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Bu dergideki makalelerde kullanılacak olan kısaltmalar Alman Arkeoloji Enstitüsü yayın kuralları, Bulletin de l'Association internationale pour l'Etude de la Mosaïque antique, AIEMA - AOROC 24.2016, La Mosaïque Gréco Romaine IX ve Der Kleine Pauly dikkate alınarak yapılmıştır.

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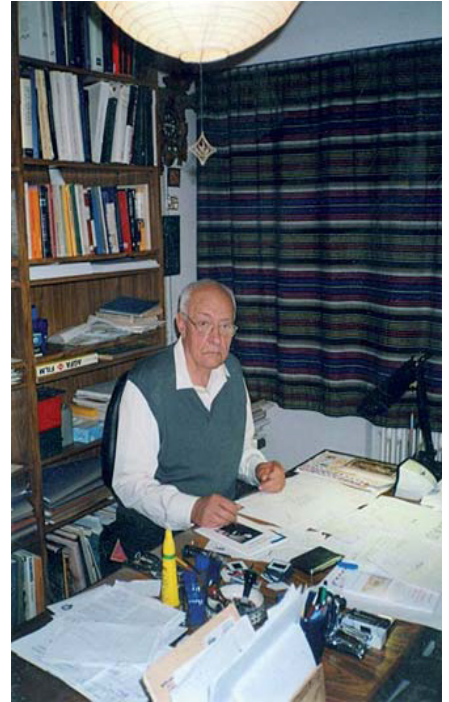
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José María Blázquez Martínez in memoriam (1926-2016)

José María Blázquez Martínez (Professor of Ancient History and Fellow of the Spanish Royal Academy of History) passed away on March 26, 2016, in the city of Madrid (Spain) after a full life devoted to teaching, scientific research and the spread of antiquity; and leaving all of us -who have had the immense fortune to enjoy his mastership and overwhelming personality-, with an immense sadness.

Prof. Blázquez graduated in Philosophy and Letters from the University of Salamanca in 1951 and defended his PhD in the Complutense University of Madrid in 1956. During the next decade, Prof. Blázquez continued his training under the supervision of Prof. Pallottino at the University of La Sapienza in Rome and, granted by the DAAD, at the University of Marburg, under the supervision of Prof. Matz and Prof. Drerup. Subsequently he made other successful research stays at the University of Tel Aviv, the British Academy of Rome, the University of Catania, and in the German Archaeological Institute branches at Istanbul, Damascus and Riyadh. In this regard, Prof. Blázquez always defended the importance of international networks that, through academic contact with other schools and colleagues, conceived as essential for personal development and the progress of scientific research.



After this intense formative period, José María Blázquez obtained a position as Professor of Ancient History at the University of Salamanca (1966-) and shortly after at the Complutense de Madrid (1969-), where he was designated as Professor Emeritus. At the same time, he was an active member of the former Institute of Archaeology "Rodrigo Caro" (CSIC), that he directed during more than ten years (1973-1985). Finally, in recognition to his academic trajectory, Professor Blázquez was elected as a Fellow of the Spanish Royal Academy of History. In all these institutions Prof. Blázquez developed a brilliant contribution to the promotion of Ancient History in Spain, especially important was his capacity for mentoring (he supervised more than 40 PhDs during his academic life) large teams of teachers and researchers, that obtained several tenured positions in different universities and academic institutions. He was also a prolific author publishing many handbooks and monographs that are authentic milestones in history the Spanish scholarship (i. e. *La Romanización, Historia social y económica. La España Romana. Economía de la Hispania romana*, Bilbao, 1978, *Historia de España Antigua, I. Protohistoria*, Madrid, 1980; *Historia de España Antigua II. Hispania romana*, Madrid, 1978). Largely influential was also his leadership in the direction of the scientific journals as *Archivo Español de Arqueología* (1973-1987) and *Gerión* (1983-2010). In addition, Prof. Blázquez directed numerous archaeological excavations at Caparra (Cáceres), Cástulo (Jaén), La Loba (Fuenteovejuna, Córdoba), and in the Monte Testaccio (Rome).

By virtue of its training and its wide perspective, Prof. Blázquez's research trajectory was the reflection of the scientist dedicated to the study of antiquity, with a masterful management of

diverse written and archaeological sources, always connected with current intellectual debates of all social and human sciences. During his career published more than 37 books, acting of editor in other 9 monographs. He also published 234 articles in the most prestigious, both Spanish and International, scientific journals and several chapters in collective volumes. His research interests covered multiples areas on the study of antiquity: the Phoenician and Greek colonization of the Western Mediterranean, the Late Iron Age communities of the Iberian Peninsula, the study of Pre-Roman religions, the Impact of primitive Christianity in the Late Roman Empire, and, of course, the ancient economy of Roman Spain, with an special focus on the exports of *Baetican* olive oil.

Finally, we would like to highlight his research on Roman mosaics, whose first publication dates from 1975 - "Arte y Sociedad en los mosaicos del Bajo Imperio" [Art and Society in the mosaics of the Late Roman Empire] *Bellas Artes* 75, 1975, pp. 18-25 -soon followed by- "Mosaicos romanos del Bajo Imperio" [Roman mosaics of the Late Empire], *Archivo Español de Arqueología* 50-51, 1977, pp. 269-293., In this regard, Prof. Blázquez continued the a research line previously initiated by his teacher Prof. Antonio García y Bellido. Since 1976 to 1996, Prof. Blázquez promoted and directed the Corpus of Mosaics of Spain, within the framework of the international project sponsored by the AIEMA. Through this monumental labor, Prof. Blázquez contributed to establish the study of Roman mosaics as an authentic sub-discipline in the field of the Spanish Classical archaeology.

The obtention of several I+D Research projects, funded in competitive calls by the Spanish Ministry of Science (acting as Principal Investigator from 1976 to 1997) and an International Project of the Joint Hispanic-American Committee, with the University of West-Lafayette, Purdue (Indiana-USA), allowed Prof. Blázquez to create a permanent research team on the study of Roman mosaics. This team, which I (Prof. Neira Jiménez) am honored of have been part, managed the realization of the above mentioned *Corpus de Mosaicos de España* (CME), a work continued afterwards by its dear colleague, Dr. Guadalupe López Monteagudo (CSIC). In addition to the publication of 12 volumes of the CME, he presented numerous papers on the Hispanic, African and Near Eastern Roman mosaics in the most prestigious conferences on these topics, such as the International Congresses organized by the AIEMA or *L'Africa romana* conference, organized by the Centro di Studi sull'Africa Romana of the Università degli studi di Sassari, as well as in countless courses and seminars in other institutions and universities, such as the Roman Mosaic Seminar of the UC3M, to which he attended every year, without missing any of the 9 editions celebrated.

Prof. Blázquez was a firm believer in the work developed by AIEMA, having been named member of Honor of this scientific association. He also formed part of the editorial board of the Journal of Mosaic Research, where he published various articles, and presented papers in both the 11th International Colloquium on Ancient Mosaics, held in Bursa on 2009, and in the 5th Colloquium of AIEMA Turkey, held in Kahramanmaraş on 2011. Prof. Blázquez was a true lover of Turkey.

