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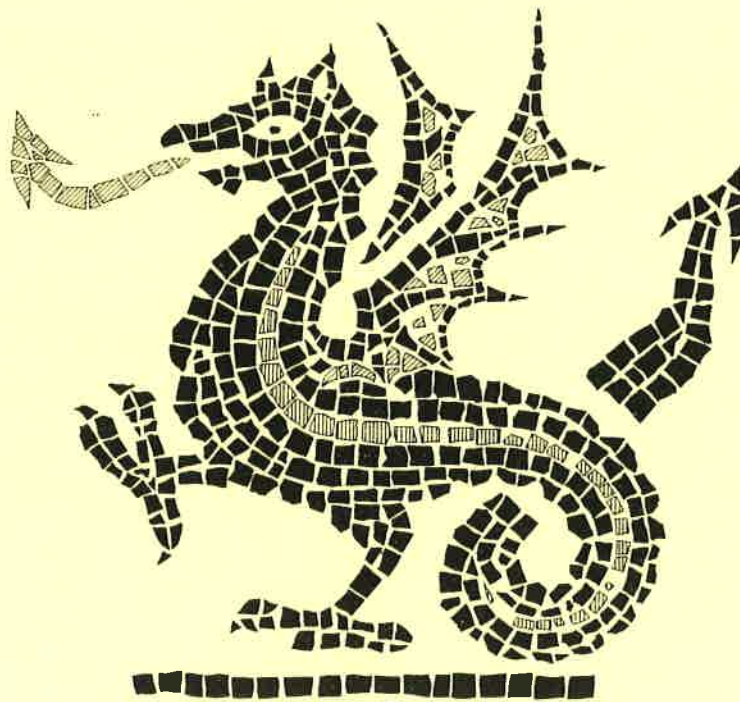
VARCA94

V&A BS 532/96

Victoria and Albert Museum

V&A Museum, Kensington, London

Recording of North Wing Mosaic floor in advance
of building work, November 1993



Oxford Archaeological Unit
February 1994

Victoria and Albert Museum, Kensington, London.

Recording of North Wing mosaic floor.

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Victoria and Albert Museum, Kensington, London.

Recording of North Wing mosaic floor.

1 Introduction

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) was commissioned by the Victoria and Albert Museum to undertake a survey of the mosaic floor to the north wing of the museum buildings (former Royal College of Art) in advance of building work to convert the space to X-ray laboratories, photographic laboratories and conservation workshops. As a part of this building work, certain areas of the mosaic are to be lifted, while the remainder is to be left *in situ* but covered over. The purpose of the survey, therefore, was to produce an accurate drawn record of the mosaic floor as it stands at present. A photographic survey of the mosaic was also undertaken by Paul Robbins of the V&A photographic department.

