

Mosaic Researches at Amisos, 1996

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Çalışmaya konu olan taban mozaiği Samsun il merkezinin yaklaşık üç km. kuzeybatısındaki Toraman Tepe sırtlarında bulunan Amisos antik kentindeki yapılardan birine aittir. Büyük bölümü tahrip olan ve kuzey tarafı da asfalt yol altında kalan mekanlardan birinde çalışılabilmiştir. Yaklaşık 6.00 x 15.00 m. boyutlarındaki salon tamamen mozaik döşemeye sahiptir. Mozaikli dikdörtgen salon, Samsun Arkeoloji Müzesi içinde sergilenen ve Amisos Mozaiği olarak ünlenen paneller ile aynı bölgede bulunmuştur. Bu alan Samsun Sahra Sıhhiye Okulu ve Eğitim Merkez Komutanlığı içinde yer alır. Ancak, bu makalede incelenen örnekte figürlü kompozisyon yerine, geometrik bezeme ağırlıklı olarak kullanılmıştır. Mozaiğin bir bölümünde ortaya çıkan portre ise Geç Antik döneme işaret etmektedir. Mozaikte, dış sırası, dalga motifleri, ikili-üçlü giyoşlar ve rozetler ile zenginleştirilen çerçeveler, köşelerde bitkisel motifler ve kuş figürleri ile doldurulmuştur.

Keywords: Amisos, Samsun, Mosaic, Conservation, Late Antique

Introduction

Mosaics have been taken in hand for the first time in 1991, at a salvage excavation initiated in Amisos by Directorate of Samsun Museums (Akkaya 1992). In 1996, Directorate of Samsun Museum has conducted an excavation in the same place in cooperation with Trakya University (Atasoy 1998). Following the inspections conducted within Samsun Sahra Sıhhiye Okulu and Eğitim Merkez Komutanlığı, the mosaics paved on the rectangular shaped ground have been removed and carried to Samsun Archaeology Museum¹ (Akkaya 1998, 44). Mosaics are currently kept in the depots of Samsun Archaeology Museum.

One of the most significant harbor cities on the northern region of Turkey, the ancient settlement of Samsun is situated to the northwest of the city area today, perched on Toraman Hill at a distance of three km from the city center (Figure 1). A large portion of this area is situated within the periphery of Sahra Sıhhiye Okulu and Eğitim Merkez Komutanlığı. The area renowned as Toraman Hill was levelled using bulldozers during the construction of American radar facilities in 1954. As the region is located within the military zone and due to the devastation mentioned, the ruins have been destroyed almost entirely.

The research conducted so far indicates that the earliest settlements around the Amisos date back to 4th Millennium B.C. (Atasoy 1997). It has been inferred that the region had a commercial infrastructure which made its way to the Balkans, Central Anatolia and Mesopotamia. Yet as a city of the Greek and Roman Period, Amisos was able to prosper through the commerce of wine, olive oil and timber. Especially at the time of Mithridates VI (120-63 B.C.), the city lived through its golden era. The war of Mithridates III (74-64 B.C.) caused Amisos to fall under Roman dominion. After Pompey's arrival at Amisos in 64 B.C. and the administrative regulation in Anatolia, the city flourished substantially. As from 1st century A.D., Amisos is known to have faced an increase in terms of population and have not involved in any rebellions during the ruling period of the Roman Empire. (Atasoy 1997: 75-78). Exhibited at Samsun Archaeology Museum, the famous Amisos Mosaics² are strongly supposed to have been produced in the environment of peace and tranquility, considering their superior artistic properties. Amisos Mosaics also constitute

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1 We offer our thanks to Mustafa Akkaya the Manager of Samsun Museum, who initiated the mentioned efforts and ensured that the mosaics are introduced on a scientific platform today for the first time, Prof. Dr. Sümer Atasoy who conducted the mosaic dismantling project as well as the Asst. Prof. Dr. Özkan Ertuğrul. The mosaic plan included in the text is drawn by their associate Enise Dursun, plans and photographs are digitally adjusted by their associate Hüseyin Erpehlivan.