Prof. Blázquez was an unavoidable reference in the international scholarship on ancient mosaics, many colleagues who share our pain remember his vitality even in the XIII. AIEMA Congress held in Madrid on September 2015, where he gave the inaugural conference. As a testimony of his enthusiasm for the study of ancient mosaics, he was already thinking of traveling to the next AIEMA Congress scheduled for 2018 in Cyprus. Proof of his infinite generosity, he prepared

tirelessly until the end of his days a text on Diana in the mosaics of Roman Spain for X SMR, held in September 2016 at Universidad Carlos III de Madrid.

His decisive contribution to the study of antiquity has earned him numerous recognitions from many international academic institutions and associations: Fellow of German Archaeological Institute (1968), Board member of the L'Association Internationale d'Épigraphie grecque et latine (AIEGL), Member of the Hispanic Society (1974); Fellow of the Academy of Arts and Archaeology of Bologna (1980), Fellow of the Spanish Royal Academy of History (1990), Fellow of the New York Academy of Sciences (1993), Fellow of the Academia Nazionale dei Lincei (1994), Fellow of the Fine Arts Academy of Santa Isabel de Hungría (Seville) (1995), Fellow of the Real Academia de Bones Letres de Barcelona (1997), or Fellow of the Académie de Aix-en-Provence (1999), among others. He also received many prizes as the Franz Cumont prize from the Académie Royale de Belgique (1985), the Great Silver medal of Archaeology from l'Académie d'Architecture de Paris (1987), or the Cavalli d'Oro prize from Venice (2003). Prof. Blázquez was named *doctor honoris causa* by the universities of Valladolid (1999), Salamanca (2000), Bologna (2001), León (2005), and Universidad Carlos III de Madrid (2015), and received the *Orden del Mérito Civil*, one of the highest recognitions granted by the Spanish govern.

He was a genius as scholar, but also a genial person. For both reasons, colleagues, students, and friends of many countries, that have the fortune of meet Prof. Blázquez during his life, feel a great emptiness for the loss of our dear teacher.

Prof. Dr. Mustafa Şahin
Bursa Uludağ University

Prof. Maria Luz Neira Jiménez
Universidad Carlos III de Madrid



Archaeology / Arkeoloji

1 Simonetta ANGIOLILLO

A New Mosaic Workshop in South Sardinia?

Güney Sardunya'dan Yeni Bir Mozaik Atölyesi?

9 Oktay DUMANKAYA

Room and Corridor Mosaics from the Ancient City of Germanicia and its Iconographic Assessment

Germanicia Antik Kentine Ait Oda ve Koridor Mozaiği ve İkonografik Değerlendirmesi

27 Maria de Jesus DURAN KREMER

From the Roman Mosaic to the Portuguese Pavement: Continuity of an Artistic Expression in Time and Space

Roma Çağı Mozaiğinden Portekiz Döşemesine: Sanatsal Dışavurumun Zaman ve Mekân İçerisinde Devamlılığı

41 Mercedes DURÁN PENEDO

Iconography Related to the Mineral-Medicinal Waters in Hispanic Mosaics in Castilla, Aragón and Navarra

Castilla, Aragón ve Navarra'da Yer Alan İspanyol Mozaiklerindeki Mineral-Tıbbi Sularla İlgili İkonografi

- 63 Zaraza FRIEDMAN
The Boat Depicted in the Yakto Thalassa Mosaics: Is it a Dug-Out?
Yakto Thalassa Mozaiklerinde Betimlenen Tekne: Bir Kano mu?
- 79 Amir GORZALCZANY - Baruch ROSEN
Tethering of Tamed and Domesticated Carnivores in Mosaics from the Roman and Byzantine Periods in the Southern Levant
Güney Levant'ta Roma ve Bizans Çağlarında Yularlanmış Olan Ehil ve Evcil Etoburların Betimlendiği Mozaikler
- 97 Lihi HABAS
Early Byzantine Mosaic Floors of the Church at Ozem, Israel
Ozem Kilisesi'ndeki Erken Bizans Çağı Mozaik Zeminleri, İsrail
- 121 Gülgün KÖROĞLU - Emine TOK
Sinop Balatlar Kazısında Ortaya Çıkarılmaya Başlanan Erken Bizans Dönemi Döşeme Mozaikleriyle İlgili İlk Veriler
First Data on the Floor Mosaics of an Early Byzantine Church Being Excavated Recently in Sinop Balatlar
- 137 Filomena LIMÃO
The “Opusmusium - Roman Mosaics in Portugal” Academic Project: from Teachers’ Lab to Public
Portekiz'deki “Opusmusium- Portekiz'teki Roma Mozaikleri” Akademik Projesi: Öğretmenlerin Laboratuvarından Halka
- 143 Guadalupe LÓPEZ MONTEAGUDO
New Reading of the Mosaic in Noheda (Cuenca, Spain)
Noheda'dan Bir Mozağin Yeniden İncelenmesi (Cuenca, İspanya)
- 149 Maria Luz NEIRA JIMÉNEZ
On the Interpretation of Pothos in a Mosaic from the Antiquities Market with the Representation of Pelops and Hippodameia
Antika Müzayedesinden Pelops ve Hippodameia Betimli Bir Mozaikteki Pothos'un Yorumlanması Üzerine
- 155 Elda OMARI
The Roman Villa of Tirana (Albania) and its Mosaics
Tiran Roma Villası ve Mozaikleri (Arnavutluk)

- 173 M^a Paz PÉREZ CHIVITE
New Documentation Technologies: The “Mosaico de Otoño” of the “Casa del Anfiteatro”, Mérida, Spain
Yeni Belgeleme Teknolojileri: “Amfiteatro Evi’nden Sonbahar Mozaïği”, Mérida, İspanya
- 179 Luigi QUATTROCCHI
Common Aspects of the Mosaics of Sardinia, North Africa and Iberian Peninsula in the Light of Recent Discoveries
Son Araştırmalar Işığında Sardunya, Kuzey Afrika ve İber Yarımadası’nda Bulunan Mozaiklerde Görülen Ortak Özellikler
- 193 M. Pilar SAN NICOLÁS PEDRAZ
Technical and Artistic Aspects of the Roman Mosaic of Castulo (Jaén, Spain)
Castulo Roma Mozaïğinin Teknik ve Sanatsal Açılardan İncelenmesi (Jaén, İspanya)
- 207 S. Sezin SEZER
Prusias ad Hypium Akhilleus Mozaïği
The Achilles Mosaic of Prusias ad Hypium
- 225 Derya ŞAHİN - Mustafa ŞAHİN
Roma Mizah Anlayışının Roma Dönemi Mozaiklerine Yansıması
Reflections of Roman Humour on Roman Mosaics
- 239 Derya ŞAHİN – Nur Deniz ÜNSAL
Ontario Kraliyet Müzesi’nde Sergilenen Edessa Kökenli Bir Grup Mozaik Pano
A Group of Edessa Oriented Mosaic Panels Exhibited in Royal Ontario Museum
- 257 Felix TEICHNER - Irene MAÑAS ROMERO
The Mosaics from Abicada and Boca Do Rio (Portugal) - A New Perspective Thirty Years Later
Abicada ve Boca Do Rio (Portekiz) Mozaikleri - Otuz Yıl Sonra Yeni Bir Bakış Açısı