2 Brief description of the mosaic floor

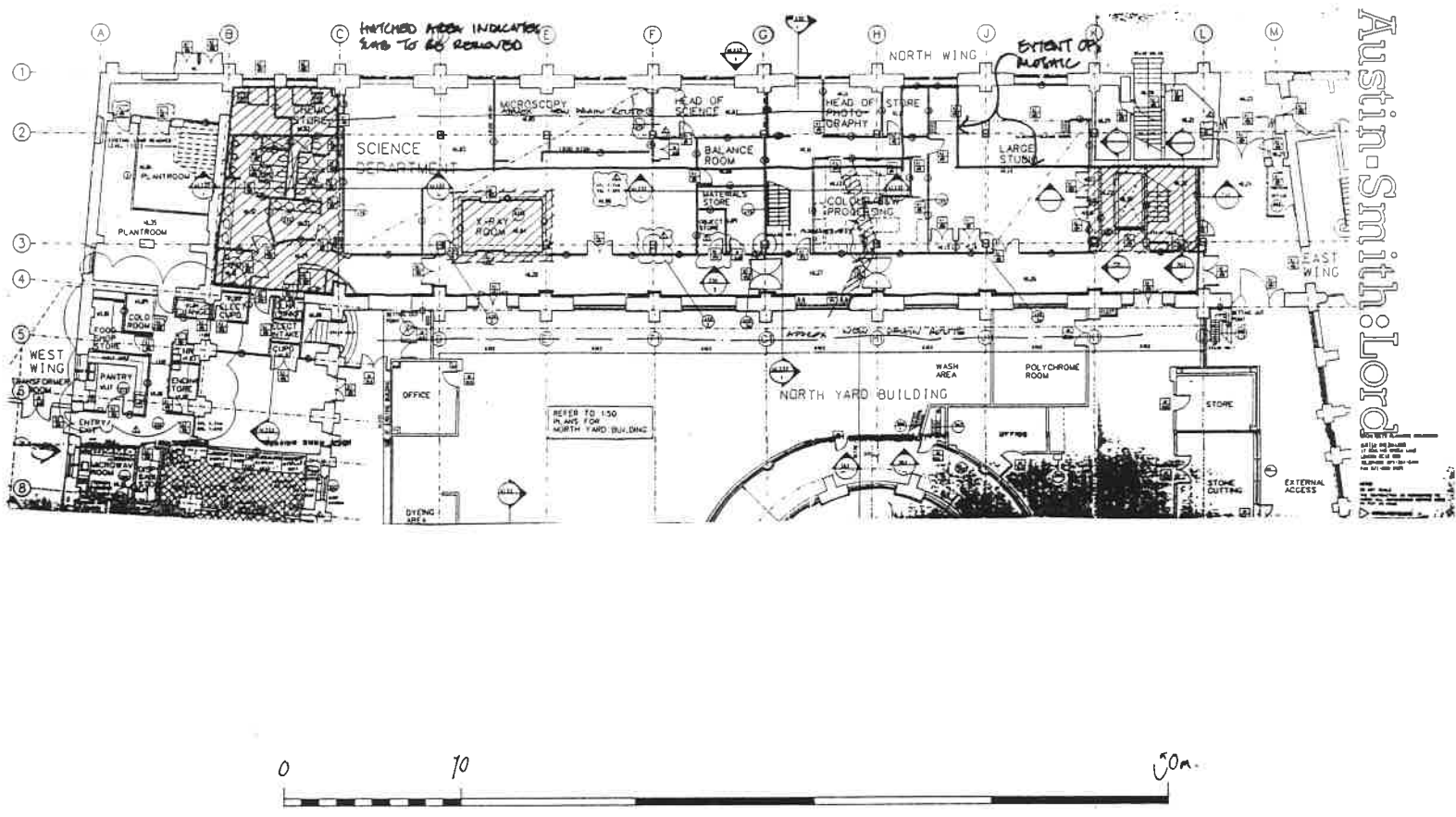
- 2.1 The mosaic floor (maximum dimensions: 57.5m x 12m) forms the present floor of the former Royal College of Art in the north wing of the Victoria and Albert Museum buildings at Exhibition Road, Kensington, London. The mosaic does not, however, appear to have been originally laid for the present building and is likely to have been a part of the former 'north cloister' shown on various mid-late 19th century plans of the museum (see 2.2, below).
- 2.2 The mosaic floor comprises a total of 131 decorative motifs of eleven individual designs (a-h, plus a*, b*, and c* which are variants of motifs a, b and c respectively) arranged on a grid pattern over the full extent of the floor. The motifs are located on alternate points on the grid, the blank points being occupied by a repeated diamond motif comprising 16 red tesserae (the 'spacer' motif). A number of the motifs have been fully or partly destroyed by the insertion of brick encased steel uprights to support the upper floors which suggests that the mosaic was not originally laid for the existing building, but probably for the former 'north cloister'. The mosaic is bounded on all but its eastern edge (where it has been destroyed) by a decorative mosaic border of a running scroll design (see fig. 12). A number of service inspection holes within the floor area appear to respect, and are therefore probably contemporary with, the mosaic.
- 2.3 A second section of mosaic is located to the north of the main area (area B on fig. 3). This mosaic is of a different and much simpler design comprising a repeated pattern of mosaic tiles (see fig.13) which correlate to form a pattern of adjoining circles. There is no reason to believe that this mosaic is contemporary with the main floor and was probably laid at the time of the conversion of the building from the north cloister to its present form.

