

The Mosaics with Animals Theme in the Southern Adriatic Between 4th and 6th century A.D.: Decorative and Iconographic Schemes in Comparison

Elda OMARI*

The study of the mosaics found on the south-east Adriatic coasts, between Epirus Nova and Epirus Vetus (the current Albania), highlights significant analogies between the animals' representations depicted on these floors and those represented on the early Christian basilicas or buildings cover floors in Syria, Turkey and in some other important centers of Eastern Mediterranean and Northern Adriatic.

The iconographic and the iconological analyses offer new clues to reflect on some well-known models which circulated throughout the Adriatic and the Mediterranean areas between 4th and 6th century A.D., in geometrical and figure patterns (Aquileia, Butrinto, etc.), as well as in daily-life patterns (Dyrrachium, Bylis, Costantinople, etc.). Also, there are interesting parallels between these patterns and those of the Orpheus mosaics (Ulpiana, Sicily, Sparta, Chahba, Istanbul, etc.).

The comparisons which will be drawn will enable us to reflect on the connections between Eastern and Western Adriatic areas with important centers in the late ancient era, which the sea does not divide, but rather brings together: such a perspective is viewed as extremely important in the study of the history of coastal countries in the Adriatic, the Mediterranean and beyond.

Keywords: Albania mosaic, Epirus, Orpheus, Mediterranean, Adriatic sea, animals

1. Introduction

Starting from the study of the mosaic discovered in one of the rooms adjoining the basilica of S. Michael at Arapaj, near Dyrrachium, the environment B (Figure 1), here we propose to focus attention on one of the scenes depicted, namely the scene of rural life, postponing to another time the description of the second panel that is the scene of the source of life. Through this study, we will try to reflect on the problems of the dissemination of the models and about the movements of the craftsmen through Adriatic and eastern Mediterranean sea, in an attempt to highlight significant similarities between the representations of animals in this floor and those represented in Christian buildings of Aquileia, aiming to emphasize once again the links of these two important centres for the history of the lower and upper Adriatic (Bandelli 2001: 17-49; Buora 2003: 39-56; Volpe 1998: 561-626; Disantarosa - Mazzoli 2010: 5-10).

Based on the known studies on the circulation of cultural mosaics, the analysis of iconography and iconology in this regard offers interesting insights on some well-known models, which circulate in the Adriatic and beyond between the 4th and 6th century A.D. and that are found in the Orphic mosaics and scenes of everyday life, themes that change with the advent of Christianity the symbolic meaning.

The Christianization of the area started already in apostolic times since the preaching of Saint Paul. After a brief stop in Macedonia by the Philippians' community, he went to the West using the Via Egnatia, crossing almost the entire Balkan Peninsula, performing his preaching: Thessaloniki, Athens, Corinth and the provinces of Illyrichum. During his third journey, in 59 A.D. Saint Paul wrote to the Christian community of Rome: "... For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience - by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God - so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ".

* Elda Omari, Università degli Studi di Padova, Dipartimento di Archeologia Piazza Capitanato, 7 – 35139 Padova. E-mail: elda.omari@yahoo.it