- 273 Ivo TOPALILOV
On the Eirene Mosaic from Philippopolis, Thrace
Trakya, Philippopolis Eirene Mozaïği Üzerine
- 287 Federico UGOLINI
A New Insight into the Iconography of the Civitas Classis Mosaic at Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna
Ravenna, Sant'Apollinare Nuovo'daki Civitas Classis Mozaïği İkonografisi Üzerine Yeni Bir Bakış Açısı
- 297 Miguel Ángel VALERO TÉVAR
New Representations of the Myth of Pelops and Hippodamia in Roman Mosaic Art
Roma Mozaik Sanatında Pelops ve Hippodamia Efsanesinin Yeni Tasvirleri
- 315 Sebastián VARGAS VÁZQUEZ
Cube Designs in Roman Baetica Mosaics
Roma Çağı Baetica Mozaiklerinde Küp Tasarımları
- 333 Véronique VASSAL
Iconographie et relecture d'une mosaïque gallo-romaine à décor multiple de Vienne (Narbonnaise)
Narbonne'dan Çok Dekorlu Bir Gallo-Roma Mozaïği'nin İkonografi ve Yeniden Okuma Çalışmaları
- Modern Mosaic Studies / Modern Mozaik Çalışmaları**
- 349 Hülya VURNAL İKİZGÜL
The Modernization of Mosaic Art in Turkey
Türkiye'de Mozaik Sanatın Çağdaşlaşması
- Book Review / Kitap İncelemesi**
- 361 Maja KRAMER
Los mosaicos de la Plaza de la Encarnación. Roma a Seville, Guadalupe López Monteagudo.
- 367 David PARRISH
Corpus of the Mosaics of Albania, Vol. 1, Butrint intramuros, Balkans' Mosaic, Marie-Patricia Raynaud - Agron Islami
- 371 Guidelines for Authors / Yazarlar İçin Yazım Kuralları

The Roman Villa of Tirana (Albania) and Its Mosaics

Tiran Roma Villası ve Mozaikleri (Arnavutluk)

Elda OMARI *

(Received 15 November 2017, accepted after revision 16 July 2018)

In memory of Prof. Dr. José María Blázquez

Abstract

Tirana, the capital city of Albania, in Antiquity did not exist as an inhabited centre, simply it was considered a rural area, the residential territory of Dyrrachium patricians, as was Ercolano for Pompeii. In 1972 in Tirana, during the construction of a building, the remains of a rustic villa built in Roman Period were brought to light accidentally, and some of the rooms were decorated with polychrome mosaics. This villa was used for more than four centuries and it has several phases of life, for this reason it was dated by the archaeologists between the end of the 1st and the 5th century AD.

The principal goal of the research is the punctual analysis of the mosaics motifs and their contextualization in the Balkan and Adriatic area, to identify the owner and the craftsmen who live and work in it. The second goal is to present to the international scientific community this rustic villa, a unique case for Tirana.

Keywords: *Tirana mosaic, rustic villa, domus ecclesiae, Roman Albania, Christian Albania.*

Öz

Arnavutluk'un başkenti Tiran, Antik Çağlarda bir yerleşim merkezi olarak var olmamış, basit bir şekilde, Pompei için Ercolano'nun olduğu gibi, Dyrrachium'un asilzadelerinin kırsal yerleşim bölgesi olarak kabul edilmiştir. 1972'de Tiran'da, bir binanın inşaatı sırasında, Roma döneminde inşa edilen rustik bir villanın kalıntıları tesadüfen ortaya çıkarılmış ve bazı odaların çok renkli mozaiklerle dekore edildiği tespit edilmiştir. Bu villanın dört yüzyıl aşkın bir süre boyunca kullanıldığı ve birkaç nesli barındırdığı anlaşılmış ve bu nedenle arkeologlar tarafından İS 1. yüzyılın sonları ile 5. yüzyıla tarihlendirilmiştir.

Bu araştırmanın asıl amacı, mozaiklerin ve mozaiklerde kullanılan motiflerin dikkatli bir analizinin yapılması, mozaiklerin Balkanlar ve Adyatik coğrafyasındaki yerinin belirlenmesi, mozaiklerin sahiplerinin ve mozaikleri işleyen zanaatkarların tespit edilmesidir. İkinci amaç, Tiran için eşsiz bir örnek olan bu rustik villayı uluslararası bilimsel topluluğa sunmaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Tiran mozaiği, kırsal villa, domus ecclesiae, Roma Çağı'nda Arnavutluk, Hristiyan Arnavutluk.*

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A Roman Vila in the Centre of Tirana

The research will focus on a structure found in the capital of Albania, Tirana (Fig. 1), which in the beginning was used exclusively as a residential and productive structure, but, later on, part of the building became public (Anamali - Meksi 1972: 12; Omari 2013: 373-384).

The ancient *villa* is located in the middle of the modern centre of the city, not far from the principal square, “Scanderbeg Square”, and between two important roads: “*Rruga e Durrësit*” and “*Rruga e Kavajës*”, connecting Tirana with the port of Durrës, from which the most important road of Balkan *Via Egnatia-Eγνατία Όδός* starts, and its hinterland, Kavaja, also located on the route leading to Byzantium.

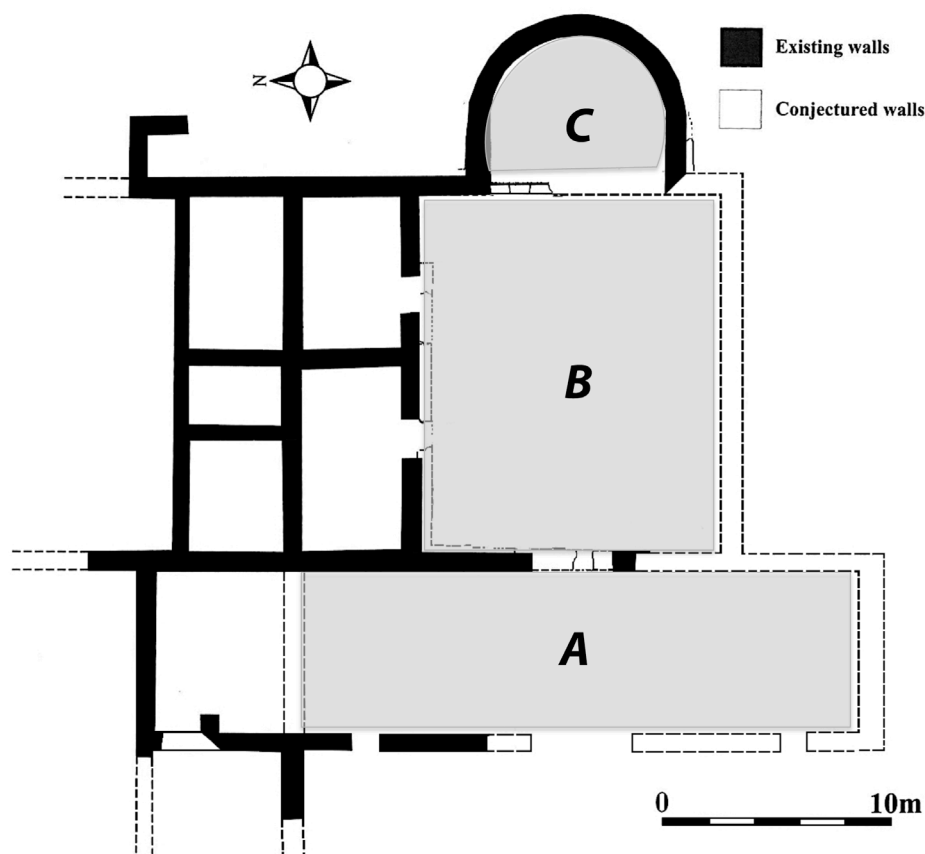
From the research carried out in the last years, Albanian archaeologists have identified in the hinterland between Durrës (*Dyrrachium*) and Elbasan (*Scampia*), in the area that today we can consider the territory of Tirana, several castles and sites already inhabited in the Illyrian period. The sites that are better known are those of *Mali i Vilës* and *Dorëzi*, where the castles built in the 6th-5th century BC were used and restructured respectively till to the 6th and to the 4th century AD (Ceka 2006: 62-66; Cabanes et al. 2008: 254-258). As the recent studies have not been systematic and many details are missing, it is difficult to reconstruct precisely the ancient landscape. Surely, this area of ancient Albania, after the Roman occupation, became a busy region with mercenaries, soldiers and merchants traveling both to the East and to the West (Ceka 2006: 62-66). Another testimony, although unclear because of the lack of precise details, can be found in the 4th book of *Περὶ κτισμάτων* of Procopius of Caesarea where castles are listed that were built *ex novo* or reconstructed in the territory of *Epirus Nova* by Emperor Justinian. On the list of the new castles we find that of *Τιτιάνα* – Titiana, while on that of restructured castles that of *Τυρκανός* – *Tyrchanus* (Procopius 1961: 251) is mentioned. Perhaps the latter is the castle of our centre that over the centuries became *Tyrana* – Tirana, as was mentioned by Eduard Lear in his travel diary in Albania (Destani - Elsie 2008: 42-54, 79-82). Until now, nothing is known on these mentions, and therefore the information remains to be checked. However, in Tirana, not much time ago, during the reconstruction of a central street, close to the Parliament, archaeologists found the remains of the Ottoman castle. Maybe the Justinian walls are preserved under them? In this case, we are not so far from the Roman *villa*, which was found by chance in 1972, during the construction of a building in the neighbourhood called “*Partizani*”. Approximately -0,30 /-0,40 meters below the city’s modern trekking level, were discovered the remains of a residential structure decorated with mosaics. Immediately after the discovery, the work for the construction of the palace were interrupted and the excavations started, coordinated by the Institute of Cultural Monuments and the Institute of History of Tirana. The archaeological investigations brought to light only the south-east part of the ancient building, with their different phases, the floors decorations, several fragments of ceramics and bricks, and various funeral steles that identify the building with a rustic *villa* and, at the same time, include the period of its first construction between the 1st and the 2nd century AD (Fig. 2).