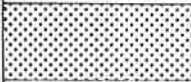
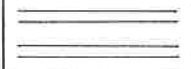



3 Recording Strategy



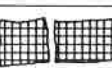

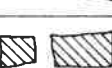


- 3.1 An overall plan of the mosaic floor was produced at a scale of 1:50, recording the position of each of the 131 motifs, the location of service inspection holes, and areas of mosaic previously disturbed by the insertion of service pipes or the building of internal partition walls. This plan is in two parts (east and west) and is reproduced here at a scale of 1:100 (see figs. 2 & 3).
- 3.2 Each of the eleven individual decorative motifs was recorded on site at a scale of 1:1, taking note of the colouration of individual tesserae. These plans are reproduced here at a scale of 1:4.
- 3.3 A representative section of the decorative mosaic border was recorded on site at a scale of 1:1, again taking note of the colouration of the individual tesserae. This plan is reproduced here at a scale of 1:4.
- 3.4 The points on the grid not occupied by one of the eleven principal decorative motifs were marked by the 'spacer' motif - a red diamond comprising 16 tesserae. An example of this motif was recorded on site at a scale of 1:1 and is reproduced here at a scale of 1:4.
- 3.5 A sample mosaic tile from area B was recorded on site at a scale of 1:1, and is reproduced here at a scale of 1:4. The manner in which these tiles correlate to form the design of adjoining circles is shown in fig. 3.

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Fig. 1: Architects plan of north wing showing areas of mosaic to be lifted.



Key to figs. 2 & 3	
	Mosaic destroyed
	Decorative mosaic border (see sheet 5)
	Location of decorative motif (see sheets 3 & 4)
	Steel uprights
	Services

Key to Figs. 4 - 17	
Colour of Tesserae	
	Dark blue/grey
	Light blue/grey
	Yellow
	Red
	Brown
	Green
	White

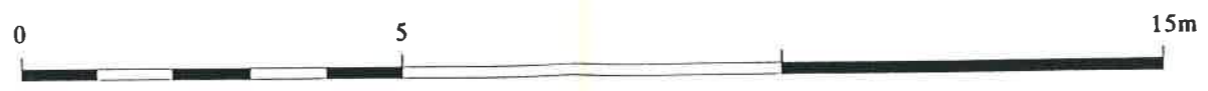
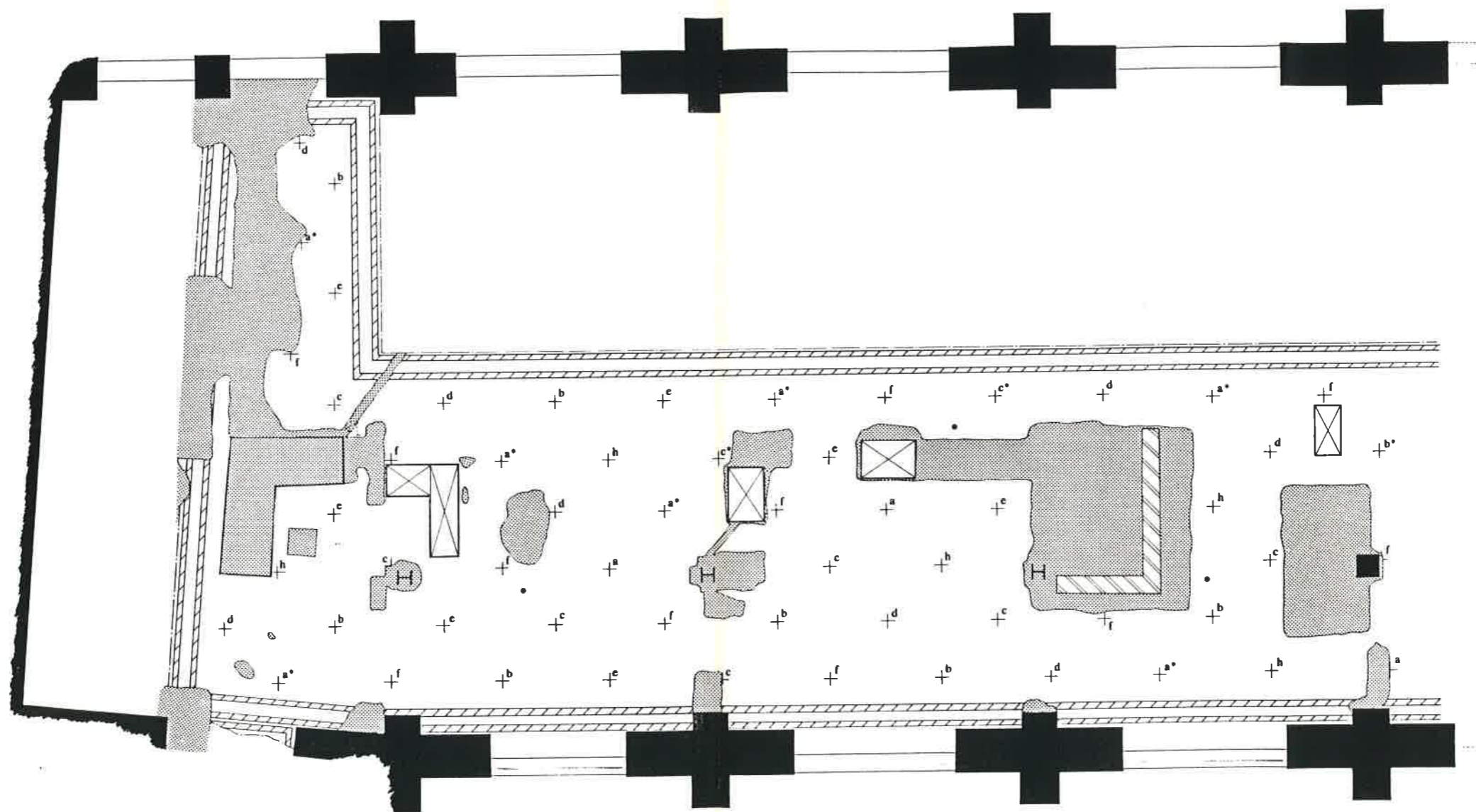