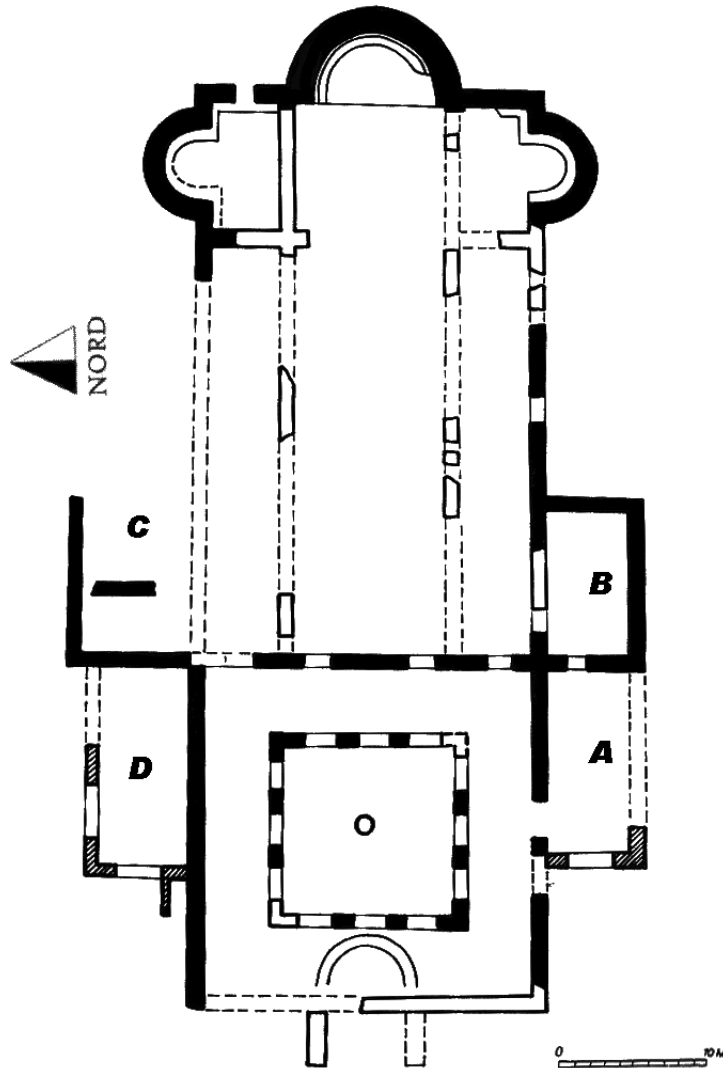


Figure 1
The plan of Saint Michael
basilica at Arapaj (from Omari
2009: 310, fig. 1).

The expression “to Illyrichum” is ambivalent: it is not clear if Saint Paul preached outside the borders of Illyrichum, or within the province. But of course, from these words it is evident that in this region “promoters” of Christianity, Christ’s apostles were present.

In this phase of history, the basilicas played an important role in the spreading of Christian tradition and the symbolism of religious buildings revolutionized the new artistic expression related to the Christian message. The roots of this change are to be found in the culture and tradition of the previous change in the identity of the society of the time, expressed in terms of Christian iconography in residential facilities and then transported primarily in churches as a sign of social status (Bowden 2008: 301-332; Siniscalco 2007: 24-35; Bisconti 2007: 36-53; Sapelli 2007: 54-63; Sena Chiesa 2007: 76-83).

2. The mosaic of Arapaj in Durrës with rural representation and the local production

Going into detail of the argument we see that the excavations undertaken in the suburban area of Durrës in the years 1980-87 by the Institute of Archaeology in Tirana led to the discovery of a longitudinal axis basilica, oriented East-West (68x28 m), built in opus mixtum. The basilica has three aisles divided by

a continuous wall, where the foundations for the columns had been laid. In the presbytery area, where the floor is decorated with mixed technique in tessellatum and tiles and is delimited by decorated balustrades, the transept developed, made by two side apses (4.50 m); the central apse (7 m) contains at the centre three steps, perhaps, the presbytery chair. In North-East side of the transept are two obvious steps that were used as access (Omari 2004: 35-51).

The main building is preceded by an atrium (19.80x19.80 m), where there are still the foundations of the columns. At the centre of atrium is a well. Here two openings on the walls in line with the basilica, respectively, to the east and west, in the structure of the columns are connected with a channel that was used to drain the water (Figure 1).

The outbuildings are the spaces outside the main building to the north and south. There are four rooms: A the entrance, B and C - the rooms reserved for funerary use, and D might be the diaconicon.

Our environment of interest is the B compartment, rectangular (0.90x0.60 m), with a polychrome mosaic floor decoration; this indicates that this area was probably used for important ceremonies, maybe it was a private chapel, as the tomb of a married couple was found during the excavations under the environment. This room can be accessed by two entrances: through A and through the south aisle of the basilica (Omari 2004: 35-51).

The floor (54 sq m) is a polychrome tessellated bordered by two frames. The first one is a variant designed by sinusoids connected rods loaded with crosses (D cor I 68d). The second and subsequent frame is composed of three rows of simple black fabric, three rows of simple white card (D cor I 1t) surround and divide the area into two panels: the first one depicting a rustic theme, while the second one decorated with geometrical and figured pseudo-emblem representative of Christian religious symbols, as if, in these two scenes, they wanted to tell the earthly life and the paradise lives of costumer (Figure 2).

As previously announced, here we shall only present the analysis of some iconographic elements in the first panel that shows two male characters, with an eye toward the entrance, sitting on a rock on the sides of the stage, under the shade of a tree. One of the characters, the older man, sitting on the right, holds a stick



Figure 2
The mosaic pavement of Saint Michael basilica at the Arapaj, Durr s (from Archeologic Institut Archive in Tirana).



Figure 3
The mosaic with the rustic scene.
6th century A.D.
(from Koh 1988: 127, fig. 85).

with his right hand, while his left hand feeds the dog which moves its tail and front legs to eat the food. The younger man holds a rope in his hands to catch the horse that crouches at his feet and follows him with his eyes. A ram and a sheep are drawn in the middle. In the second level there are two goats, the first attempting to eat the leaves of the tree on the right; the second follows the race looking at three horses in brown, white and blue. In the third level there are two other animals at rest and a grazing grass. The three levels are drawn from bands of land with grass, most likely to characterize the hilly hinterland Durrës. The edge that defines the representation is made by: sawtooth equilateral contrasting colours of red and white (Décor I 10a) and a second frame consists of three simple lines of black tesserae (Décor I 1t). The variety of animal figures that enrich and fill the scene (Figure 3) not only testify to the variety of species, but most likely were part of daily life for clients, perhaps landowners and cattle ranchers, who ordered the construction of mosaic (Omari 2003: 75-97; 2006: 46-51).