Two centuries later, in the 4th century AD, based on some structural data, archaeologists think that the owner of the *villa* performed some changes. In this second phase the building was transformed from a unitary structure in two separate parts: one exclusively residential and one for productive activities, aimed at working the fields. It is in this moment that the Christian message begins



Figure 1
Tirana location with the mosaic site in the centre of the modern city (re-elab. by E. Omari).

Figure 2
Plan of the rustic villa of Tirana (from Gilkes 2004: 286 fig. 119, re-elab. by E. Omari).



to spread in the territory of Albania and with more probability the owners of the *villa* became Christians. In this historic phase the celebrations of the first Christian communities took place in private buildings or in catacombs (Bowes 2008: 4-11; Sfameni 2014: 99-112). Until today in all the Albanian territory the catacombs have never been found. Consequently, the owners, converted to the new religion, reorganized the *villa* making further structural changes, as it happen in all Mediterranean area (Volpe 2002: 26-63; Chavarría Arnau 2009: 11-13; Chavarría Arnau 2010: 639-662). In this case, in order to have a larger room to hold the community meetings and to celebrate the sacrifice of Christ, in the east side, where the main room of the *villa* is, was added an apse, while on the west side, on the mosaic of the room which will be the narthex of the Christian building, the figures of two pairs of fishes were inserted and counterpoised.

Indeed in Albanian literature the building is known as the “*domus ecclesiae*” or as the “rustic *villa*” of Tirana. The Albanian archaeologists have interpreted the last changes as adaptations to carry out a structure for the celebrations of the new Christian community that gravitates around it (Gilkes 2004: 284-286).

The architecture of the part that becomes *ecclesia* is simpler: on the west side two doors permit the entry into the narthex, of rectangular shape. Two other doors carry out on the eastern wall of the narthex, allow guests to enter into the main room, which ends in east side with an apse. These three rooms at the moment are the principal rooms of the rustic *villa* as they are decorated by polychrome mosaics, with geometric patterns; motifs which are used both in the Roman and late antique period (Fig. 3). Here, as in the whole Adriatic and Mediterranean area, the artisans used geometric patterns that are neutral and employ them to decorate structures that have a double value, private and religious. Only on the mosaic of narthex elements are inserted that can be connected to the new

religious tradition, fish and birds, the latter mentioned by Anamali (1993: 460), but no longer visible.

During the excavations other environments were found on the north side of the structure, perhaps rooms linked to the private activities of the *villa*, some of which still display bricks floors with monograms (Omari 2009: 81-89). This shows that in the phase of the conversion of the rustic *villa* into *domus ecclesiae* the craftsmen used blocks with the symbol of the cross, dating back to Constantine I (306-337 AD).

