

# The Roman Mosaics of Bracara Augusta: Re-Reading and Reinterpretation of Decorative Motifs

## Bracara Augusta'nın Roma Mozaikleri: Dekoratif Motiflerin Yeniden Okunması ve Yeniden Yorumlanması

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### Abstract

*The earliest news about mosaics discovered in the Roman city of Bracara Augusta, dating from the second half of the nineteenth century, were mostly published in local newspapers. Only in 1976, after the creation of the Archaeological Field of Braga, the body responsible for carrying out rescue archaeology in the urban area, were some dozens of archaeological interventions performed, which allowed mapping, safeguarding remains and proceed a cultural heritage. This allowed us to have a systematic knowledge of the mosaics of Bracara Augusta.*

*Our work aims to provide an overview of the mosaics displayed in D. Diogo de Sousa Museum of Braga and remaining in situ (the mosaic of “Escola Velha da Sé” (Cathedral’s Old School) and the mosaic of the “Casa da Roda” (House of the Wheel), to undertake a new reading and interpretation of them, looking for their relationships with the mosaics of the eastern and western Mediterranean.*

**Keywords:** Bracara Augusta, Roman mosaics, patterns, decorative motifs, re-reading.

### Öz

*Bir Roma kenti olan Bracara Augusta’da çoğunluğu 19. yüzyılın ikinci yarısına tarihlenen mozaiklerle ilgili ilk bilgiler yerel gazetelerde yayınlanmıştır. Ancak 1976 yılında, Braga Arkeolojik Alan Projesi ile, kentsel alanda kurtarma kazılarının üstlenilmesi, birçok arkeolojik çalışmanın gerçekleştirilmesiyle haritalama, kalıntıların korunması ve kültürel mirasa kazandırılması mümkün olabilmektedir. Bu sayede, Bracara Augusta’nın mozaikleri hakkında sistematik bir bilgiye sahip olunmuştur.*

*Bu çalışmada, D. Diogo de Sousa Müzesi- Braga’da sergilenen mozaikler ile in situ olarak korunan “Escola Velha da Sé” Mozaiki (Eski Cathedral Okulu) ve “Casa da Roda” (Çark Evi) mozaikleri ele alınarak yeniden okumaları ve yeniden yorumlamaları yapılacak, aynı zamanda Doğu ve Batı Akdeniz’deki mozaiklerle ilişkileri irdelenecektir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Bracara Augusta, Roma mozaikleri, desenler, dekoratif motifler, yeniden okuma.

Since the 1970’s, some of the archaeological interventions undertaken by the archaeological team of the City Council of Braga and the Recovery Team of *Bracara Augusta*, under the responsibility of the Archaeology Unit of Minho University, have revealed a set of information which has allowed the reconstitution of the urban development of *Bracara Augusta*<sup>1</sup> (Fig. 1).

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<sup>1</sup> “Based on the available archaeological remains, it is possible to note that the city had axles oriented 1 *actus* (120 feet), observable modulation in the archaeological area of Carvalheiras (Martins 2004: 154). The city streets measure between 10 to 12 feet, having been identified, so far, a single road with 25 feet wide, which allowed access to the *forum*.” (Magalhães 2015: 18).



Figure 1  
Location of *Bracara Augusta*,  
capital of *Conuentus Bracaraugustanus*,  
northwest of *Hispania*.  
(Google earth)

Among the different archaeological sites already excavated a set of old *domus* has been selected for being in a central area of the Roman city. Some of these *domus* have been paved with mosaic in different periods of their occupation. Supporting this choice is the attempt to find and interpret a repertoire of the geometric patterns present on the mosaic fragments discovered in these houses.

These interventions have brought to our attention a number of mosaic floors which we have been studying and publishing<sup>2</sup>. Between the last quarter of the first century and early second century, a programme of works, well testified by the important remains of public and private buildings, was carried out in the city. In this period, the city would have reached its maximum extension. In the following period, between the end of the second century and mid-third century, the city knew some stagnation in terms of construction. However, the city registered again an important programme of urban renewal, between the end of the third century and the beginning of the fourth century, a period during which the city acquired a greater importance in the context of the cities in the northwest of the Peninsula, with its elevation to capital of the new province of *Gallaecia*. In this period, important renovations on public and private buildings were carried out,

<sup>2</sup> See Bibliography: Abraços 2005; 2008; 2011; 2014; 2015; 2015a; Abraços in print and Wrench 2014; Wrench in print.