2 The Mosaics were examined by Derya Şahin within a comprehensive study and were published as a book by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Şahin 2004.



Figure 1
Map of the modern Samsun and
ancient city of Amisos
(It is arranged by combining
the map data from Google and
utilized with Atasoy 1997)

a resource for the samples that were located at Sıhhiye Okulu. However, Amisos mosaics dated back to the first half of the 3rd century A.D. display superior qualities and crafting properties from the mosaic of Sıhhiye Okulu.

The works conducted in 1996 basically include the boundary detection, surface cleanup, peripheral planning and handling of the mosaic, as its surface was partly covered by plants. The mosaic paved chamber with the dimensions of 6.00 x 15.00 m. was previously unveiled in part, but the infrastructure works performed in the past years damaged a portion the mosaic and walls (Akkaya 1992). Rectangular shaped and mosaic paved hall is covered by pathways in three directions and restricted by a sports area at the other side. This caused a limited working environment. Likewise, the mosaic advances to northwest with well-preserved figures, yet this part falls right under the motorway. Within the scope of the works, the architectural pieces on the mosaic were dismantled and a complete cleanup was achieved. It has been observed that the mosaic ground on which work and cleanup was performed had its substantial part missing (Figure 2).

The Border

Size: Totally 1.06 m (Square band 0.62 m and guilloche band 0.38 m in width)

Density: 70-80 tesserae/sq dm.

Colors: White, dark blue, dark red, dark yellow, green, pink, beige and gray.

Description: Contains a large square band encircling two large square panels that consist of geometric motifs at the center, as well as two guilloche bands that separate each panel from the other (Figure 3). Outer band is a polychrome orthogonal pattern of quasi-tangent quadrilobes of peltae tangent to a central square, forming interspaces by a biconcave square and two spindles (Décor I:

