

## ANCIENT RESTORATIONS OF MOSAIC FLOORS OF POMPEII AND HERCULANEUM

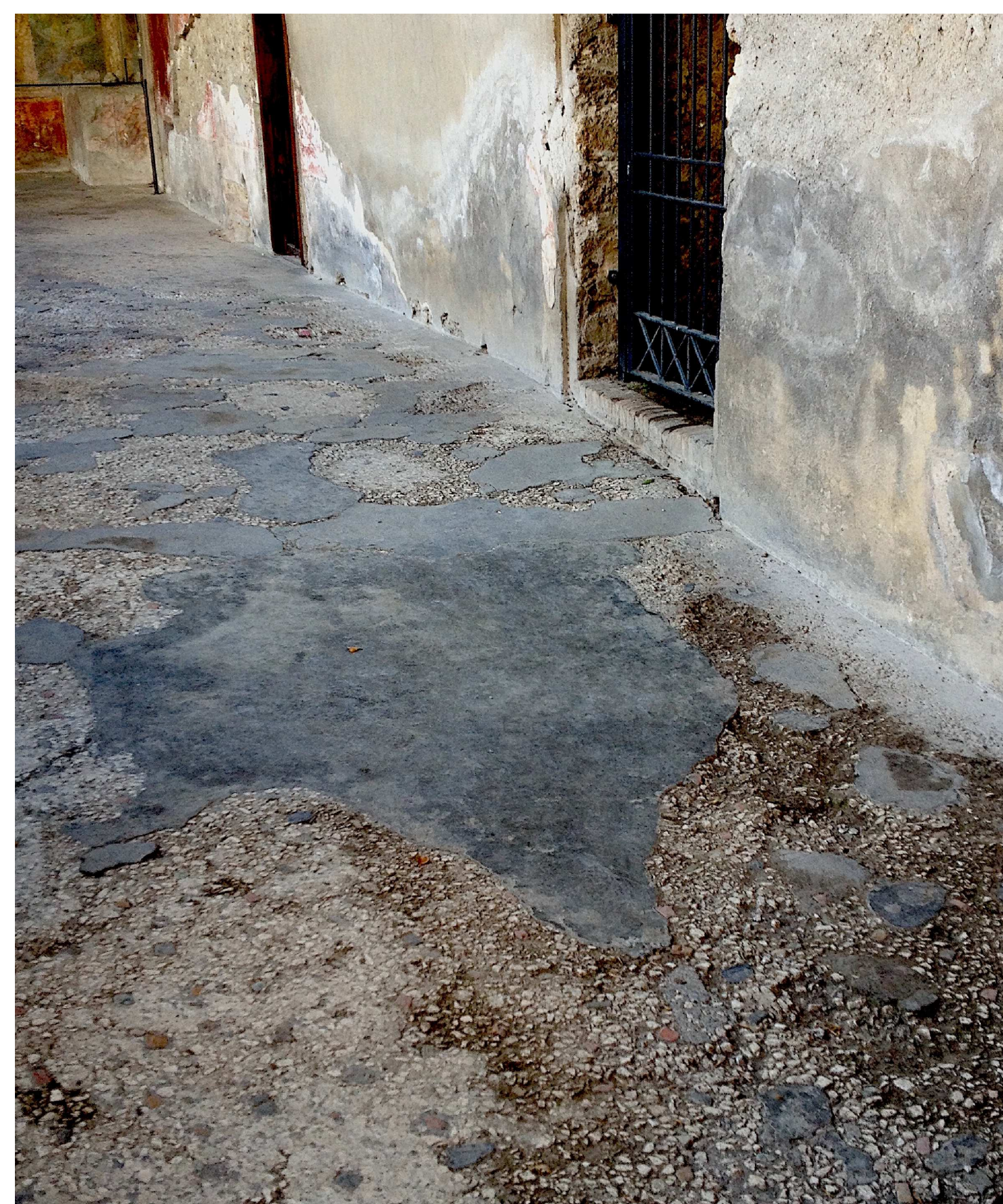


Fig. 1 - Pompeii, House of Menander, peristyle.