Since the beginning of the nineties, when we integrated the project of the *Corpus of Roman Mosaics in Portugal*, directed by Janine Lancha and Adília Alarcão, we realized the lack of a specific study on conservation and restoration and an updated inventory of Roman mosaics discovered in the Portuguese territory. Due to this, in 2001, we presented to the Faculty of Letters of the Classic University of Lisbon a Doctoral research project that included the study of the mosaics in the whole territory. We elaborated a work (Ph.D. thesis) divided into 3 volumes (Abraços 2005). In the first volume, we drew a brief perspective of the history of the mosaic, conservation practices, lifting techniques, consolidation, conservation and restoration of the mosaics in Portugal up to the recent methodologies and the best preventive solutions; we looked to do a review of the situation in relation to the state of conservation of the mosaics in museum collections and of mosaics *in situ*. In the second volume (Annex I), we presented the study of the mosaics of museum collections, described in 429 files, with graphic and photographic documentation according to the model of files from the *Corpus of Roman mosaics in Portugal*. In the third volume (Annex II), we introduced the Roman mosaics from archaeological sites in the Portuguese territory, those *in situ*, in museums or in private collections, for a total of 254 sites with mosaic floors and 832 fragments of mosaics. Since that, we have been completed this inventory in partial studies published in specialized magazines or in the proceedings of Congresses (Abraços 2008; 2011; 2014; 2015; 2015a; Abraços in print). Our objective is to collect this mosaic heritage, systematically studying and giving it continuity, including the new findings within a *corpus*: “The Corpus of Roman mosaics from *Conuentus Bracaraugustanus*”. To reach this goal we are developing a project with other researchers.



Figure 2  
City Map of Braga. Location of the archaeological sites with mosaics analysed. 1 - Casa da Roda, Rua de S. João; 4 - Rua D. Afonso Henriques, 1 (Escola Velha da Sé); 5 - Rua D. Afonso Henriques, 20-28.  
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with a powerful wall being built, very well documented by the archaeological remains from different excavations.

The late imperial city is characterized by a building dynamic that led to the narrowing of the roads and to the disappearance of some of them. On the other hand, the refurbishment of the houses registered some loss of orthogonality, failing to respect the characteristic orientation of the early imperial city. This tendency persisted in the buildings of the fifth century, a period during which the city became the capital of the Suebic Kingdom. (Ribeiro 2008: 265)

In addition to public buildings, the city had its residential quarters where prestigious *domus* were built, attesting to the richness of the urban population, well documented through their late renovations, generally characterised by the introduction of *balnea* and mosaic floors (Magalhães 2010: 19-21).

In most cases, it has been the practice to lift the mosaic fragments and direct them to the Conservation and Restoration Team of the D. Diogo de Sousa Regional Archaeological Museum (MDDS), in Braga, where, after treatment, the fragments are deposited for later studies; other fragments, whose conditions of protection allow them to stay integrated in the architectural structures where they were discovered, remain *in situ*<sup>3</sup> (Fig. 2).

The mosaics that we are going to present remain *in situ* the Mosaic of “Escola Velha da Sé” (Cathedral’s Old School) and the Mosaic of the “Casa da Roda” (House of the Wheel).

### The mosaic of the “Escola Velha da Sé” (“Cathedral’s Old School”), D. Afonso Henriques Street, nº 1

In 1998, due to a proposed remodelling of the building of the former “Escola Velha da Sé” an archaeological intervention was carried out by the Archaeology Office of the City Council of Braga, under the direction of Armandino Cunha, whose works took place during different phases up to 2003.

