

Marie-Patricia RAYNAUD, Agron ISLAMI

# Corpus of the Mosaics of Albania



Volume 1

**Butrint *intramuros***

– MOSAICS OF THE BALKANS 1 –

# CORPUS of the MOSAICS of ALBANIA

## Volume 1 *Butrint intramuros*

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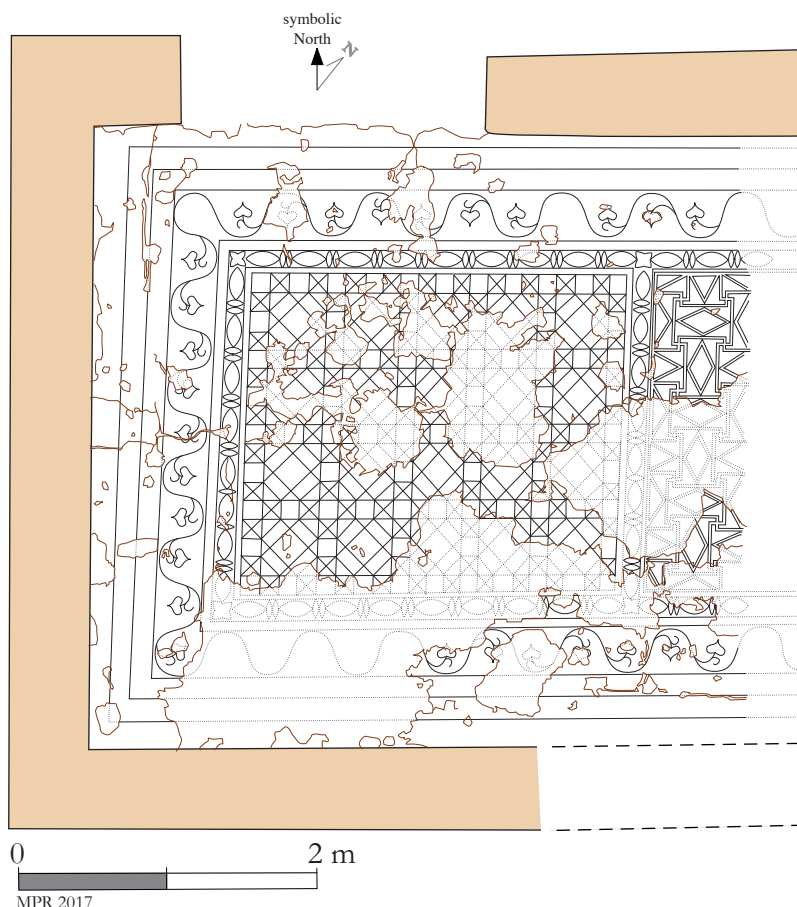
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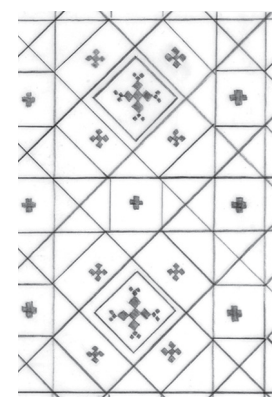
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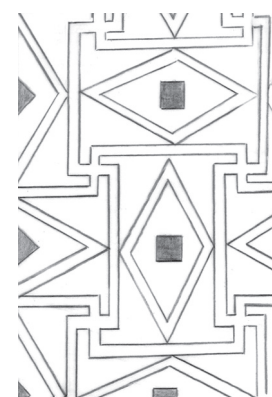
52. Graphic reconstruction of the mosaic according to the previous drawing.



9- border 1, 2



9- field 1



9- field 2

no. 5, Baths under the Great Basilica nos. 3-4, and possibly the Baths near the Vivari Channel no. 6 since the latter has a similar field grid,<sup>89</sup> if relatively rare (*Field 2*). The border of vertical and horizontal spindles resembles those of mosaics 3 and 5. The ivy leaf motif (*hederae*) is akin to that of gallery of the Triconch complex no. 11, but is even more similar to that of the mosaic O at Vrina, Town House 2. The repertoire is the same, as well as the overall arrangement with outer margins in successive bands of pink and white. A taste is seen for linear and repeating pattern, covering the floor with an outlined network of double filets. The field patterns are very fragmented, and difficult to discern at first glance.

### 10. Mural mosaics in the three niches of the Nymphaion, by E. Neri

Illustrations 43, 53-61, 237-239, 290-300, 315

Parietal *opus tessellatum in situ*

Architecture: a small rectangular building (9.30 x 5.00 m), brick-built with narrow joints (*opus testaceum*), encloses a rectangular basin with an apse. The west and eastern ends are elevated, forming a frame that emphasizes this central structure of the courtyard (fig. 53). We will call it a Nymphaion, the term 'fountain' suggesting more an edifice for public use, for the distribution of water (running water and overflow). Here, by contrast, access to the water seems difficult, and we have found no specific place for the filling of receptacles. The ornamental building seems therefore most likely to have been designed for aesthetic or religious purposes, as demonstrated in the mosaic iconography.