The majority of the wealthy domus of Pompeii and Herculaneum has preserved the floors of the First Building Period (3<sup>rd</sup>- 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries BC) up to the destruction of the town in 79 AD. These floors, made in caementicium on a fictile, lava or travertine base, were under continuous maintenance and therefore are fairly well preserved. Sometime they were modernized with the insertion of mosaic bands, of marble and of large or small fragments of different materials (M.S.Pisapia, in AIEMA XIII, Madrid 2015, pp.406 – 412)

After the 62 AD earthquake and the subsequent seismic events, the floors suffered serious damages due to the collapse of roofs and walls. Restorations were then more substantial than in the past, since there was the need of making the rooms usable as soon as possible.

### Restorations in Pompeii

To restore badly damaged floors a more effective system was invented, consisting in stuffing the lacunae with a paste just like stucco and then polish the surface to set up the floor again (M.S.Pisapia, XIII Convention of the AISCOM, in print). The paste in the most prominent houses (House of Menander, of Paquius Proculus, of Vettii, of the Small Fountain, Forum Bath etc.) was a highly refined, powdered volcanic material of a slaty colour, that in some houses were laid on the whole floor with a shining surface, as for instance in the peristyle of the House of Menander (Fig. 1); the material has been analyzed by Professor Stefano Lugli of the UNIMORE (G.Tirelli, in M.S.Pisapia, XIII Convention of the AISCOM, in print).

### Restorations in Herculaneum

This kind of restoration of floors by means of glazing is not used in Herculaneum, where floors were made mainly in mosaic: the floors seriously damaged could undergo a complete remake with careful imitations of older ones, or could be integrated with similar tesserae and embellished with marble insertion (see, e.g., the floors of the Palaestra terrace, in Guidobaldi et al., Ercolano, Pisa-Roma 2014, pp. 107 – 113 and pls. LXXXV no. 64, LXXXVI nos. 65, 65a, 66, 71-72, 73, 76 and pl. LXXXVII nos. 73, 74-75, 78, 79, 80). The House of the Tuscan Colonnade shows a particular form of restoration, very likely done after the earthquake of the year 62 AD: the great triclinium 13 has a floor in white tessellatum, with the exterior border of two black bands and a false central emblema with an eight-pointed stars. The white surface is largely integrated with tesserae of the same colour, to repair lacunae and all sorts of sinking. Also peculiar of this floor are both the space between the black borders and the centre of the stars, which is painted in yellow colour (Fig 2).

Fig. 2 - Herculaneum  
House of Tuscan Colonnade, triclinium.



Fig. 3 - Herculaneum  
Samnitic House, triclinium of the upper floor.



### Two emblemata in Herculaneum

The couple of emblemata I am going to compare comes from Herculaneum. Their subject and manufacture are very different, but in spite of their poor conservation they were restored in a similar way, but in different epochs.

The first mosaic, found in the Samnitic House by Amedeo Maiuri in 1927 (Fig. 3), represents Dionysian symbols on a neutral background with a black serrated notched edge and a chessboard motif. The emblema is of a rather mediocre manufacture, likely of the 1st century BC, when this sort of mosaic was no more fashionable, the general preference being for panels in marble of various types. After the earthquake of the year 62 AD, Herculaneum suffered the same social change which took place in Pompeii and the once aristocratic Samnitic House was divided in various apartments: our emblema comes from the second floor, previously a slaves quarter. The greater part of the field of the mosaic shows to have been integrated with tesserae similar to the original ones; the centre of the panel with the Dionysian symbols is on the whole preserved, while the damaged border has been integrated in several points, even with glass paste tesserae, that is typical for wall mosaics from the middle of the 1st century AD.

The second mosaic, whose exact provenance is not known, very likely represents Hylas between Mercury on the left and a nymph on the right in a mountain landscape. Hylas holds an amphora from which water is flowing; the panel is bordered by an undulated ribbon. The mosaic is of a good workmanship, but its very sketchy right side and border have been restored with tesserae of a material, different for quality and size from

Fig. 4 - Herculaneum



Fig. 5 - Naples  
Capodimonte Museum,  
Medusa table, detail.



Fig. 6 - Naples  
Capodimonte Museum, Medusa table

the original; therestoration of the nymph on the right was even made only reproducing the outline of the figure (fig. 4); the tesserae of the original mosaic were imitated by means of incisions (Fig 5). The restoration does not belong to Roman times, but was most likely executed by the Real Opificio delle Pietre Dure in Naples during the reign of Murat, a laboratory specialized in micro-mosaics that has produced real masterpieces such as the Medusa Table in the Capodimonte Museum, a mosaic from Pompeii with the head of the mythical monster, to which the restorers added a border with Napoleonic symbols (Fig. 6).

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