The area of intervention, located in the underground of the building, occupies a total area of 720 m<sup>2</sup>, where the southern part of a Roman house with remains of a *hypocaustum* and floors covered with tiles and mosaics was uncovered (Fig. 3). Three phases of construction were distinguished for this house, based on the stratigraphy and the archaeological materials analysed. The first phase can be dated from the first century and it is represented by the several walls that define the rooms that relate to the private part of the building. The second phase corresponds to a significant remodelling of the house, which can be dated between the late third century and the early fourth century (Fig. 4). The remodelling of the *domus* that defines this second phase of occupation was characterized by the construction of baths, in the southwest area of the building. The construction of the baths complex sacrificed the area of the house previously occupied by a possible *peristylum*. Related to this remodelling, there is a mosaic pavement which

<sup>3</sup> Most of the Roman mosaics of *Comuentus Bracaraugustanus*, discovered from 1883 onwards, were found in architectural structures in the area of the city of Braga: City; Seminary of Santiago; Cerca; Cardoso da Saudade/ Quintal of Fernando Castiço; Carvalheiras; Casa da Roda (House of the Wheel); Cathedral; Gualdim Pais Street Block; Quinta of Fужacal; D. Afonso Henriques Street n. 1; 20-28 and 42-56; Cavalariças (Horse stables) in the area of the D. Diogo de Sousa Museum and also in S. Martinho of Dume (2 Km north of Braga). It is already known that there are two dozen sites with mosaics. These interventions have allowed the documentation of the orthogonal layout of the Roman city and the characterization of their public and private equipment.



Figure 3  
General view of  
“Escola Velha da Sé”.  
(Photography Abraços, 2014)



Figure 4  
General view of the *domus* of the  
“Escola Velha da Sé” with the  
mosaic pavement. © AFMDDS

covered an extensive corridor and allowed access to the new area of the house, enabling the interaction of the baths space with the other rooms of the house (Magalhães 2010: 50-51) (Fig. 5).

This mosaic of bicolour *tesserae* (black and white limestone) is decorated with geometric motifs (Fig. 6). The connection of the mosaic carpet with the walls

Figure. 5  
General view of the mosaic  
from the *domus* of the  
“Escola Velha da Sé”.  
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is made through a frieze of 1 cm white *tesserae*<sup>4</sup>. The compositional scheme, “orthogonal pattern of tangent outlined circles and poised squares, forming bobbins” (Décor I: pl. 156a), would have spread in the western part of the Empire since the second century AD, occurring in mosaics from Switzerland, Germany and France. It would be a variety of a diagonal grid – *cancellum* – a pattern known in Pompeii since the first century BC. This pattern evolved into the composition in which the circles alternate with the squares occurring in the first half of the second century AD in an example at Aquileia (Lancha 1977: 98). In *Hispania*, as well as in North Africa, this scheme had a wide dissemination until a quite late period.

In this mosaic from Braga, black and white, the scheme occurs with considerable visibility and the filling decoration slightly emphasized (Fig. 7). The squares are outlined by a double file of black *tesserae*, enclosing squares with a central small square. The circles enclose circles bearing a kind of an irregular corolla with a central small square of poised *tesserae*, or alternately bearing black or white small squares. The rectangles with facing pairs of concave and straight sides (bobbins) enclose, also, a bobbin.

In mosaics from the Portuguese territory, we find a similar composition, decoratively more simplified, in two side panels of the *triclinium* figured mosaic of the *Villa* of Alter do Chão, Portalegre, *Conuentus Emeritensis*. It is “an orthogonal scheme of white concave circles and squares, with blue filling. From the tangency of these elements, double-axes result with ochre filling and differentiated guidelines. It is also important to point out that the circles are centred in crosses made of five white *tesserae* and the squares filled only by one white *tessera*.” The geometric mosaics from this *uilla* were dated, *in genere*, from the third-fourth century (António 2015: 46, 49-50 fig. 13).

In the *Villa* of Coriscada, Meda (Légier 2015: 193 fig. 9) the same scheme from the mosaic of Braga is used in wide bands enveloping the figured panel, dated from the third-fourth century. Although the decoration in the circles

<sup>4</sup> In addition to this mosaic, in the neighbouring rooms, other small fragments with *tesserae* of various colours have been identified, but due to their fragmentation, it has not been possible to characterize them. (Magalhães 2010: 57).