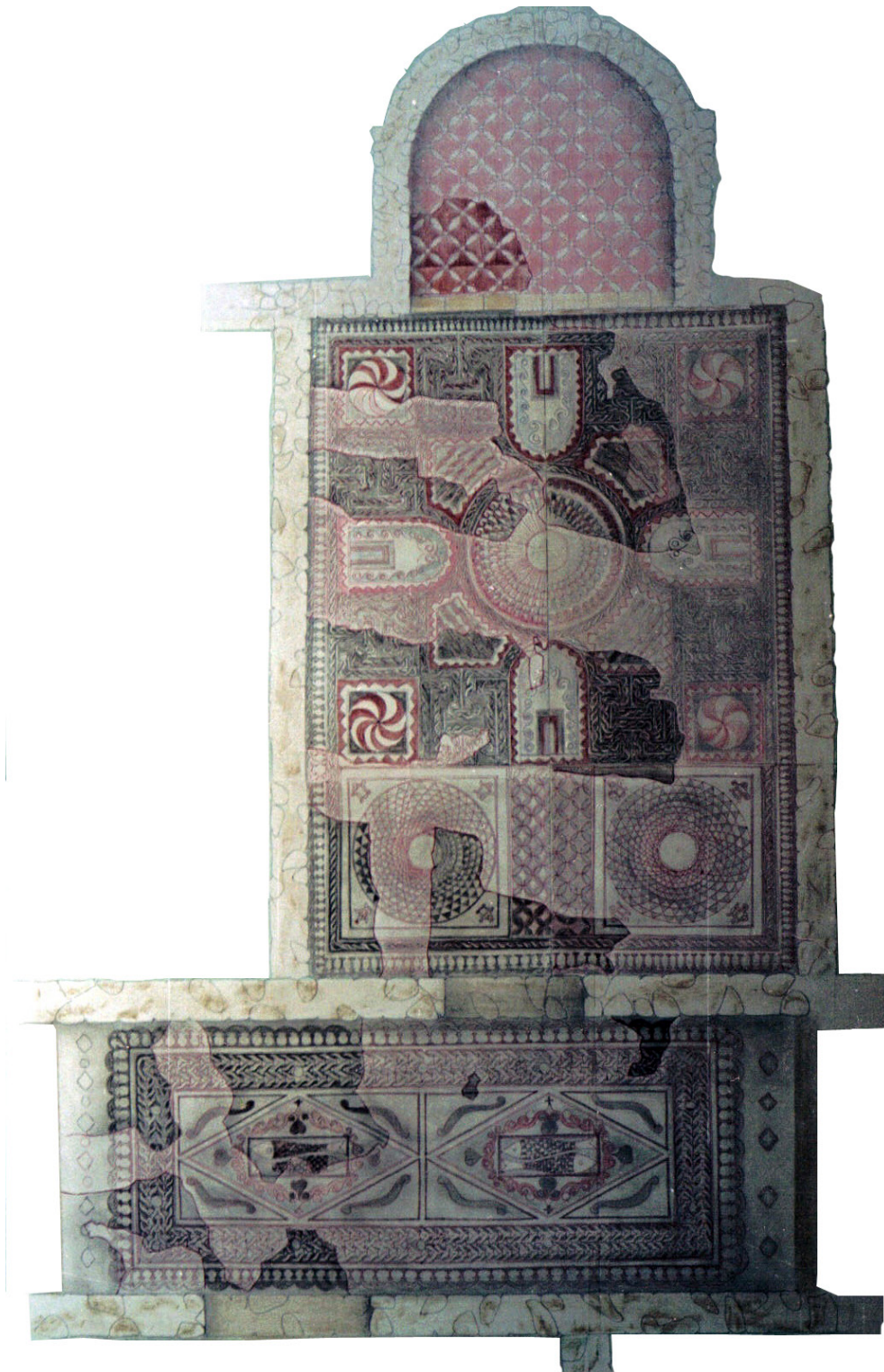


Figure 3
Reconstructive design of mosaics
of rustic villa (photo E. Omari).

The Mosaics of Villa

The mosaics realised in tessellates, as already mentioned above, decorate important rooms and have polychromatic and bi-chromatic geometric and geometric-figurative patterns. The material used for the mosaics, with most probability, is local. From a visual examination it was possible to note that in it prevail limestone tesserae in white, beige, black, grey, pink, violet colour, whereas the red tesserae are made by ceramic material-terracotta.

Starting from room “A”, which must have mainly been an access room, it is visible that during the late antiquity period it went through structural and decorative modifications, which lead the archaeologists suggest that these changes are due to the use made of the room that became the narthex of the new *ecclesiae* (Fig. 4a-d). The south part of this environment was destroyed during the opening of the foundations of the modern palace. Therefore, today almost two-thirds of the wall structure is preserved (12,9x4 m). From a recent study done by the University of Siena, as part of a Master thesis, the scholar hypothesises a much larger environment where the length is 25.51 m and the width is 4,56 m (Miti 2005: 24-31).

Figure 4 a-d
Mosaics fragments in the room “A”
(photo E. Omari).

The floor decoration of the room, brought to light in fragmentary conditions, present a tessellate with juxtapose texture of the mosaic surface (Omari 2011:



a



b



c



d

679), where perhaps there were two connecting bands, one to the north and another one to the south of the room, but only a small fragment was found in the north corner. This white monochrome band was decorated by row of spaced and poised serrated polychrome squares (Décor I: pl. 5a). There are two edges, preserved in part, consisting in polychrome stylized arcade of peltae with a column supporting the central point of pelta, forming twin arches (Décor I: pl. 97e) and three interbraided bands of polychrome round-tongued guilloche opened from eyelets, running in opposite directions (var. Décor I: pl. 75c). The edges enclose the field composed of two rectangular panels inscribed by lozenge loaded by current waves; on the triangles, formed by the lozenge, curved ribbons are presented with Hedera or heart-shaped leaves, in the centre of this lozenge another rectangle with two contrasting fishes was inserted (Décor I: pl. 299e).

The second room decorated with mosaics is room “B”, rectangular (11,20x9,45 m), both for the size and for the floor decoration must be identified with a representation environment that in the second phase, after structural changes it became the hall /nave used for the religious ceremonies (Fig. 5a-g).

Figure 5 a-d. Mosaics fragments in the room “B” (photo E. Omari).



a



b



c



d

Also in this room the artisan uses the juxtapose texture to make the floor mosaic, where the first edge defining the entire surface is composed of arcade of peltae with a column supporting the central point of pelta, forming twin arches (Décor I: pl. 97e) followed by a simple guilloche in contrasting colours (Décor I: pl. 70d). They enclose two panels, one is small and is divided into three parts and another one is larger. The first panel is limited by a triple line with black tesserae, which in turn divides it into three distinct areas. This part of the field presents three motifs decorations: two squares, with equal decoration to the sides



Figure 5 e-g
Mosaics fragments in the room “B”
(photo E. Omari).

of the carpet, and a central one. Inside of the lateral squares, on a white surface, a shield of triangles with opposite colours (Décor II: pl. 327b) are inscribed, which on the sides of the square form four triangles loaded by *kantharoi*. The pattern of the central decoration has an orthogonal shape of intersecting circles, forming saltires of quasi-tangent solid spindles and concave squares, the colours counter changed (Décor I: pl. 237a). The second panel, which covers most of the room, presents a centralized pattern, in a square and around a circle, made up of 4 lateral arches interlaced tangentially with the circle, and of 4 chevrons in the corner. These are adjacent to the arches (here in simple guilloche, the chevrons with meander and swastika in opposite direction with a double “T” (Décor II: pl. 367c). The central circle in the inside is defined by a simple wave (Décor I: pl. 101b) and is loaded by a shield of scales with radial flower effect (Décor II: pl. 333b). The four arcades that are formed at the side of the central circle are adorned with simple waves and by geometric elements, while the four squares placed between the circle and the arcades are loaded by zigzag rainbow-pattern of simple filets (Décor I: pl. 199b).

On the east side the large room is close to the apse, room “C”, which is a semi-circle and has a diameter of 5.16 m. Added to the structure of the home and the environment that preceded when the building became a *domus ecclesiae*, so at the end of 4th century AD, not only the construction technique, but also the size of the wall are different from the set of the *villa*, they vary from 0.67 to 0.75 m of thickness. The apse mosaic, of which only a small part can be found, has another texture, which is iterative (Fig. 6). It presents an orthogonal pattern of

intersecting circles, forming saltires of quasi-tangent solid spindle and concave squares, and the colours are changed (D cor I: pl. 237a).



Figure 6
Mosaics fragments in the room "C"
(photo E. Omari).

The Comparisons of the Motives of Mosaics

The following analysis of decorative patterns used in the mosaics of Tirana, being they employed to decorate the edges or the fields or as filler elements of the basic motif, will not be considered as dating elements for the floor mosaic and for the architectural structure. They are indeed very common throughout the Mediterranean area, but they will help us to understand the tastes of the territory. Given the vastness of their distributions in different places and times, we will give only examples from neighbouring areas of Albania: the Balkan and Italian area. It should also be specified that where the motives are widespread and the testimonies exceed a certain number they will be mentioned in general without specifying the structure or the environment they decorate.