To better analyze the iconography of the mosaic carpet construction, leaving aside the human figures and landscape with trees and vegetation with land lines, if we look we see that the images alone can be subdivided into four groups identifying:

1. animals at rest with their legs raised (in our mosaic are two: a pair of sheep in the first level and the goat spotted on the far right of the third level);
2. animals at rest, with a front leg forward (in the mosaic of Arapaj there are two examples: the horse positioned in the first level, before the young man with lasso in hand, and the goat in the third layer, slightly off to the right);

3. animal sitting on its hind legs and moving with the front legs (in our gaming case there is only one example: the dog in front of the shepherd with staff, the first level of representation);
4. animals standing in motion and / or at rest (this is the largest group of components of the mosaic: a pair of goats and three horses in the second level, there is the goat on the far left in the third level).

Looking at the example of Durrës it is clear that the workshop that produced the artefact is a high-level workshop with a long tradition of making elaborate and realistic mosaics. The only flaw is the third horse, the brown, at the second level of decoration, which seems to be falling as a result of a rush: that perception is evident from the long neck of the animal. Perhaps an execution error or maybe worked by an apprentice (?). Despite this, all the other animal figures are made with skill and with a sense of peace and serenity, a truly rural landscape, as we will see today a campaign across Albania.

The models in iconographic depictions of animals listed above are known and have been designed by craftsman before durazzion Arapaj mosaic. In the centre of Durrës, the capital of the province, an always open port, starting point of the Via Egnatia and the crossroads of trade, the mosaic tradition is reflected from the 4th century. B.C. and consequently, over a thousand years of life and history of the place, the artisans in their workshops have not only perfected the technique, but have also developed and expanded iconographic models (Baudry 2009).

Thanks to the geographical position, Durrës “suffers” the confluence of types, iconographic figurative forms and systems are coming both from the East, and from the West, which gives an idea of a vitality and a very complex composition of the artistic repertoire (Santoro 2003: 149-208; Bisconti 2007: 371-398).

Unfortunately there is little evidence of mosaics emerged from this site. Many of them were destroyed by the development in the last ten years, surely a good portion of them are still lying under the earth, under the city that has always persisted in living area north of the Gulf from ancient times to today. Within the city, both in Roman times, as a result of the colonization of the area, and in Roman antiquity, lived a rich and extensive local aristocracy and Roman mosaics and decorations of their homes and public buildings testifies to its culture and at the same time the social status.

At present the research within the city, the only comparison of iconographic figures of animals depicted in the attitudes listed above, is performed on a random mosaic fragment found in a private building in the city centre.

This fragment (0.90x0.57 m), dated by scholars to the 4th century A.D., represents the figure of Orpheus was most likely to be surrounded by animals, only three of them are visible: a goat in a movement that tries to burn the leaves of a tree, a calf at rest with the front right foot forward, followed by a third animal in motion, the latter only partly visible (Figure 4). Most likely the mosaic decorating a representative environment of a private building, not identified because of the limited area investigated (Zeqo 1989: 284-286; Hoti, Shehi, Santoro in press; Omari 2009: 194-199).

These two examples - made at a distance of 100-150 years of each other in totally different structures and private houses of worship, do not only reflect on the reuse of models previously known and used by craftsman to decorate the domus of aristocracy, but also change the symbolic and representative of the models. What takes place in Durrës, in this evolving political and religious, the transition from pagan religion and Christianity, takes place throughout the

Balkan region and beyond (Frugoni 1993: 247-256; Filoramo 1993: 98-104; Jesnick1997: 38-43; Bisconti 2007: 36-53).

Durrës is not an exception, but it is an example for the Adriatic and Mediterranean, so it absorbs and processes the new artistic expression based on its iconographic tradition and its own inner experience. Therefore, we can say that those who conceived and built the artefact are local producers Arapaj sensitive to Figurative ideas from two cultural sources: pagan Rome and Christian East. That way, the durazzian workshop appears as a frank *atelier*, open to input from different production centres and of different religious expressions (Bowden 2008: 301-332).

The surrounding area, Epirus Vetus, between the 5th and the 6th century A.D. presents the same characteristics mosaics productions of Durrës. In early Christian churches decorated with polychrome mosaics floors still bear witness once again for the spread of Christian themes with animals, whether they are represented in a rural scene (the only examples of the church come form exonarthex of Byllis B (Muçaj, Raynaud 2005: 383-398) and a fragment of a mosaic of the basilica of Apollonia (Lafe 2005: 119-137) discovered in recent years (Figures 5-6), and as fillers in the geometric elements: these examples are very popular and have



Figure 4
The Orpheus mosaic form Durrës.
4th century A.D. (from Hoti, Shehi,
Santor in press: fig. 10)



Figure 5
The mosaic of exonarthex of basilica
B at Bylis. 6th century A.D. (from
Muçaj, Raynaud 2005: 395, fig. 11).