Figure 2
Plan of mosaic hall

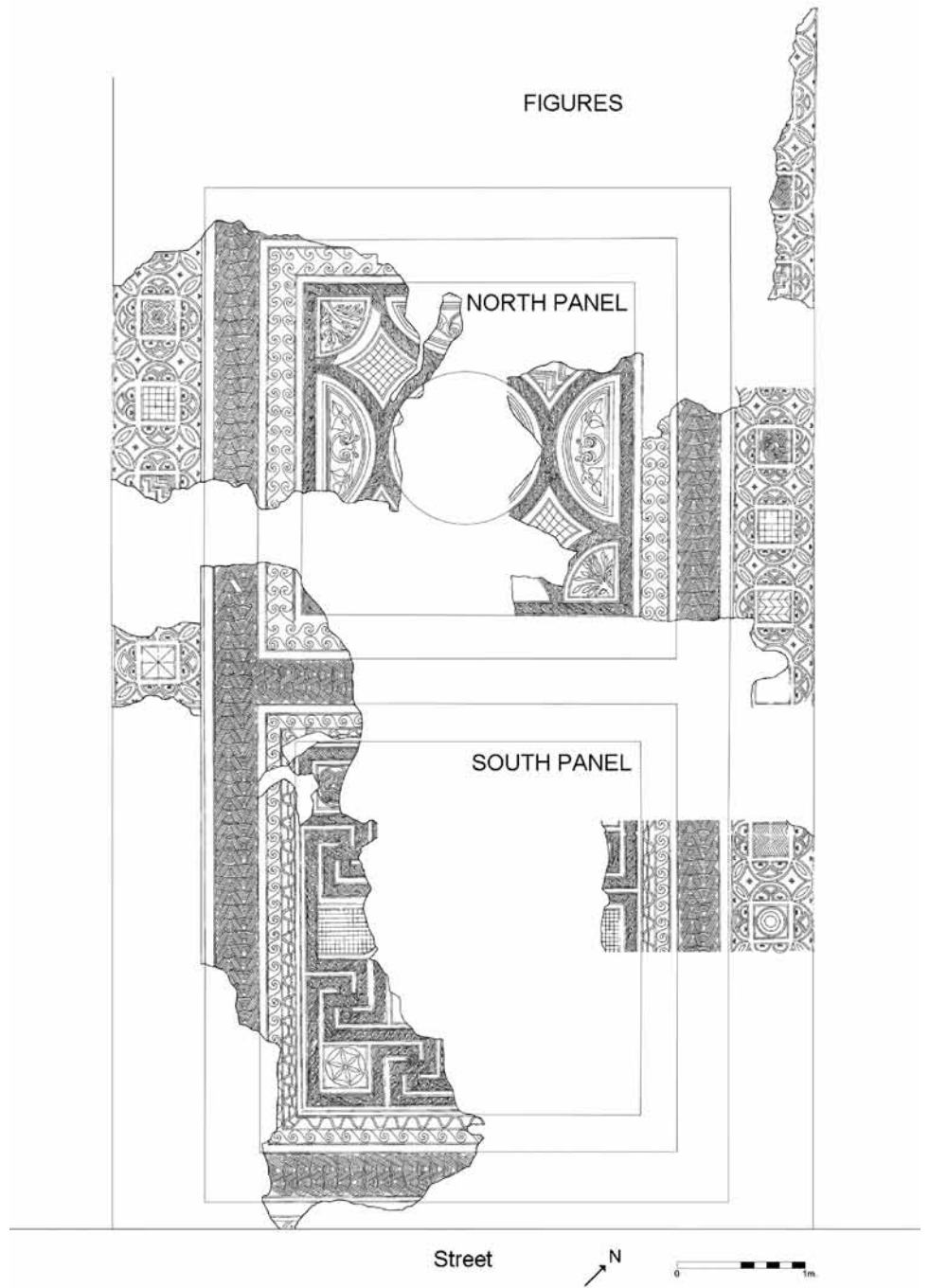


Figure 3
Detail of geometric
pattern in border



228b). Squares are filled by various forms such as eccentric circles, dashboard, zigzag lines, arrows, diagonal lines, twin Herakles' knots and serrated squares. After a thin white band (0.06 m), secondary band is two interbraided bands of polychrome round-tongued double guilloche opened to form eyelets. Guilloches are running in opposite directions red and green colors (Décor I: 75c).

Preservation: The band section of the mosaic survived up to this day under poor preservation. The bands at the longer sides are relatively good-looking. Out of 40 squares assumed, only 11 pieces could be located. Since the southern part of the mosaic is left under the pathway, it wasn't possible to ascertain whether it was still advancing or not.

Comparison: The band system which makes up the external border falls into the group 228 in the general catalogue. However, the motifs ornamented inside the squares on the border are different from each other. Most of the motifs consist of zigzag, chevron and gradient squares produced with the rainbow technique. An example of diagonal lines and chevrons ornamented in rainbow style can be found in the Antioch 25L building (Campbell 1988: 82, pl. 230). Alongside these, simple patterns consisting of checkerboard and concentric circles are also present.

The most interesting motif is the Solomon Seal located in the eastern part of the border (Décor II, 42). The knot is formed with a toning from white to red and blue. Observed very rarely since the Pompeii samples at 1st century B.C, the knot or seal of Solomon is the symbolized form of King of Israel, Solomon's wisdom (Rose 2005). The earliest example known in Anatolia is located in the Pergamon Z Building (Radt 1998; 82). The seal of Solomon and the rosette motifs seen at the topic of research, namely the north panel, are located at the Amisos Mosaic which was acquired at the same region (Şahin 2004: 32, fig. 26).

South Panel

Size: 3.69 x 3.68 m.

Density: 90-100 tesserae/sq dm in border, 130-140 tesserae/sq dm in panel.

Colors: Black, white, dark blue, dark red, dark yellow, green and pink.

Description: The main composition consists of swastika maeanders and small squares around a big central square (Figure 4). Panel has a grid of maeander



Figure 4
South Panel

with recessed returns and a small square enclosed at the intersections (Décor I: 136e, 194c). Small squares have various ornament, such as concave hexagon with spindles, dashboard and three Solomon's knots. Cause of a large gap in the middle of panel, the content of central square is not known.