After the destruction by the Italian excavators of a small chapel within the Nymphaion (cf. *infra synthesis*, chap. 7), the complex was subsequently restored and rebuilt. Only a few remnants remain allowing us to attempt to piece together the original setting.

89. The same design is studied under number 122, Guimier-Sorbets 1983, pp. 197-199, pl. CXXIV-CXXV. The most numerous examples date from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. An example is found in the lateral fields of mosaic J of Town House at Vrina (fig. 212).



53. Gymnasium, Nympeum; wall mosaics 10; overall view of the mosaic niches in the apse.



54. View of the south side of the apse, with flat niches.



55. View of the rear of the apse, with grooves and piercing for the water inlet.



## GLASS MATERIAL IN ROMAN AND BYZANTINE MOSAICS FROM BUTRINT

Distribution, supply, production  
and technology by SEM/EDS analysis<sup>273</sup>

Elisabetta Neri<sup>274</sup>

The use of glass is attested in the highest-level figurative mosaics to express a client's patronage, owing to the visibility, execution time and material cost of such works.<sup>275</sup>

However, studies considering the distribution of glass in floor mosaics and characterizing the typology of materials to understand the know-how of mosaicists from the tesserae employed are rare.<sup>276</sup>

Three Roman-Byzantine mosaics at Butrint having glass tesserae as well as stone tesserae are considered in this paper: the wall mosaic of the Nymphaeum in the so-called "Gymnasium" (2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century AD), the pavement of the apse of Room 24 in the Triconch Complex (3-4<sup>th</sup> century AD) and the Baptistery (6<sup>th</sup> century AD). The aim is to study firstly the use and distribution of the glass in the pavement, and secondly the supply routes of this material, by integrating an analytic and an archaeological approach.

The results obtained in this research show chronological differential patterns in the production and use of mosaic tesserae at Butrint in terms of base glass as well as colourants and opacifiers. This might highlight a change of supply route in the 6<sup>th</sup> century for the Baptistery's building site.



237. Nymphaeum of the Gymnasium (2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c.), central niche:  
a) Dionysus's mask;  
b) Green translucent tesserae, observed by PM<sup>277</sup> (LSOM 7 mm).

### THE GLASS IN THE MOSAICS OF BUTRINT FROM 2<sup>nd</sup> CENTURY TO 6<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

The Nymphaeum of the Gymnasium, built during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, has three niches partially decorated with mosaics. In the central niche, against a white limestone background, there is a mask of Dionysus wearing a crown of ivy and bearing a thyrsus, while the two lateral niches have two *cantharoi* from which rinceaux (leafy stems) spiral out. The use of glass is predominant in the figure of the central niche, while it is limited to vegetal elements in the lateral niches. In the central niche, in particular, the green tesserae in the ivy crown of Dionysus's mask (fig. 237) are made of glass, as are the three shades of blue tesserae in the thyrsus (fig. 238). In the lateral niches, the leaves of the rinceau are made with green, light green, yellow-green and yellow brown



238. Nymphaeum of the Gymnasium (2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c.), central niche:  
a) Dionysus's thyrsus;  
b) Light blue translucent tesserae (LSOM 3 mm);  
c) Blue transparent tessera (LSOM 3.5 mm) observed by PM.

273. Please note that this section was written in English by the author, and only proofread by the translator.

274. CNRS, IP2CT, UMR8233, MONARIS, 4 place Jussieu, 75005 Paris, France ; UMR8167 Orient & Méditerranée, Monde Byzantin.

275. This is well exemplified at Butrint in the Triconch Complex, in the three mosaics of the phase 2 (no. 11 to 13), Room 24, Gallery 18 and Room of Masks (cf supra catalogue p. 64-90).

276. Guimier-Sorbets & Nenna 1992; Boschetti 2009; Salvadori & Boschetti 2014.

277. Hereafter, 'portable microscope' (Dinolite) will be abbreviated to PM, and 'long size of optical micrograph' to LSOM.

