Malta and Gozo experienced a period of relative peace and prosperity under Roman rule (218 BC – AD 535). The main towns of the islands, ‘Melite’ on the mainland and ‘Gaulos’ on the sister island, evolved into flourishing urban centres adorned with fine houses like the Domvs Romana at Rabat (Malta). This town house must have been the residence of a well-established and rich family. Its floors and walls were decorated with fine mosaics, which rank among the finest of the period throughout the west Mediterranean. Of particular note is the courtyard floor, featuring a central panel depicting two pigeons on the rim of a bowl, surrounded by striking geometric patterns.

Mosaics are made of roughly squared tiles known as tesserae. Making your own mosaic is fun and can turn out to be a great family activity. A number of designs from the Domvs Romana are being featured in this information sheet. We are also providing a sheet of blank tiles.

Getting to work...

1. Fetch a piece of cardboard to serve as a base. The thicker it is the better.
2. Divide the sheet into a grid of 1cm squares.
3. Sketch the design you want to create on a different piece of paper. The Romans were very fond of geometric patterns, but you can opt for a different composition, like your family’s coat of arms. Anyway, it is entirely up to you, but keep in mind that the neater it is the better it will look.
4. Transfer your design on the grid by marking the colour of each square with the same colour of the tile that is to be affixed there. Best to limit to five or six colours as it will get complicated.
5. Print a few copies (depending on the size of your mosaic design) of the sheet of blank tiles and colour in. Each sheet contains 396 tiles.
6. Cut the tiles carefully and group by colour.
7. Glue the tiles to the cardboard base according to the determined scheme.

Take a picture of your marvellous mosaic and upload it on Heritage Malta’s Facebook Event page as a post. Only one photo per submission is to be posted.
Detail of the emblemata (central panel) from the courtyard floor at the Domvs Romana. This fine example of opus vermiculatum (use of very small tesserae to permit fine gradations of colour and an exact following of figure contours) depicts the ‘Doves of Soros’, one of the most popular motifs of antiquity.

Detail of the articulate geometric patterns from the courtyard floor at the Domvs Romana. The vivacity of the colours, the symmetry and precision of the composition, and the fascinating 3D effect are testimony to the high skills of the craftsmen who produced them around 100 BC.

Detail of a border from one of the rooms at the Domvs Romana depicting a theatrical mask flanked by compositions of foliage, citrus and pomegranates. The regular occurrence of colourful and expressive masks confirms the influence of Classical Greek culture on the Romans.