The Edges Motifs

D cor I: pl. 5a: *row of spaced and poised serrated polychrome squares.*

Although in part visible in the mosaics of Tirana, this pattern is known but not very frequent. In the Albanian territory, the second example comes from the room with the apse in the Athena *domus* in Apollonia, which is dated between the 2nd and the 3rd century AD (Omari - Bonini 2016: 32-33). If we look at the neighbouring areas of Albania, the pattern is absent. Currently it was found in Greece and specifically in few churches of Cos island, dated at 5th-6th century AD (De Matteis 2013: 48-68). In Italy, there is only one example in Rome; the floor decoration now is preserved and exhibited in the *Capitolina* Collection. Also in this case, as in the Tirana mosaic, the row of spaced and poised serrated polychrome squares mark the central panel of the threshold of an unknown room only on two sides; this mosaic is dated by the scholars back to the middle of the 3rd century AD (Salveti 2013: 283-285). If we wanted to expand the comparison



area, which looks like the pattern that had origin and fortune in the East, it is enough to consider that many edges, in different rooms of the Roman *domus* excavated in Antioch, dated between the 2nd and 3rd century AD, were decorated with it (Levi 1947: 66-281), such as the church of Bishop Martin in Gerasa, erected in the 4th century (Picirillo 1989: 1704-1711).



Décor I: pl. 97e: *polychrome stylized arcade of peltae with a column supporting the central point of pelta, forming twin arches.*

Currently the pattern with pelta on columns forming twin arches seems to be unknown in Albania and the example of Tirana can be considered unique for this territory. In addition to use in the edges of the rooms “A” and “B”, the pattern was employed with a single arch and carried out with inferior quality only in another site, in the mosaic of the Acropolis church of Butrint (Mitchell 2008: 85). This design, although not so recurring, in the Balkan area was found in Istria, on two occasions: in a rustic *villa* discovered in S. Simeone and in the Christian basilica of Orserio (Zovatto 1971: 58) and in Bulgaria, at Stara Zagora, on the edge of the large room of the late antique *domus*. In the Bulgarian mosaic, the motif was used only on one side of the room, just in the west (Valeva 2011: 930-932). By contrast, in Italy this pattern is used both in roman tradition, in a mosaic excavated in Vatican, dated between the end of the 1st century BC and the beginning of the 1st century AD, with arches that more elaborated than the one in Tirana, (Blake 1936: 121), in Christian tradition in north Adriatic area, on the Grado island, used to decorate the edge of the baptistery mosaic, dated to the beginning of the 4th century AD (Zovatto 1971: 63).



Décor I: pl. 75c: *a variant of two interbraided bands of polychrome round-tongued guilloche opened to form eyelets, running in opposite directions.*

The pattern with three interbraided bands, running in opposite directions, in Albania’s territory prove to be used only in Tirana mosaic, but it is a variation of the original motif found in Costanza, in Romania (Barnea 1977: 183). The pattern of the edge of the Tirana mosaic is a triple and is unique for the area. In Albania, the archaeologists have always found this design with one band starting from the 2nd-3rd century AD, in the roman *domus* of Apollonia and Butrint, until reaching the religious structure of the 6th century AD, specifically in Lin and Bylis basilica and in the Saranda synagogue (Omari 2009: 132-133). However, in the Balkan area, in Greece, the pattern is widespread as a single braid, both in edges of the private *domus* of the 2nd-3rd AD and in edges that decorate the floor of the early Christian basilicas, then of the 5th-6th century AD. Exemplars were found in the basilica of Managitas, in the basilica “A” of Elitas and in the basilica “B” of Chersoneso on the island of Crete (Atzakà 1988: 123-137). A punctual comparison with our pattern, three interbraided bands of polychrome round-tongued guilloche opened to form eyelets, running in opposite directions was discovered in a small church of Cterio Castron in Amfissa (Atzakà 1987: 187-188). If we observe the Italian mosaics it is known that, in this area, the motif is privileged with polychrome round-tangent double guilloche opened to form eyelets too. From the census carried out throughout the country many braid examples were found, with all the nuances that the pattern can undergo, except for the triple band. The similar edges to our example were found accidentally in Rome, in Tiburtina road, locality Settecaminì. The mosaic discovered without context was dated by the archaeologists, based on stylistic data, between the end of the 2nd and the beginning of the 3rd century AD (<http://tess.beniculturali.unipd.it/web/home/>).

Décor I: pl. 70d: *outlined simple guilloche on a coloured ground.*

This decorative pattern has been known since the origins of the mosaic and throughout the Mediterranean area. In Albania we find it almost everywhere since the imperial period to the late antiquity both in private buildings (Apollonia and Butrint *domus*) and in public buildings (Lin, Bylis, Mesaplik and Saranda basilica) (Omari 2009: 132-133). In the Balkan area the comparisons are so many, therefore, in this analysis we are going to mention a few of them. Starting from the Greek area, the outlined simple guilloche on a coloured ground can be found on the island of Delos (Bruneau 1972: 53) and on Kos island. Here it is used to decorate the edges of the major basilica of Kephalos and the Baptistery of Zipari (De Matteis 2013: 40-44, 67-68); in Macedonia it is present in the mosaic decorations of the episcopal basilica of Stobi, into the Thyrsus Bishop basilica in Tegea and in Nea Anchialos basilica, all of 5th-6th century AD (Kolarik 1989: 372-439). In the italic area it is witnessed throughout the area from the 1st to the 5th-6th century AD. Only in the area of *X Regio* there are seventeen mosaics between Adria, Este, Padova and Verona, which have had a decorative element of the edge this pattern (Rinaldi 2007: 33-35). In the central-northern area of Etruria there are fourteen edges carried out between the end of 1st century BC and 4th century AD where the outlined simple guilloche on a coloured ground is used (Buono 2011: 211).

**Décor I: pl. 10g:** *serrated saw-tooth pattern.*

This pattern used in the mosaic of Tirana doesn't present any limits in space and time. Being so well-known within the Albanian territory, we find it in Apollonia in a *domus* from the 3rd century AD and in a late antique basilica of the city; the pattern was also used in the floor decorations of the so-called Triconch palace of Butrinto and in the mosaics of the basilica *extra muros* in Elbasan (Omari 2009: 134-135). If we turn our gaze to the Balkan area, the serrated saw-tooth pattern is present in Greece, in Delos, in the *domus* of the northern quarter (Bruneau 1972: 50). By contrast, on the western shore of the Adriatic, in Italy, it has been attested already in the republican era in Rome (Morricone Martini 1967: 48-49), in Sirmione in so-called *Grotta di Catullo* (Roffia 1997: 157-159), in Este in a Roman *domus* excavated in the *Albrizzi Villa*, in Padua in an unclear context, excavated in the centre of the city (Via 8 Febbraio – *Palazzo degli Anziani*), in Verona in two *domus* (Rinaldi 2007: 29). Four attestations can be found in the Tuscany area: two in Arezzo, one in S. Liberata in Grosseto and one in Volterra, all framed in a period of time between the 2nd to the 4th century AD (Buono 2011: 201-202).