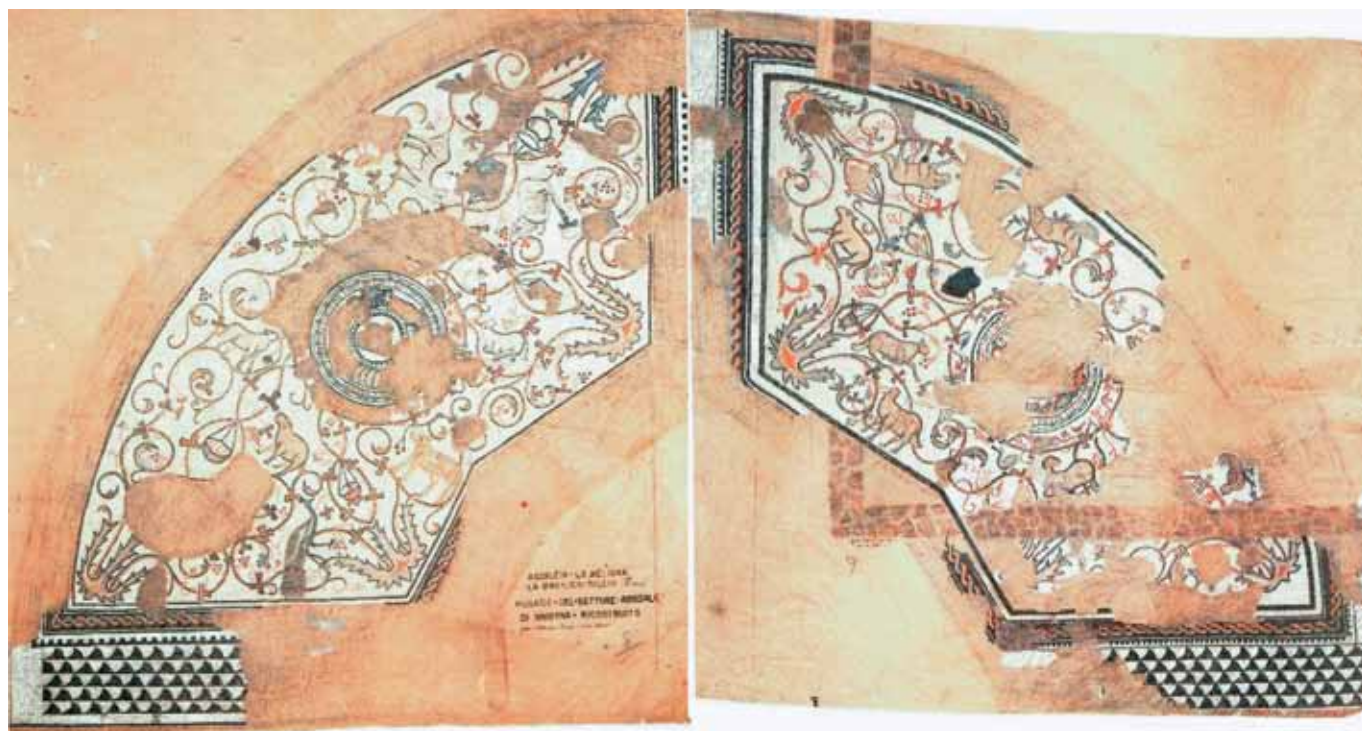
Figure 6
The mosaic fragment of the basilica
at Apollonia. 6th century A.D.
(from Lafe 2005: 129, fig. 23).