The border is limited by a white band 0.05 wide on all sides. Border consists of two different band. Outline band is a superposed volute stylized scroll (Décor I: 64b) and other is a polychrome row of tangent juxtaposed bells with horizontally shaded and outlined in white (Décor I: 60e). Whole border width is 0.23 m. Yet the single line wave crest pattern inside, unlike the square panel at the north part, is ornamented with black tesserae on white background. Right on the front, the twisted ribbon interiors are ornamented to be filled with tones of tobacco color. The front most line is limited by dentil band. The composition on which wave crest and twisted ribbon band are used together can be observed on Hermes and Dionysus Mosaic in Antioch (Campbell 1988: 17, pl. 65). Yet here, a thick white line lies alongside between the two lines.

The center of the square panel at the south is missing. The swastika maeander motif consisting of double ropes include rosettes inside square frames on the corners. Dark blue, tobacco and white colored rhomboids, yellow and white squares and the knot motif with different tones of dark blue and tobacco color are all used separately. On the square panel to the south, the dominant colors are black, yellow, white and tobacco. The small squares on the outmost lines are missing in this part. The only preserved example is filled with nested yellow circles of different tones and zigzags. The swastika maeander within the panel is formed with double guilloche illustrations colored in tobacco and dark blue. The square gaps on the corners are filled with encircled six-leaf rosettes. The square areas inside are ornamented diagonally with colorful squares.

Preservation: There are large gaps on all sides and center. The absence of central parts on both panels leads to an estimation that these possibly illustrative emblems were intentionally removed.

Comparison: The maeander motifs with guilloche bands along, forming squares on the south panel can also be observed on the mosaics at the ground of Antioch Mnemosyne Grave (Campbell 1988: 77, pl. 217). There is a white border around the wonderfully ornamented symposium scene and the seasonal illustrations are present inside the squares between the maeanders which constitute this border. On this perspective, Antioch Mosaic has borders for maeander arrangement and the inside squares contain illustrations instead of geometric shapes, which distinguish it from Amisos Mosaic. The example with a wide square in the center and eight small squares with maeander around can be observed on Verulamium Neptune Mosaic (Witts 2005: 127, fig. 64). Here, despite the presence of geometric rosettes and craters inside the small squares, there is a linear and shaded Neptune illustration on the large square in the center. Similarly, the small squares between the swastika maeanders on the Pitney Seasons Mosaic are filled with Cupid illustrations that characterize the seasons. (Witts 2005: 86, fig. 37). In light of these examples, there is a possibility that an illustration is present on the center of south panel from the Mosaics of Sihhiye Okulu.

North Panel

Size: 3.70 x 3.68 m.

Density: 90-100 tesserae/sq dm in border, 130-140 tesserae/sq dm in panel.

Colors: White, dark blue, dark red, dark yellow, green and pink.

Description: On the mosaic pavement, there are two panels of the same size that separated from each other with guilloche band. Around the north panel is a border

Figure 5
Detail of North Panel



consisting of three bands. Two white bands of 0.05 m width contain 0.23 m wide double wave crest patterns. The main border is a band of superposed involuted linear hearts, forming wave-pattern (Décor I: 94c). Double wave crest motifs are ornamented in white color on black background.

The main composition of panel is tangent circles in a square (Figure 5). Interspace is filled by concave squares, semi and quarter circles around a circle. A nearest example is Décor I: 245b and Décor II: 403a. All circles combined with common guilloche bands which consist of gradient colours of red. Although concave squares have zigzag and dashboard ornament, semi circles are with floral elaboration.

The semi-circles on the inline sides are ornamented with ivy motifs. Heart-shaped ivy leaves (*hedera helix*) combined with voluted spring extends to the

sides (Décor II: 50). Basically the same in terms of size and shape, the motifs are distinguished with their different colors on the leaves. Black and white on the eastern ivy, the leaves is cream and tobacco colored on the west. The quarter circles on the corners and the semi circles on the sides are limited by double guilloche and ornamented with triple-leaf plantal motifs.