**Décor I: pl. 101b:** *wave pattern (normal).*

This decorative motif is one of the oldest and the well-known in Greek (Salzmann 1982) and Aegean areas, especially on Delos island (Bruneau 1972: 266). The pattern, used to define pebble mosaics already in the 4th century BC, has a very long life and wide diffusion across the Mediterranean, and as this pattern doesn't know space and time limits it is impossible to lose all the archaeological evidence. In Albania, beyond the Tirana example, other seven edges decorated with this motif were identified. In this territory the theme appears at the dawn of floor decorations, in the 4th century BC in Durrës; once again in Durrës we find it employed in a mosaic of the 2nd century AD and later in the decorations of Roman houses of the 3rd-4th century AD in Apollonia, Saranda, Butrint. It can also be found in the late antiquity basilicas "D" and "E" of Bylis, both built in the 5th-6th century AD (Ceka - Muçaj 2005: 73-75; Omari 2009: 131-132). The same



happened in the Macedonian and Greek area. The development and the distribution of the pattern go from the 4th century BC to the 6th century AD. We just need to think of the Hellenistic mosaics of Corinth and Olinto (Salzmann 1982: 95-103); of Pella (Guimier-Sorbets 2004: 1163-1172), the mosaics of Delo's houses (Bruneau 1972: 172-303), the *domus* of Peristeria (Kolarik 1989: 140-154), the Roman houses and the early Christian basilicas of Crete dating back to the middle of the 2nd and the 6th century AD (Markoulaki - Christoudoulakos 2004: 366). Still in Italy, the normal wave pattern is widely spread throughout the territory. In this respect we can give the example of what was found near Foggia, in a late antique villa dating between the 3rd and the 4th century AD (Fiorella et al. 2006: 454); the two testimonies found in Este and Padua dated between the middle of the 1st century BC and the 2nd century AD (Rinaldi 2007: 50-51), and those found in Lucca, Populonia and Volterra, dated from the end of the 2nd and the beginning of the 1st century BC (Bueno 2011: 226-227).

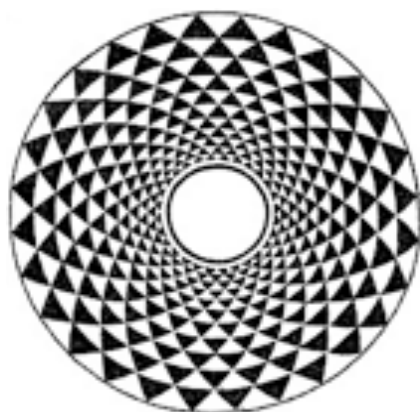
The Field's Motifs



Décor I: pl. 299e: (*variant*) of lozenge inscribed in a rectangle (*here outlined*).

This pattern that in Tirana is used to decorate the central part of the floor mosaic of room "A" in Albania is known but not widespread. Currently, in addition to the mosaic of Tirana, in this Balkan area it was used to decorate the threshold of the north nave of the basilica "A" in Bylis (Muçaj 1987: 173-190), whereas in Greece it is highly appreciated by the client and has been used in the mosaics decorations since the Hellenistic era, for example in Delos, in the mosaic which adorn the Italian agorà, in one of the rooms of the "House with a column" and in the "House III Q" located in the theatre neighborhood (Bruneau 1972: 141, 218, 283). Still in Greece, two examples coming from Oikia and Tasos (Atzakà 1998: 233-234, 335-336) were found in a private building built during the imperial era. However, they are not missing in the late antiquity basilica. Here we can mention the mosaics of the basilica "A" of Chersonisos and the basilica of Eleutherna (Sweetman 2013: 213-216, 225-227). In the italic area some mosaics testify that this pattern, drawn in two-toned colours (black and white), was found in Rimini, in the threshold of room "C" of a Roman house close to the arch of Augustus. The mosaic is dated by the archaeologist back to half /end of the 1st century (Riccioni 1994: 80-81). It was also found in Desenzano, again used to adorn the threshold of one of the rooms of a Roman house (Mirabella Roberti 1994: 109). Based on the edited data we can say that the lozenge pattern inscribed in a rectangle had better luck in the Eastern area than in the West: numerous are the exemplars which come not only from the Greek but also from the Roman houses discovered in Antioch (Levi 1947: 37-219).

Décor II: pl. 327b: *shield of triangles*, in contrasting colours (*here with 28 triangles per row, in 11 rows*).



The shield of triangles pattern, which decorates part of the main room of the rustic *villa*, is well-known and diffused throughout the area of the Roman Empire. Therefore, even in this case, it is very difficult to bring all the examples documented. The most immediate comparisons are among those within the Albanian territory, in important sites such as Durrës, in the "*hippocampus* thermal bath" dating 1st century AD; in Apollonia, in the Athena *domus*, dated between the 2nd and the 3rd century AD; in the Triconch Palace at Butrint, dated between the 2nd and the 4th century AD (Omari 2009: 181). Even though there is no scheme that is much appreciated by the customer, in the Balkan area the examples are not

missing. A testimony to the use of the scheme comes from Bulgaria, from a private building of the 3rd century AD, excavated at the ancient site of *Philippopolis* (Plovdiv) (Kessiakova 1994: 166-167). In Greece, currently, the pattern can be found both in private houses built during the imperial era (2nd-3rd century AD) and in public structures, as are the early Christian churches. The following are some examples found on the island of Crete. The first one comes from the so-called *Dionysus villa* (2nd century AD), the second from a residential building of Mitropolis of Gortina dated between the 3rd and the 4th century AD, the third from the *triclinium* of the Roman house found in the Kypriotaki properties of Chersonisos (4th-5th century AD), while in the late religious context the pattern was found in three basilicas at Poros, at Klapsi and at Antichira (Atzaka 1984: 51; 1987: 149, 164-169; 1988: 83-85). On the west shore of the Adriatic see, in Italy, the motif is mainly documented in Rome, with five attestations all carried out between the 1st and 4th century AD. However, the item in Italy that shares more similarities with the Tirana pattern was excavated at Narni in Umbria and was part of a mosaic fragment which decorated the field of the Roman *villa* room dating back to the 1st century (<http://tess.beniculturali.unipd.it/web/home/>).

Décor I: pl. 237a: *orthogonal pattern of intersecting circles, forming saltires of quasi-tangent solid spindle and concave squares, the colours are counter changed.*

The pattern is quite simple and therefore very diffused throughout the Empire. From Albania, in addition to the testimonies of Tirana, there are eleven other attestations, all carried out in red and white (two-toned), which come from the Roman houses and the early Christian basilica brought to light at the sites of Berat, Bylis, Saranda and Butrint. The buildings that are located in a time span that goes from the 2nd to the 6th century AD. Therefore, in this territory the orthogonal pattern of intersecting circles circulated for four centuries (Omari 2009: 177-178). There are many samples in the surrounding area as well. Not so far from Tirana, on the ancient way *Dyrrachium-Naissus*, at *Ulpiana* (Kosovo), the motif was used to decorate three environments of a Roman house from the imperial era with mosaics (Cvetković Tomašević 1994: 145-146). In other parts of Balkan area, in Macedonia, we find it on the mosaics of the Episcopal Church at Stobi and of the great basilica at Heraclea (Kolarik 1989: 97-98). In Greece it was found on the island of Kos as part of the mosaic of the early Christian basilica of Zipari (De Matteis 2013: 64). Also the italic examples are numerous and here we can cite only a few. In Rome only, until today three mosaics floor adorned with the orthogonal pattern of intersecting circles are known: the first sample comes from the port of Rome, Ostia, from the Insula of Aquila, the floor of the corridor of one of these houses was covered with this pattern (Becatti 1961: 194). The second mosaic was found in Via Rusconi, in the heart of Rome, which decorated the floor of an undocumented structure; the third mosaic with this scheme was found in the Roman suburb, in the hypogeum of the so-called *Villa Lucchina*. The archaeologists dated all these examples to the 3rd century AD (<http://tess.beniculturali.unipd.it/web/home/>).