Fig. 2: Plan of mosaic (west).

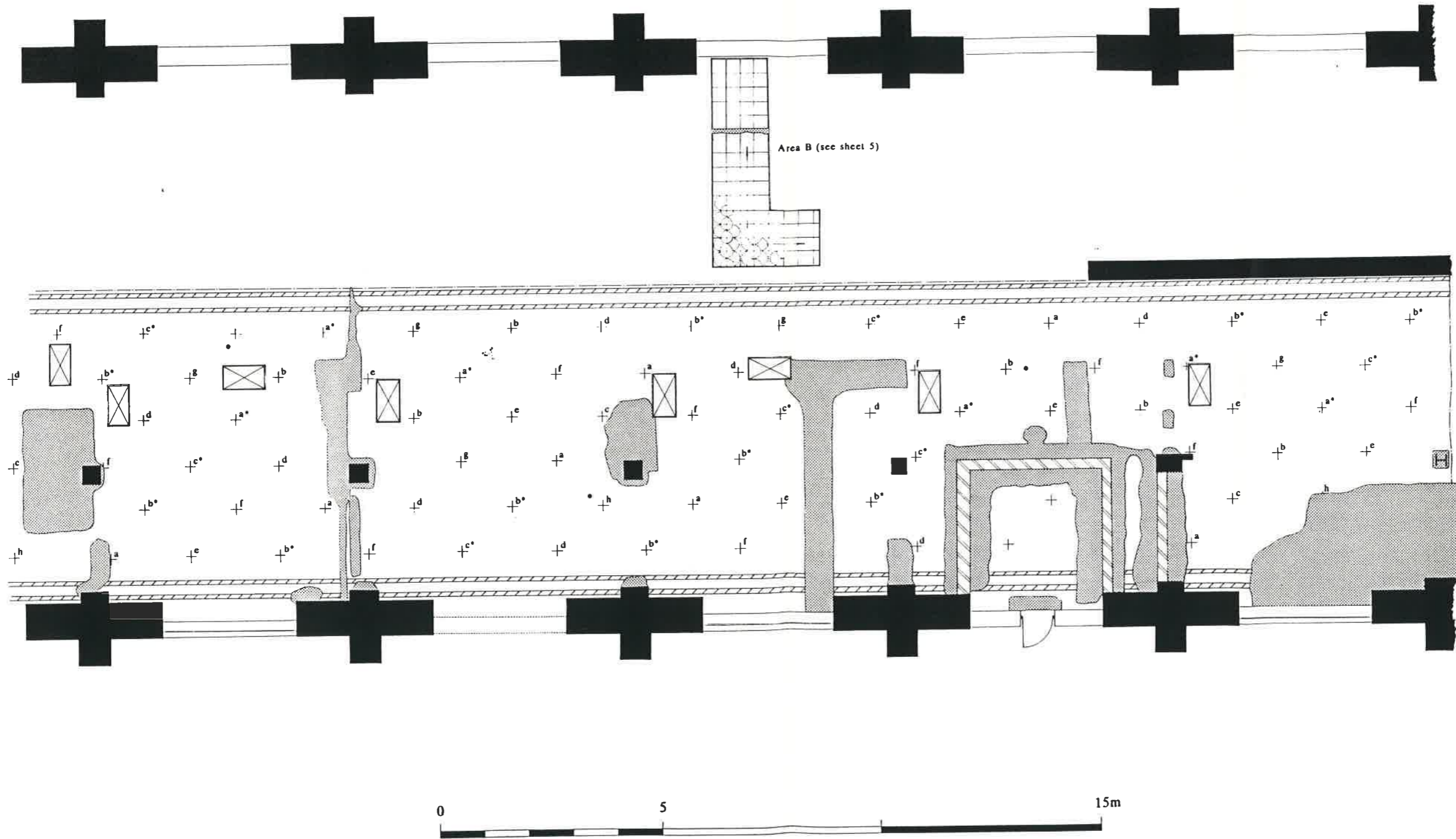


Fig. 3: Plan of mosaic (east).