Preservation: There are large gaps on all sides and center. Cause of large gaps, the content in the center of panel is not known.

Comparison: The panel is very similar example of churches. In Britain, the mosaic of Hinton St. Mary Church, Cupid mosaic at Fishbourne (Dunbabin 1999: 90, 95) and Hunting Dogs Mosaic in Cirencester, Venus mosaic in Rudston (Witts 2005: 96, 148) have common composition. Similar mosaics dated to 2nd – 4th century A.D. generally enclosed mythological figures. The same composition can be observed on the adjacent two panels at Uderzo (Donderer 1986: 165, Fig. 52/5). The interesting point is the presence of pelta motives inside the semi circles, just like on the borders of Mosaic of Sihhiye Okulu. Therefore, the Uderzo mosaic which dates back to the second quarter of the 2nd century bears resemblance to Mosaic of Sihhiye Okulu both in terms of composition and ornamentation. However, in the Uderzo example, there is a linearly ornamented theater mask illustration inside the central circle. Therefore, the presence of an illustration inside the missing central circle is possible.

The Panel with Figures

Size: 4.10 x 2.50 m.

Density: 90-100 tesserae/sq dm in border, 140-150 tesserae/sq dm in figure.

Colors: White, dark blue, dark red, dark yellow, green and pink.

Description: The most interesting part of the mosaics in the rectangular hall is the figural mosaic in the northwest. Since the same border advances through, it has been inferred that all three panels are parts of mosaic pavement belonging to the same place despite the 5.00 m gap between the illustrative panel and other panels. The difference, is the instant entrance of composition just after the border without a crossing band. Generally, the composition of panel arises with four tangent coils filling the interspaces and forming irregular concave shapes (Décor I: 235b). The figures were handled in these concave shapes (Figure 6).

Coils consist of tobacco and dark blue colored guilloches along with yellow and black colored straight bands. On one of the shapes in the center where four coils meet, a male portrait stands out. The letter “E” at one side of the head



Figure 6
Panel with Figure



Figure 7
Inscribed portrait of a male



Figure 8
Figures of partridge and dove

along with letters “A” and “P” are supposed to symbolize spring time³. This explanation reminds about the four seasons theme, just like in Amisos Mosaic. An illustration with short brown hair, pearl diadem and outfit is depicted in a serious expression. The tesserae used on the hair, eyes and face of the illustration in different tones give a spirit to the scene (Figure 7). The interspaces between the illustration and concave corners are filled with fruit (?) and flower patterns. However, it was not possible to work on the oncoming parts of the mosaic and observe the well-preserved part. Therefore, the information is limited about the mosaic pavement which is thought to be taking up a larger space.

The other pentagonal gaps to the northeastern part of the mosaic are enriched with various bird species such as partridge, pigeon and collared dove. Depicted as collecting seeds on stones, the partridges’ chests are ornamented in yellow and green with an emphasis on the chest lines (Piccirillo 1992: 350). Similarly,

³ The meaning of these letters and therefore the illustration was explained by Prof. Dr. Oğuz Tekin during the years of the study.

pigeons and collared doves are depicted among green-leaf and flowering plants (Figure 8).

Preservation: Since the excavations were discontinued before the mosaic pavement was completely uncovered, the opinions about the whole panel will stay on the level of hypotheses. However, the uncovered mosaic pavement has been acquired pretty firmly. Therefore, it is highly possible to be able to reach the information that could define the place and the mosaics through future excavations.

Comparisons: A piece that resembles the geometric composition that constitutes the panels was discovered at the Eastern Bath in Kos (De Matteis 2004: 93, pl. XXXI). Kos mosaics possess the most common examples of rope and coil knots. The ateliers at Kos Island were specialists on these patterns. Since the Mosaic of Sihhiye Okulu was not completely uncovered, there is no precise information about the whole composition. However, the presence of pentagonal shapes along with concave tetragons displays the practice of straight lines as well as curves. Therefore, it is necessary to think that the rope knot shaped main motif is inside a square or octagonal frame. This kind of knot combination can also be observed on the mosaic pavements at Agios Ioannis Basilica in Kos (De Matteis 2004: 126, pl. LXV).