Décor II: pl. 367c: *Centralized pattern, in a square and around a circle, with 4 lateral arches, interlaced tangentially with the circle, and with 4 chevrons in the corner adjacent to the arches (here in simple guilloche, the chevrons with meander and swastika in opposite direction with a double T).*

This motif, which currently decorates most of the carpet of the great room of the rustic *villa* in Tirana, results to be an *unicum* for Albania, which suggests that his diffusion was very restricted. In the Balkans, until today, there are only three



mosaics decorated with this pattern and specifically there two are in Greece: in the narthex of the basilica of Aigion and in the central nave of the basilica of Delfi (Atzakà 1987: 180-82, 94-197). The third one, which is more similar to the mosaic of Tirana, was recently discovered in Bulgaria, at Stara Zagora. Here the centralized pattern, in a square and around a circle, was used in the carpet of the great room of a late antique *domus*. Based on the stylistic analysis, Bulgarian archaeologists date this mosaic between the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 5th century AD (Valeva 2011: 927-934). On the Western side of the Adriatic Sea, this pattern is completely absent in Italy. From a study done by M-P. Raynaud on three examples found in France, it seems that the motif has late antique origin and is well known in the Middle East, between Syria and Turkey (Raynaud 1996: 69-102).

Filler Elements

Besides the decorative patterns of edges and fields, with all the other Roman mosaics the mosaic of Tirana also shares the so-called filling elements, the geometric or figurative decorations that fill the empty spaces of the geometric scheme. In our case, in the narthex room filling elements are used on the mosaic ad: a curved ribbon with *Hedera* in the end and fish in opposite directions. Both are known elements but not widespread. In Albania, opposite fish are found only in the Tirana mosaic, while the ribbon with *Hedera* in the end is present in another carpet, the one found in the entrance of the “G” *domus* at Apollonia (2nd – 3rd century AD).

Other filler elements are found in the geometric motifs that decorate the large room inside the two side panels those with triangle-shaped shields. Four *kantharoi* have been employed to fill the four triangles of the result and the hexafoil (flower with six petals) in the middle. Both the *kantharos* and the flower were widespread throughout the Mediterranean area already from the Hellenistic period until the late antiquity era. Let us just consider the mosaics of Delos (Bruneau 1972: 69-70) and the pebble mosaics studies by Salzmann (Salzmann 1982: 76, 113, 119-121, 124-126). In Albania a similar pattern is found in the mosaic of the apse room in the Triconch Palace at Butrint (Mitchell 2011: 242-251). Instead, in the big panel, the one with the centralized pattern, in a square and around a circle, the filler elements are: the turning wheel in contrasting colours, a shield of oblong bipartite polychrome scales which appears to be windswept (Décor II: pl. 333b) and the zigzag rainbow-pattern of simple filets (Décor I: pl. 199b) at the sides of the central circle. Also these patterns are very common in the Mediterranean area, however some of them were carried out in later periods, for example the turning wheel in contrasting colours is witnessed in Greece, in the late antique basilica of Dietomo (Atzaka 1987: 151-152). On the contrary, the zigzag rainbow-pattern of simple filets has been certified to date back from the imperial era to the late antiquity both as a filler element and as a real decoration of the carpet. Currently it was found employed in the Christian basilica of Crete (Sweetman 2013: 210-212, 225-227) and on the mosaics that adorn the late antique *domus* of Stara Zagora in Bulgaria (Valeva 2011: 934-936). This zigzag pattern was also discovered in Italy, in a mosaic at Desenzano (Mirabella Roberti 1994: 109). Also the comparisons related to filler patterns are important engagements for the reconstruction of their temporal development. Elements such as *kantharos* and hexafoil have a very long life and distribution (3rd century BC – 6th century AD), while other elements such as shields of oblong bipartite polychrome scales, appearing windswept and the turning wheel in contrasting colours seem to be mostly employed during the 3rd and the 6th century AD.

Conclusions

In the end of this research the questions that emerge are more numerous than the solutions. First of all, the location of the *villae* is never chosen by chance but because of rural and productive reasons as well as because of the business conducted by the clients. Rich clients whose families had been living in the *villae* for some generations, making renovations and, as seen, also changes could afford high expenses. Being the mosaic of Tirana an *unicum* for the city, some questions arise spontaneously: who are the clients of this *villa*? Are they merchants who travelled and comprehended the new religion or are they landowners who received Christian guests? Were they indigenous people or did they come from other parts of the Empire? All this is hard to say. Moreover, how big was this Christian community to establish a *domus ecclesiae* and to adorn it with mosaics? Providing answers with accurate data to all these questions has not as yet been possible for various reasons, especially because the modern Tirana has been greatly enlarged and the presence of the new buildings does not allow any archaeological investigation. Other issues emerge if we think of the artisans who used to work there. Who are they? Where did they come from? From the analysis illustrated in this study, it is possible to observe that some decorative patterns, such as Décor I, pl. 5a (row of spaced and poised serrated polychrome squares), Décor I, pl. 75c (variant of two interbraided bands of polychrome round-tongued guilloche opened to form eyelets, running in opposite directions), Décor II, pl. 299e (lozenge inscribed in a rectangle), and Décor II, pl. 367c (centralized pattern, in a square and around a circle, of 4 lateral arches) are mostly widespread in the eastern Adriatic region. This data stresses the fact that part of the motives come from this part of the Empire and the artisans, in their itinerary, move the wave of motive fortune, which fades when they meet their clients different taste, which the craftsman try to respect. In this landscape of mosaic patterns, it is curious that pattern Décor II, pl. 367c is documented in Albania in the end of 4th century AD and has a precise comparison in the mosaic of Stara Zagora in Bulgaria. They were used to adorn a *domus* built at the end of 4th century AD as well (Valeva 2011: 927-934), which runs against all the examples proposed by Raynaud (Raynaud 1996: 69-102) as they mostly come from early Christian basilicas. Can it be that the craftsmen who carried out the mosaics of Tirana were local people who altered move, with the patterns, in to work in the East part of the peninsula? Another peculiarity of the Tirana mosaics is the use of the three interbraided bands of polychrome round-tongued guilloche opened to form eyelets, running in opposite directions, which, as seen from the comparisons, find a precise comparison in Greece, but here they were carried out later in the 6th century AD. What can be said about this? Within a vast territory like that of the Roman Empire, where everything and everybody used to travel: people, goods, culture, and so did also cartoons with decorative patterns. It seems that Albania had developed a typical taste for the decoration of their buildings and conducted a filtering role for the capital of the Empire, Rome. Albania has its own craftsmen's workshops that developed their own decorative motifs and know-how maybe they also import it.

In conclusion, the archaeological data, the excavation materials, the level quotas and the stylistic analysis of the floor mosaics allow us to confirm the various phases of the building, the wealth of the clients and above all its use: from the end of the 1st until the 5th century AD, when the barbaric invasion started in this territory.

Unfortunately, from a structural and decorative point of view, the needs associated with the modern buildings around and the road do not allow further excavations for a more accurate knowledge of the complex. The mosaic fragments of Tirana, unlike other Albanian mosaics, are preserved *in situ*. Thanks to the conservation work carried out in 2009 by the Institute of Cultural Monuments of Tirana, the archaeological site has been consolidated and made available to visitors and scholars (Fig. 7), so the mosaic is visible and accessible.



Figure 7
The archaeological site of Tirana with
the new mosaic protections
(photo E. Omari).

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