

# Under the Influence of Hadrian's Tondi ?: A Sacrificial Iconography Found in *piccola caccia* of Piazza Armerina's Villa

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## ABSTRACT

Hadrian's tondi were originally created for a monument constructed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. They were later reused as *spolia* in Constantine's Arch in the centre of Rome. In one of the eight round reliefs represented a sacrificial scene for Diana, in which Hadrian pours a libation over the flame of the altar in front of a statue of Diana. In Piazza Armerina, far away from Rome and situated in the central part of Sicily, there is a sacrificial iconography quite similar to the sacrifice to Diana. It is represented in triclinium, a formal dining room, of a huge villa, called Piazza Armerina's Villa, probably constructed in the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Despite being one of the most interesting examples about how images of Roman Emperor influenced iconographies in peripheries of the Roman Empire, the relationship between the two has not been investigated in detail yet. This paper will examine how these two images are related based on iconographical characteristics. I argue that the sacrificial scene in Piazza Armerina's villa may be created under the influence of Hadrian's tondi decorating Constantine's arch in Rome.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

A Villa in Piazza Armerina, situated on the central part of Sicily, is well known for its huge estate and luxurious decoration such as mosaic pavement or statue. Since the first partial archaeological investigation in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the site has been excavated little by little until now. The excavations in 20<sup>th</sup> century mainly focused on the site under the Roman era, but archaeologists are now increasingly interested in how people in Byzantine and Islamic age used the villa.

The villa is a single-storied building constructed of mortared rubble faced with small irregular pieces of local brown stone. The house is entered through a monumental triple archway, ornamented with Ionic columns, niches and urn to a pair of fountain-basins. The entrance leads into an irregular D-shaped courtyard with a central fountain-basin and a surrounding portico decorated with a polychrome mosaic. From this courtyard the visitor has to turn to the right in order to reach the heart of the villa. In the middle is a large ornamental pool, and this was probably surrounded by a

garden. At the north-west corner of the peristyle, there are warm bath facilities including undressing room, sauna and small bath. Along the north side of the peristyle, there are a lot of rooms including triclinium about whose mosaic I will examine here. At the east side of the Great Hunt corridor is an enormous apsed hall, the so-called Basilica and two sets of mosaic-floored rooms. Along the south side of the peristyle, the group of rooms consists of a great oval court flanked by three small room on either sides.

Among the many rooms composing of the villa, *piccola caccia*, as Carandini suggests<sup>1</sup>, may have been used as *triclinium*, a formal dining room. It is a colonnaded chamber measuring 7.30 meters from north to south and 5.90 meters from west to east. The columns of the chamber are of the Ionic order with an egg and dart motif, dated to the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. to the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

In the mosaic floor of *piccola caccia*, there are in all 12 hunting scenes. In the left of the first register represented a hunter leading two hounds, while, in the right, a hunter, holding a stick in his right hand and raising his right hand, unties two dogs for a rabbit. In the center of the second register represented a sacrificial scene, in which a hunter in red costume pours a libation over the flame of the altar from his *patera* in his left hand. Behind the sacrificant found a hunter leading a horse. In the right of the altar seen a hunter leading a horse and a boy holding a hound. In the center of the third register represented banquet scene after hunting. Five hunters participate in the banquet and two attendants look busy preparing the dining. Besides 5 scenes mentioned above, we can see 7 other hunting scenes.

In the center of the floored mosaic is the sacrificial scene and this is probably the most important scene among 12 images. It is academically noteworthy that the sacrificial iconography looks quite similar to the sacrifice dedicated to Diana, one of Hadrian's tondi which are originally created for a monument constructed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. and later reused as *spolia* in Constantine's Arch in Rome. The eight tondi represent a departure for hunting, three hunting scenes and sacrifices after the hunts.

L'Orange already indicates the iconographical similarity between the two in 1966 and suggests that the image in Piazza Armerina may come from those iconographies originally created for Roman Emperors<sup>2</sup>. After L'Orange, the relationship between them has not been researched in detail yet. I would like to examine the relationship between the two sacrificial iconographies in Rome and Piazza Armerina.

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<sup>1</sup> Carandini, A., Ricci, A., De Vos, M., *Filosofiana: The Villa of Piazza Armerina*, translated by Keith, M.C., S.F.Flaccovio, 1982, 178.

<sup>2</sup> L'Orange, H.P., *Un sacrificio imperiale nei mosaici di Piazza Armerina*, in *Arte in Europa: scritti in onore di E. Arslan*, Artipo, 1966, 101-104.

## 2. DISCUSSION

I think the sacrificial image in Piazza Armerina is created under the influence of another sacrificial image seen in Constantine's arch for two reasons. First of all, as we already mentioned, they have similar iconographical characteristics. Hadrian's tondi are the oldest images to show Emperor's sacrifice after hunting. They belong to Constantine's arch in the center of Rome, so people have a lot of chances to see them in public. Artists creating the mosaic floor may know the sacrificial scenes through pattern-books, sketches or actually visiting there. Second, another sacrificial iconography, similar to Hadrian's Tondi, discovered in Lillebonne of north-east France, and this can be a supporting evidence. From the sign in the mosaic, it is known that an artist and his apprentice from Pozzuoli created the mosaic floor in Lillebonne. In other words, same sacrificial iconography was transmitted from the center of Italy to peripheries of the Roman Empire. This example may be a supporting evidence when thinking about an example in Piazza Armerina's villa transmitted from Rome.

How the two iconographies in Rome and Piazza Armerina are related? There are two iconographical similarities between them: a cult statue of Diana, behind an altar, on column flanked by a tree on the left and right; a sacrificant on the right in Hadrian's tondi and on the left in *piccola caccia*. On the other hands, there are also some differences. In *piccola caccia*, you can find three attendants which you cannot see in the Diana's sacrifice of Hadrian's Tondi: a child with a dog, a youth leading a horse on the right of an altar and another youth leading a horse left next to the sacrificant. At first glance, these three attendants in *piccola caccia* look nothing to do with Hadrian's tondi, but I believe that they are created based on persons represented in other reliefs of Hadrian's Tondi except the sacrifice to Diana. A young man leading a horse on the right of an altar looks similar to a young man represented in the sacrifice to Apollo; a child with a dog on the right of an altar may be created from a youth leading a horse in the departure scene; a youth on the left of an altar looks similar to the one in Lion hunt.

Artists familiar with at least four reliefs of Hadrian's eight Tondi made the sacrificial image based mainly on the sacrifice to Diana relief, but he changed the position of sacrificant and added three persons from other reliefs, so that he can create new sacrificial image. Ghedini examines 12 hunting scenes and makes a similar suggestion that 12 images in *piccola caccia* not only follow previous iconographical traditions, but also include new elements of image<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Ghedini, F., Iconografie urbane e maestranze africane nel mosaico della Piccola Caccia di Piazza Armerina, *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Römische Abteilung* 98, 334.

### 3. CONCLUSION

This paper tries to think the relationship between a sacrificial iconography in Rome and another in Piazza Armerina. I would like to regard the sacrificial scene in Piazza Armerina is made under the influence of another sacrificial iconography in Constantine's arch. In addition, Artists in Piazza Armerina probably made the sacrificial image by not only copying some parts of the sacrifice to Diana, but also including new iconographical elements.

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