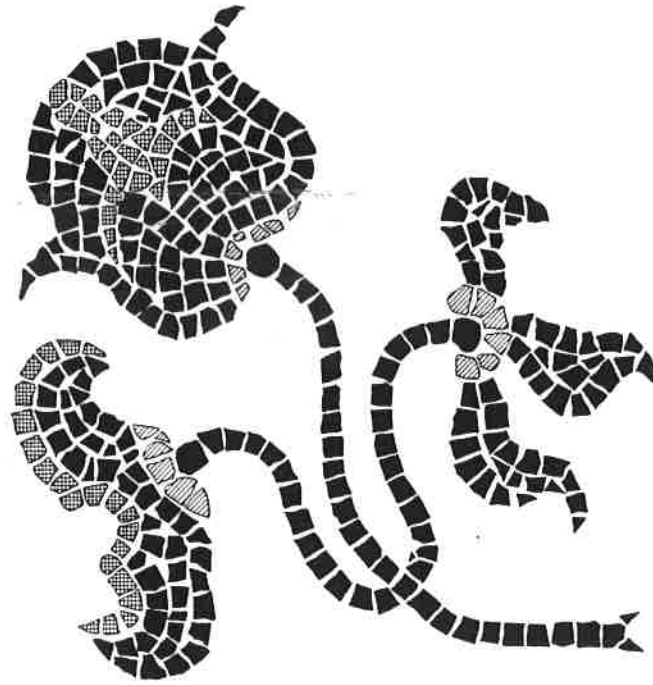


Fig. 4: Motif a.

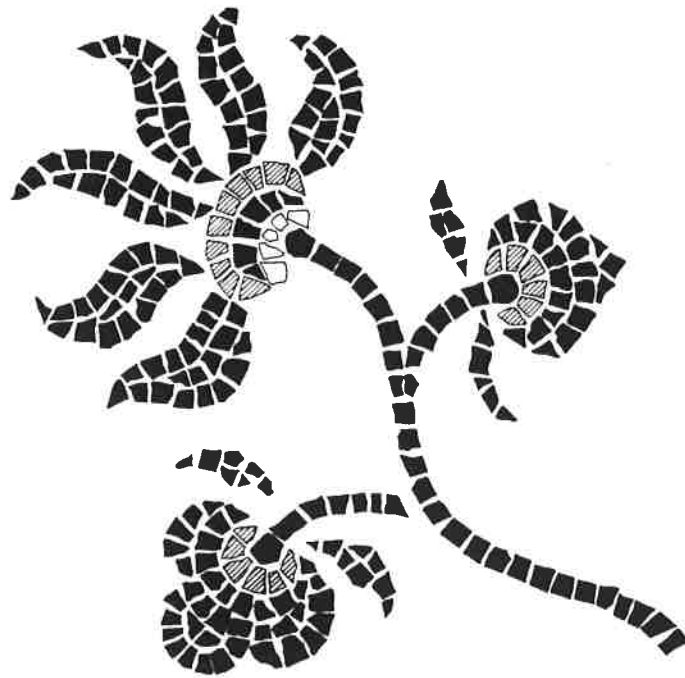


Fig. 5: Motif b.