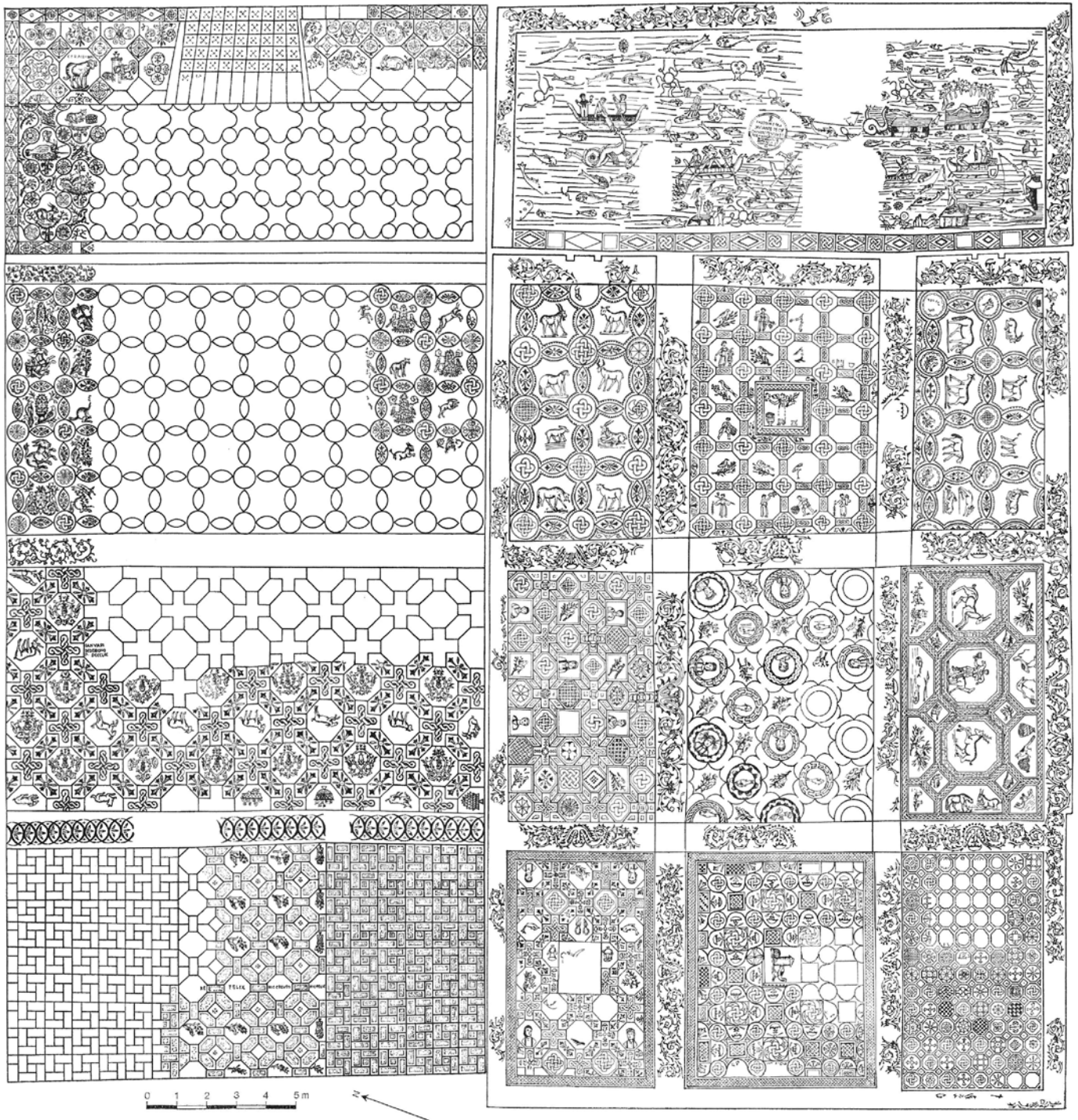
been identified by archaeologists in the mosaic that decorates the central nave of the basilica A to Byllis, the mosaic of the baptistery Butrint (Mitchell 2008).

3. Animal figures in Aquileia's mosaics and the iconographic transmission in Mediterranean area

At present, research shows that Aquileia is one of the first Adriatic centres to decorate the rooms of Christian worship by reusing models of animals depicted at rest and/or moving. Already in the 4th century A.D. the craftsmen of this centre reuse these models in the floor of the apse of the basilica known as Basilica of “*Fondo Tullio*” (Figure 7), now destroyed, in the mosaics of the north and south halls of the “*Complesso Teodoriano*” (Figure 8), in the floor of the oratory known as the “*Fondo Corsar*”. Here the figures of animals are represented in geometric patterns such as filler elements giving the decoration plasticity, movement and elegance, very similar to the durazzian examples (Bertacchi 1980: 153-183 and 185-222; Lehmann 2006: 61-82; Cuscito 2006: 83-137). The large quantity of figures in the mosaics of animals listed above help us to identify all the comparisons with the mosaic that pushed me to undergo this research. If we count the testimonies, we see that in Aquileia, in the 4th century A.D. and just in three buildings, **9 specimens** of animals are depicted in a position with four legs resting, examples of **5 animals** at rest, with a front leg forward, **5 copies** sitting on their hind legs at rest and in motion with their front legs, **30 specimens** standing in the movement of animals and /or rest. Given the quantity and their implementation, most likely, for their implementation have been working as a fashion *atelier*, or some workshop at the same time, unifying the technique and execution models. Again, knowing the tradition of mosaic art centres in Roman times, we cannot confirm the presence of local shops, but most likely external influences played a bigger role than the appeal of Christian culture. Culture and tradition was not obvious in the iconographic choices and random.

Figure 7
The mosaic of basilica “Fondo Tullio” at Aquileia. 4th century A.D. (from Bertacchi 1980: 254, fig. 208)





The dense network of movements of iconography, thanks to the highways, sees the Adriatic area as a strategic place of the meetings of various figurative tracks, which often resulted in processing /variants of the basic reason and true hybrid iconographic, weaving imported fashion and culture with the culture and local tastes.

