



Culture, identity and power in the Roman empire

Mosaic from Acholla

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This mosaic comes from the baths of Acholla. In the centre the god Dionysus on a chariot drawn by two centaurs. To either side are roundels with busts of a personification of two of the seasons. Running around these is a frieze of sea nymphs and sea monsters. But here our interest lies in the minor decorative motifs which run around the central rectangular panels. On three sides this is an alternating pattern of half-plant half-human figures or grotesques, plant motifs, with a grotesque head in the centre. On the fourth side is a complex band of figures, grotesques, animals and plants leading to a central rosette. These kinds of compositions are very similar to the details found in Italian interior decoration, for example at Pompeii, or in the Domus Aurea in Rome. Another feature which links it to wall painting is the use of colour, particularly yellows, for the friezes. So in this case the African mosaics seem to be reproducing motifs and styles of composition which were current in Italy at the time.