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**“Xenocrates and the invention of Platonism:
an iconographic approach”**

ABSTRACT

Retrieved from a villa just outside Pompeii, and now in the Naples archaeological museum, the ‘mosaic of the philosophers’ is widely agreed to depict a scene in the Academy featuring Plato and six others. The hypothesis has been impressively elaborated, if in rather different ways, by Konrad Gaiser (*Das Philosophenmosaik in Neapel. Eine Darstellung der platonischen Akademie*, Heidelberg 1980) and Marwan Rashed (2013 article, ‘La mosaïque des philosophes de Naples: une représentation de l’académie platonicienne et son commanditaire’, downloadable from <https://paris-sorbonne.academia.edu/MarwanRashed>). Although building on their invaluable work and accepting most of their identifications of individuals, I shall offer a largely different interpretation of the scene, arguing that it is designed to support a particular interpretation of the Platonist heritage: Plato’s true philosophical legacy, it tells us, was passed down through his second successor Xenocrates, and not vouchsafed either to Aristotle or to Plato’s nephew and legal heir Speusippus. I shall try to show that the image deploys an unexpectedly dense system of symbols for identifying and characterising those present. This will in turn lead to questions about the date and context of the original painting, and the possible reasons for a high-quality mosaic copy of it to be present in 1st-century CE Campania.