Fig. 6: Motif c.



Fig. 7: Motif d.





Fig. 8: Motif e.



Fig. 9: Motif f.





Fig. 10: Motif g.



Fig. 11: Motif h.



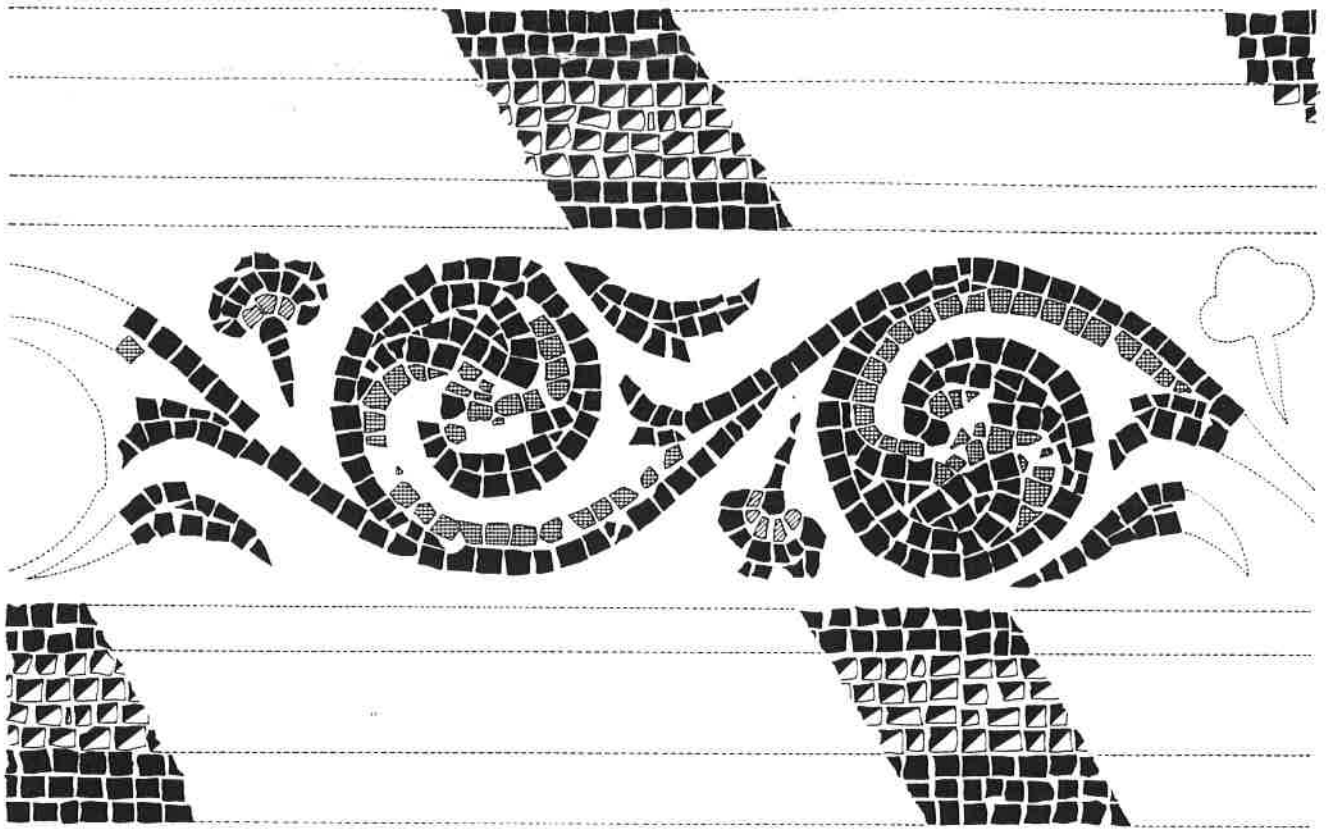


Fig. 12: Representative section of decorative mosaic border.