## THE CONVERSION OF THE NYPHEUM OF THE GYMNASIUM INTO A CHURCH

### Observations from the wall mosaic

Elisabetta Neri

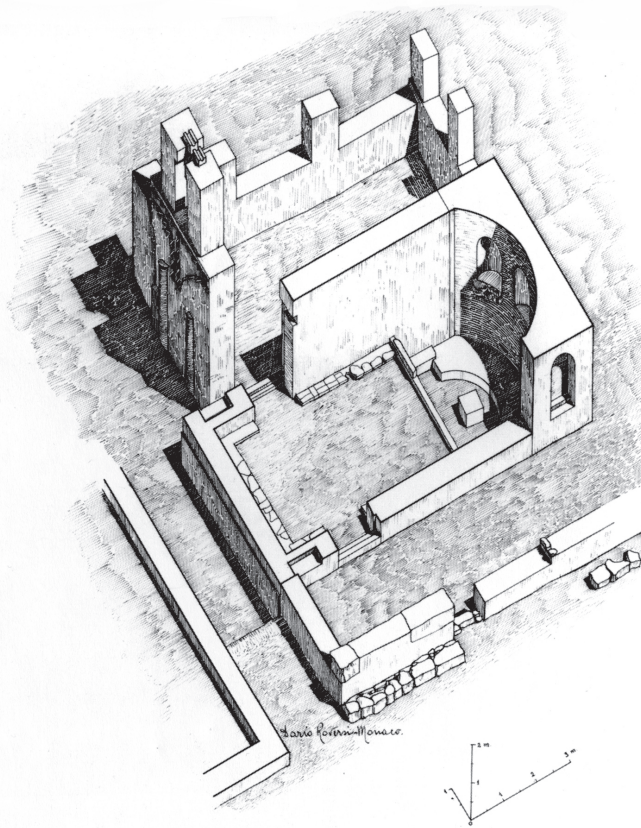
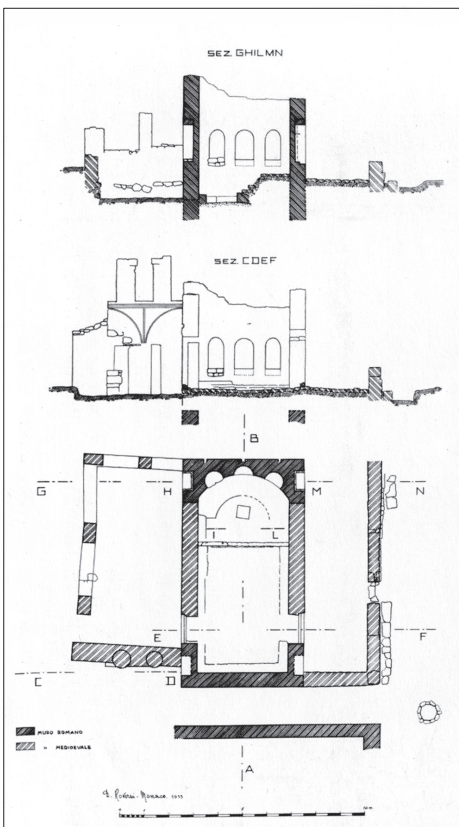
Studies on the Christian topography of Butrint have shown convincingly that from the 6<sup>th</sup> century onward the Church had control of the public spaces of the city and manipulated the urban landscape, by Christianising the important places in the management of the space. Public places thus are occupied by religious buildings, such as the baths on which the Baptistery of the episcopal complex was built, or the *Columbarium* near to which a small church was founded. Some holy places in the ancient city were also preserved, transformed and Christianised: a small church occupies the *stoà* of the Asklepeion; the well of *Iunia Rufina* was Christianised with a painted decoration; a great Basilica was built on the acropolis where a Temple it

has been argued once stood; and the Nymphaeum of the 'Gymnasium' was converted into a Church.<sup>464</sup> We will dwell here on the context of the conversion of the latter, presenting first the available information on the building's transformation and its phases, and secondly focusing on the destiny of the mural mosaic with niches and its effacement. Finally a possible context for the obliteration will be put forward.

### THE PALEOCHRISTIAN AND MEDIEVAL CHURCH OF THE 'GYMNASIUM'

The account, designs and plan of the Ugolini excavations<sup>465</sup> state that a Medieval Church once stood on the site of the Nymphaeum (fig. 290), which was dismantled during the dig to restore the original appearance of the Nymphaeum.<sup>466</sup> Several phases detected by the excavators and four floor levels paved in local stone show the building stood and was maintained over a long period.

The shape of the '*a camera*' type Nymphaeum, rectangular with an apse to the east, facilitated its conversion into a Church.



290. Plan of the Nymphaeum and the Church of the Gymnasium, from the documentation of the Italian archaeological expedition.

464. Bowden & Mitchell 2004; Sebastiani 2007.

465. Ugolini 1934.

466. Ugolini 1937; Mustilli 1941; Monaco 1934.



This first volume of the series *Corpus of the Mosaics of Albania* is also the first of a larger collection, *Mosaics of the Balkans*. The authors, Marie-Patricia Raynaud, archaeologist specialist in mosaics, and Agron Islami, chief restorer of mosaics, worked together in Albania for a long time, combining the study of pavements with their conservation.

The book is the result of the work of a whole team for five years, in the field, in archives and in libraries. It establishes a complete catalogue of all the mosaics discovered in the Butrint peninsula, the legendary City of the south of Albania, from the Hellenistic to the Byzantine periods. Each pavement is described with overall photos, maps and drawings, reconstructions and photographs of the details. The history and historiography of each monument concerned is considered.

The second part of the book gathers some reflections about the mosaics of Butrint: about their environment, the successive mosaics workshops, the analysis of glass tesserae, the iconographic studies of themes encountered, snakes, theatre masks and baptisteries, and the case of the transformation of an ancient nymphaeum into a church. After the presentation of the team and its work on the mosaics, the volume ends with a large abstract in Albanian.



COLLÈGE  
DE FRANCE  
1530