Before considering the merits of the matter it is better to dwell and throw a quick look at the roads: traffic routes, river and maritime era to better understand the links between the two shores of the Adriatic.

In Roman times, the general framework of terrestrial pathways (Figure 9), which connects Italy with the East has three directions: south of Via Egnatia

Figure 8
The mosaic aula teodoriana at Aquileia. 4th century A.D.
(from Cuscito 2006: 88-89, figs. 2-3)

Figure 9
The Roman ifrastructure
in Mediterranean area.



(which started from Durrës and Apollonia, they joined in Scampia, passed through Lychnidos, Heraclea, Thessaloniki, Amphipolis and came up to Constantinople); to the north, the road that ran along the rivers Sava and Danube (this course touched the centres of Sirmium, Singidunum, Viminacium, Ratiaria, Oescus) between these two roads there was also a great way of connecting, a diagonal Balkans (which Viminacium passed for Nish and Serdica) (Miller 1964: 415-540). In his study related to Illyrichum in the Middle proto-byzantine, Bavant supports the importance of the abovementioned routes and changes to the late third century A.D. Via Egnatia begins to become less important because of the shift of trade routes north of the Balkans in 346 A.D. and because a major earthquake strikes destroyed Durrës in the central area of the Western Balkans (Bavant 2007: 337). Archaeological evidence shows otherwise, however: at this time with the gravity centre towards Byzantium Empire area and Via Egnatia are more than ever at the height of their functions (Fasolo 2005). And it could not be otherwise, after Diocletian's administrative reform of the main towns of the province Dyrrachum in Epirus Nova. This way the city and the Via Egnatia assumed a growing role in the Lower Adriatic and Ionian Seas (Santoro et al. 2004: 717-808; Santoro 2003: 149-208; Hoti, Shehi, Santoro, in press).

With regard to maritime traffic, trade and exchanges between the two shores of the Adriatic are well known from both sources (Plautus 1993: 69-130; Ciceronis Epistulae: Cicero Attico Salutem: IV, I,1-5; VIII; Ad familiares: XIV, I.) and archaeological remains (Myrto 1998; Ceka 2005). Although quite some data is available, it is difficult to understand the links between these two great centres of the Adriatic between the 4th and 6th century A.D. Links are also confirmed by the latest underwater surveys carried out on the east coast in the Adriatic sea and from the excavations at Durrës (Volpe 1998: 561-626; Volpe et al. 2008: 2-16; Disantarosa - Mazzoli 2010: 5-10).

As we know from archaeological evidence, from 4th to 6th century A.D. mosaic culture was widespread and handicraft production had great increase in the peak carrying technique.


A study carried over by Jesnick in the late 90s of last century, on the theme of Orpheus mosaics in the Mediterranean area, shows that between the 2nd and 4th centuries A.D. the issue had spread from East to West and from South to North Sea countries and over (Jesnick 1997). Thus in the early Christian period to include this theme as the theme of country life and hunting and reusing the elements that compose them in religious contexts, loading them with Christian religious symbolism, greatly facilitates the work of artisans who do not change the models but simply put them in another context.





Figure 10
The map of Mediterranean area with the sits which preserve mosaic with animals therns.


So in an attempt to seek further towards the Mediterranean and, given the scale of sense area and chronological documentation and the lack of homogeneity of the witness, it is inevitable just a few examples of the discourse thus far conducted. For this reason we tried to summarize in a table prospective models of Orphic iconography found in mythological or religious contexts, dating from the 4th and 6th century A.D. (Table 1) and finally developed a plan prior to its distribution in the Mediterranean area (Figure 10).

Table 1. Statement of iconographic models in floor mosaics with figures of animals in the Mediterranean area (4th-6th centuries A.D.)

 animals at rest, with the four paws collected	theme of mosaic decoration	place and building of finding	dating	bibliography
1	tesselated geometric-figurative	Aquilea (Italy) basilica /so called Aula Teodoriana north and south	4 th century A.D.	Bertacchi 1980: 185-261; Lehmann 2006: 61-82; Cuscito 2006: 83-137.
2	tesselated geometric-figurative	Aquilea (Italy) basilica /so called Fondo Tullio absid	4 th century A.D	Bertacchi 1980: 245-254.
3	tesselated geometric-figurative	Aquilea (Italy) basilica /so called Fondo Corsar north oratorio	4 th century A.D	Bertacchi 1980: 256-258.
4	tesselated with Orpheus scene	Piazza Armerina (Italy), private building, room 35	4 th century A.D.	Jesnick 1997: 128.
5	tesselated geometric-figurative	Ohrid (Macedonia), tetraconch, nave	6 th century A.D.	Kolarik 1982: vol.2, fig. 718.
6	tesselated with rural scene	Costantinopole (Turkey) Great Palace	6 th century A.D.	Jobst 2005: 1083-1101; Parrish 2005: 1103-1117.
7	tesselated geometric-figurative	Qabr Himar (Lebanon) basilica of Saint-Christophe	575 A.D.	Donceel-Voûte 1988: 411-420.