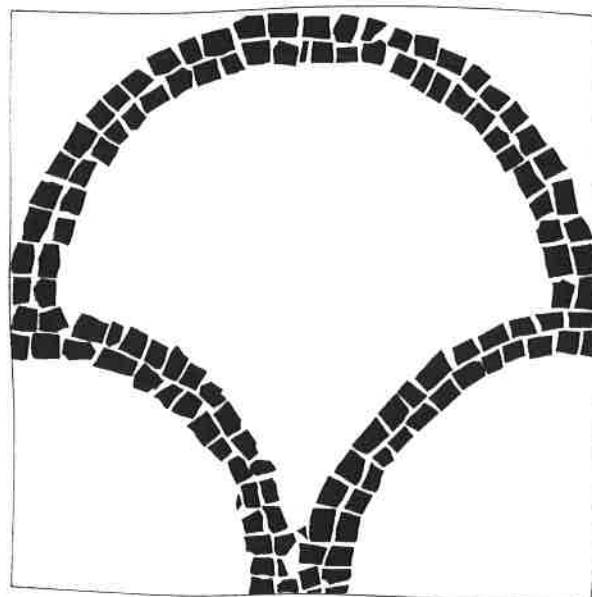


Fig. 13: Sample mosaic tile (Area B).



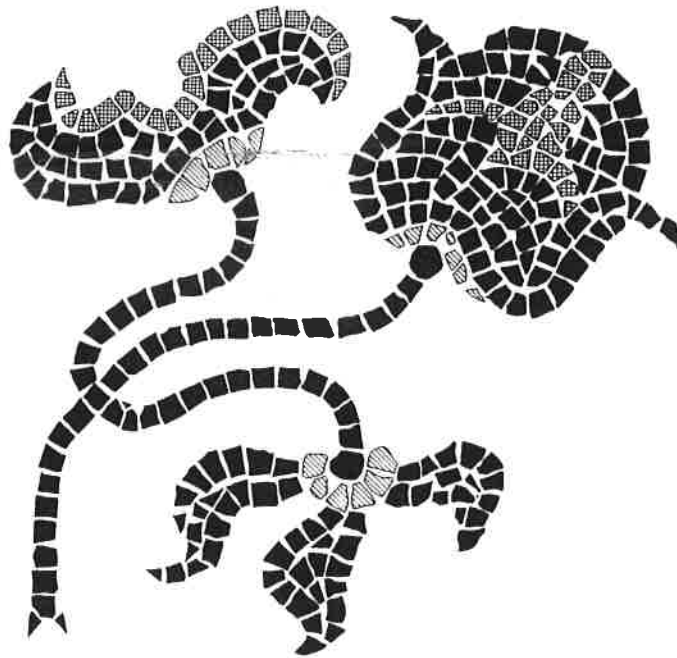


Fig. 14: Motif a*.

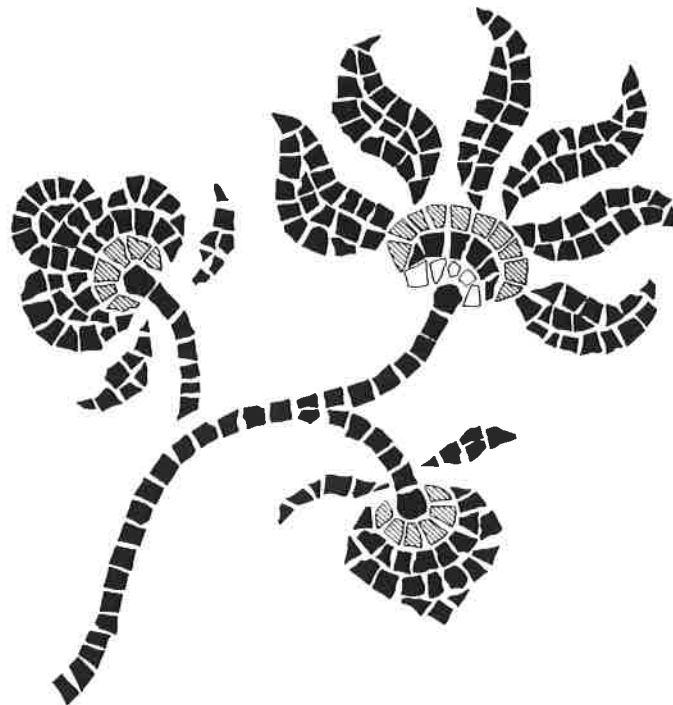


Fig. 15: Motif b*.





Fig. 16: Motif c*



Fig. 17: 'Spacer' motif.





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