Assumed to be made by a wandering artist called Orentes, the Amisos Mosaic has to be examined separately from this example (Şahin 2004: 39). The scriptures on the Amisos Mosaic reveal that the artist is originated in Zeugma and is influenced by Syria. It is also possible to mention similar influences at Mosaic of Sihhiye Okulu, but it is essential to consider the usage of larger tesserae and a relatively unelaborate style on details. Especially on male portrait (Figure 7) and bird illustrations (Figure 8), this point is clearer. On the other hand, the usage of colors in different tones such as tobacco, yellow and green gives spirit to the mosaic. The short hair, detailed ornamentation on eyes and ears as well as the use of differently colored tesserae on cheekbones observed on the male portrait are associated with Late Antique Period. Since there is not a considerable amount of research at the Black Sea coast, the closest example to the mosaic belongs to a villa of Hadrianoupolis which dates back to 6th century B.C. (Lafli 2009: 646, fig. 13). The bird and plant illustrations in Hadrianoupolis bear resemblances to those of Sahra Sihhiye Okulu. Hadrianoupolis example also mentions Syria and Urfa style mosaic ornamentation. Similar illustrations can be frequently observed on the church and synagogue mosaics which generally date back to the same period (Piccirillo 1992).

Cleanup and Conservation

The cleanup, dismantlement and transferring to the museum constituted a significant part of the work at Sahra Sihhiye Okulu in the ancient city of Amisos (Figure 9). This project was conducted by Asst. Prof. Dr. Hüseyin Akıllı and his team with utmost attention (Akkaya 1998: 44). First of all, the whole mosaic surface was mechanically defoliated and cleaned of plant roots. The drawings used in the presentation here were transferred to sketches on a scale of 1/1. The scattered pieces and tesserae of the mosaic were collected, assorted and fixed on the preserved part with hard cotton and white glue. After the cotton and glue were completely dried, the 0,05 m bedding mortar under the mosaic surface was removed by means of a rafter and placed on a smooth platform. This platform was carried to Samsun Archaeology Museum and then the glue and cotton were lysed by means of hot water, making it possible to thoroughly move the mosaic to the museum. Here, the missing pieces and scattered tesserae were placed appropriately.



Figure 9
A view of conservation procedure

Conclusion

Being the topic of interest, Mosaic of Sihhiye Okulu are planned to completely cover the whole ground of a rectangular site. It has a border formed by geometric patterns. Within the space of the frame, there are geometric compositions inside two square panels. Circular frames are placed in the center of both square panels. As similar examples suggest, these frames are supposedly prepared for illustrative compositions. The presence of floral motifs on the north panel and of single illustrations on the northwest part of the mosaic support this argument. However, a precise judgement is not possible since the circular panels are completely damaged.

In area which is not completely uncovered yet, outside of geometrically composited panels, an illustrative mosaic inside a sophisticated geometric frame has been encountered. Though the content of the composition could not be fully revealed since the mosaic was not completely uncovered, it is possible to mention interwoven rope and tetragon geometrics. A male portrait stands out in one of the concave tetragons formed between rope knots. Suggested by this personalized seasonal illustration which dates back to the Late Antique Period, the mosaics are supposed to be built in 5th - 6th century A.D. The best preserved part of the mosaic that would directly affect the dating process falls under motorway. There is a strong possibility that portraits and animal illustrations that symbolize other seasons are present in this part. Especially on the church mosaics in the region of Syria, these Figures can be frequently observed. However, it is difficult to identify the actual function of the building in which Mosaic of Sihhiye Okulu are present. The walls of the building go along the intersections as seen on the mosaic ground. Under the current conditions, it is not possible to reveal the complete area and answer the questions about the building. Considering the illustrations and geometric panels used on the mosaics, this construction can be expected to serve as a civil building.

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