 animals at rest, with a front leg forward	theme of mosaic decoration	place and building of finding	dating	bibliography
1	tesselated with Orpheus scene	Durazzo (Albania), edificio privato	4 th century A.D.	Hoti, Shehi, Santoro in press
2	tesselated geometric-figurative	Aquileia (Italy), basilica teodoriana	4 th century A.D.	Bertacchi 1980: 185-261; Lehmann 2006: 61-82; Cuscito 2006: 83-137.
3	tesselated geometric-figurative	Aquilea (Italy) bacilica /so-called Fondo Tullio absid	4 th century A.D.	Bertacchi 1980: 245-254.
4	tesselated with Orpheus scene	Piazza Armerina (Italy), private building, room 35	4 th century A.D.	Jesnck 1997: 128.
5	tesselated with animals theme	Apollonia (Albania) basilica	6 th century A.D.	Lafe 2005: 127-129.
6	tesselated with rural scene	Costantinopole (Turkey) Great Palace	6 th century A.D.	Jobst 2005: 1083-1101.
7	tesselated with rural scene	Oum Hartaine (Syrie), Saint John –Baptist basilica nef	5 th -6 th century A.D.	Donceel-Voûte 1988: 191-1201.

 animals sitting on their posterior legs and moving their front legs	theme of mosaic decoration	place and building of finding	dating	bibliography
1	tesselated geometric-figurative	Aquilea (Italy) bacilica /so-called Aula teodoriana north	4 th century A.D.	Bertacchi 1980: 185-261.
2	tesselated with Orpheus scene	Rome (Italy), private building	4 th century A.D.	Jesnck 1997: 128
3	tesselated with Orpheus scene	Piazza Armerina (Italy), private building, room 35	4 th century A.D.	Jesnck 1997: 128
4	tesselated geometric-figurative	Caričin Grad (Serbia), basilica D, transept	6 th century A.D.	Popović 2003: 273-277
5	tesselated geometric-figurative	Argos (Greece), Villa of the Falconer	Early byzantine.	Kolarik 1982: vol. 2, fig. 774

 animals leaping up in movement or /at rest	theme of mosaic decoration	place and building of finding	dating	bibliography
1	tesselated with Orpheus scene	Poljanice (Serbia) edificio privato	300-350 A.D.	Jesnck 1997: 138
2	tesselated geometric-figurative	Aquilea (Italy) bacilica /so called Fondo Tullio absid	4 th century A.D.	Bertacchi 1980: 245-254
3	tesselated geometric-figurative	Aquilea (Italy) bacilica /so called Fondo Corsar south oratorio	4 th century A.D.	Bertacchi 1980: 256-257

4	tesselated with Orpheus scene	Rome (Italy), private building	4 th century A.D.	Jesnick 1997: 128
5	tesselated with Orpheus scene	Piazza Armerina (Italy), private building, room 35	4 th century A.D.	Jesnick 1997: 128
6	tesselated with animals theme	Apollonia (Albania) basilica	6 th century A.D.	Lafe 2005: 127-129
7	tesselated with rural scene	Byllis (Albania) basilica	6 th century A.D.	Muçaj, Raynaud 2005: 383-398
8	tesselated geometric-figurative	Butrint (Albania) baptistery	6 th century A.D.	Mitchell 2008
9	tesselated geometric-figurative	Caričin Grad (Serbia), basilica D, transept	6 th century A.D.	Popović 2003: 273-277
10	tesselated geometric-figurative	Stobi (Macedonia), Episcopal basilica, narthex	6 th century A.D.	Kolarik 1982: vol. 2. Fig. 150
11	tesselated with animals theme	Heraclea (Macedonia), large basilica, narthex	6 th century A.D.	Kolarik 1982: vol. 2. Figg. 666-671
12	tesselated geometric-figurative	Delphi (Greece), basilica, narthex	6 th century A.D.	Kolarik 1982: vol. 2. Fig. 709
13	tesselated with rural scene	Constantinople (Turkey), Great Palace	6 th century A.D.	Jobst 2005: 1083-1101; Parrish 2005: 1103-1117.
14	tesselated with rural scene	Seleucia (Syrie), Quatrefoil church /so-called Martyrion	half 5 th century A.D.	Dunbabin 1999:181.
15	tesselated with Adam in Paradise	Haouarté (Syrie), basilica Nort exterm east nef	5 th -6 th century A.D.	Donceel-Voûte 1988: 102-116.
16	tesselated with animals theme	Houad (Syrie), basilica Saint Georges west nef	first 5 th century A.D.	Donceel-Voûte 1988: 138-144.
17	tesselated with rural scene	Oum Hartaine (Syrie), Saint John-Baptist basilica nef	5 th -6 th century A.D.	Donceel-Voûte 1988: 191-1201.
18	tesselated with rural scene	Campos (Spain), basilica Saint Fadrinet, absid	Late antiquity	Alcaide González 2005: 81-96

