

## SETTE SAPIENTI

OGGETTI RARI E PREZIOSI AL MANN

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LUIGI SPINA

TEXTS BY VALERIA SAMPAOLO

**Sette sapienti** unveils the details of a mosaic in the National Archaeological Museum of Naples that has survived in remarkably good condition. Discovered in Pompeii on July 14, 1897 during the excavation of a villa found 130 metres north of Porta Vesuvio in the Masucci d'Aquino estate, it has been the subject of numerous different interpretations.

Lush garlands of laurel, vine, oak, strawberry, and apple tree leaves, combined with autumn fruits and swathed in red or white ribbons with grey edges, interspersed with theatrical masks, frame the depiction of an assembly of seven sages in a sacred grove. The young satyrs and an aged Silenus occupy the corners, in the centre of the sides two masks with an open-mouthed slave alternate with the mask of a young man with fine eyebrows and an intellectual mien and another of a pale **pseudokore** with hair pulled back on either side of the head and fastened at the nape. Precise philosophical exposition and keen scientific reasoning are combined here with symbols of Dionysian exhilaration, with their undertones of exuberant life expressed on the one hand through tragedy and on the other, with equal power, through comedy and satyric drama.

Valeria Sampaolo's text and the beautiful, hitherto unpublished photographs of Luigi Spina explore every tiny detail of a work most people have never heard of. This new book is a worthy addition to the **Oggetti rari e preziosi al Museo Archeologico di Napoli** series.

**Valeria Sampaolo** is head conservator of the collections of the National Archaeological Museum of Naples. She is the author of several publications and her research concentrates on the first excavations in the Vesuvius area and on establishing the provenance of the museum's frescoes, to which she has dedicated a new exhibition.

**Luigi Spina** is a photographer. His work focuses on amphitheatres and the civic dimension of the sacred, the links between art and faith, the search for ancient cultural roots, and the physical impact of classical sculpture. He has published **L'Ora Incerta** (2014), **The Buchner Boxes** (2014), **Hemba** (2017), and **Mythical Diary** (2017) and has collaborated with Valeria Sampaolo and 5 Continents Editions to create the series **Oggetti rari e preziosi al Museo Archeologico di Napoli**, which to date includes **Memorie del Vaso Blu** (2016), **Amazzonomachia** (2017), **Centauri** (2017), and **Zefiro e Clori** (2018). He has also published **The Dancers at the Villa of the Papyri** for 5 Continents Editions' Tailormade series.