From this first statement of taking evidence it is clear that due to the movement of the artisans and figurative models, the canonization of the original model, as also Ghedini in his study on the transmission of iconography (Ghedini 1991: 269-298; 1997: 823-836), most likely the reason the original travelling undergoes changes and failing during irradiation will never be the same design iconography, even within the same decoration. It is inevitable that over the centuries the iconographic motif, coming into contact with other cultures and tastes of the site, inevitably undergoes innovations, alterations, changes which are also linked to its use in the different genres of art, variations in interpretation and symbolism as well as representation. Sometimes these elements of influence may even blur or distort the historical significance or symbolic and religious significance in favour of a purely decorative-ornamental.

Although it is not clear that these models traverse the path, most likely, as mentioned earlier, trade routes already mapped out earlier and the drafting of the road network by facilitating the spread of the Roman Empire and the Christian message consequently lead to a change in religious symbolism. Here we do not intend to solve the issue of models and / or displacement of artisans, as it is already much discussed by scholars (Besques-Mollard 1984: 71-89; Ballmelle - Darmon 1986: 235-249; Frugoni 1993: 247-256; Ghedini 1995: 129-141; 1997: 823-836; Beltrán Lloris - Paz Petralta 2006: 79-238), but try to reopen that debate and reflect on the possibility of “recycling” in a fashion that does not pass but that is reinventing itself.

4. Conclusions

At the end of this discussion we can say that the proposed analysis has allowed us to frame Durrës in such a widespread iconographic tradition during the late antiquity in the entire Mediterranean context; reworking types and models of ancient Roman building was originally charged with a prevailing mythical reference (Dunbabin 1978; Frugoni 1993: 247-262; Jesnick 1997). The starting example, moreover, leads us to consider the area south west of the Balkans as part of the Roman and Late Antiquity, as one of the many mosaic panels of the Mediterranean culture in general and in particular the Adriatic, because here it is clear that Durrës and its hinterland, in our case Arapaj, not only have their own identity and style typical of the site, but also absorb and often filter and fashion models born in both East and West to pass here. This figure allows us to reflect on ideas for interesting discussion of the possible mediating role assumed by Albanian Durrës and production, which only with a more detailed assessment of the entire iconographic contexts of belonging will perhaps further clarify the issue. Here, the issue deserves careful consideration of the artistic and cultural relations revealed by the examination of these mosaics and related decorative patterns.

The analysis has highlighted, once again, the liveliness, importance and centrality of the central Adriatic area, like Durrës and Aquileia, in receiving and disseminating the mosaic culture of time and taste, and yet constantly enriched - in the chronological range of the production, 4th-6th century A.D. - from the original creative force of the workforce, which in spite of the centuries-old tradition in mosaics, remains a thread of doubt about their origin or halogen. If the samples are considered to fit within an artistic *koiné* and cultural well-documented throughout the Mediterranean world and in Roman times and in antiquity, above iconographic correspondences revealed in particular the problem of introducing the repertoire Albanian relations with other centres which were active at that time of production: northern Adriatic and Roman culture on the one hand, and the East on the other hand.

In this research we tried to answer this need with tables that summarize some perspective iconographic evidence and the processing plant of the Mediterranean with the distribution of the identified models, aimed at understanding the roads that run through these models. This also tries to understand what the fashions of the time are and how they react and change with the advent and under the influence of new ideologies (Sodini 1978: 71-119; Cantino Watagin 1990: 269-298; Bejor 1993: 235-246; Ravasi 2007: 18-23; Bisconti 2007: 36-53; Cuscito 2008: 45-94).

Before definitively concluding the presentation, it should be noted that the fall of dictatorships in Eastern Europe, which for more than fifty years isolated the Balkans from the rest of the world, has awarded to scholars, thanks to free movement, the possibility to participate in conferences and international meetings to expose the year-long work done in their countries through the archaeological evidence proving that Christianity was spreading in the eastern Adriatic. Thanks to these meetings and the publication of the proceedings, new data and important elements have come to attention, that allow us to understand the history of the Adriatic region during Late Antiquity. During these events, archaeologists from both sides have investigated some phenomena that characterize the early Christian centres in the Adriatic, in an attempt to trace a path of its spread and thanks to a series of multi-disciplinary investigations have raised complex issues that are still open, and proposed topics for more moments of confrontation. Even after our meeting, we hope that the discussion will continue and that future updates and new data can enrich our knowledge to better understand the trends and cultural exchanges in the ancient world, considering Albania and its centres as an integral part of Adriatic and Mediterranean culture.

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