Figure 6  
Partial view of the mosaic  
from the *domus* of the  
“Escola Velha da Sé”.  
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Figure 7  
Detail of the pattern decoration  
of the mosaic from the *domus*  
of the “Escola Velha da Sé”.  
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is more emphasized than the one featured in the mosaic of Braga (Cathedral’s Old School) they are quite similar. Also very similar to the mosaics of Braga and Coriscada is the mosaic fragment from the *Villa* of Boca do Rio, Budens, conserved in the Santos Rocha Museum, from Figueira da Foz, with inventory number: MMSR 4227 (Abraços 2005: annex I 68-69). The same scheme, with a simple guilloche involving the circles and squares, occurs once again in a mosaic of the *Villa* of Santiago da Guarda, Ansião, Leiria, *Conuentus Scalabitanus* (Ribeiro 2015: 88 fig. 14). The mosaics of this *uilla* are dated from the end of fourth century to the beginning of the fifth (Pereira 2008: 174).

In Spain, we begin by highlighting the Roman province of *Galaecia*, where the same scheme appears in Doncide and, probably, in Centroña (Torres Carro 2015: 214).

In the northern Meseta, this scheme is quite frequent, especially in late mosaics (Monteagudo et al. 1998: 29). In the province of León, in a black and white mosaic from Calzada del Coto, dated from the second-third century, the scheme

is used with decorative simplicity, exclusively geometric (Blázquez et al. 1993: 20-21 mosaic n. 4 fig. 4 lam. 3); with more emphasized ornamentation, bearing rosettes in the circles, with the scheme in a simple guilloche, a mosaic from the Campo de Villavidel in a *uilla* dated from fourth century (Blázquez et al. 1993: 23-24 mosaic n. 6 (south room mosaic) fig. 6 lams. 6 and 25). Also executed in a simple guilloche, the same scheme is featured in a mosaic from Cardeñajimeno (Burgos), corresponding to the floor of a room close to a *hypocaustum*, maybe belonging to the *uilla*'s baths, dated from the late fourth century (Monteagudo et al. 1998: 29 mosaic n. 11 lam. 14).

In the *Villa* of Prado (Valladolid) the scheme is used as a band of the pavement number 2, chronologically corresponding to the expansion phase of the *uilla* in the fourth century (Torres Carro 1988: 181-192; 201-202 fig. 3 lams. II-III).<sup>5</sup>

We can see the same pattern, circles and squares in a simple guilloche, in the mosaic of Liédena (Navarra), in room 13, dated from the third century (Blázquez - Mezquiriz 1985: 44-48 mosaic n. 24 lams. 28-29; Mezquiriz 2004: 344 lam. XV) and, in the same *uilla*, with a simpler decoration, in black and white, in a panel on the south side of the peristyle (Mezquiriz 2004: 335-336 fig. 9 lam. IX, 1). With a more emphasized ornamentation, the scheme is used in a mosaic from Valencia de Alcántara (Caceres), from the late third century or early fourth (Blázquez et al. 1993: 23). In other late imperial mosaics with an emphasized *horror uacui* the same pattern occurs, among other examples: in a mosaic from Cuevas de Soria (Blázquez - Ortego 1983: 63-65 mosaic n. 55 fig. 6), in which the sequential decoration of bobbins creates the effect of crossed bands with poised squares at the intersections, and ensconced circles<sup>6</sup>; in a mosaic from Azuara (Zaragoza); in a mosaic from Saint Cristina de la Polvorosa (Zamora) and, with some variation, like the substitution of the squares by octagons with concave sides, in a mosaic from Complutum, as the composition envelopes the central panel with the depictions of Leda and the swan/Jupiter, from the late fourth or early fifth (Fernández Galiano 1984: 213 Zeus and Leda mosaic fig. 13); from Alcázer de San Juan (Ciudad Real), in a mosaic conserved in the Fray Juan Cobo Museum, dated from the fourth century, with a varied filling decoration of different geometric figures, with the circles of the composition as laurel wreaths (Blázquez 1982: 17 mosaic n. 21 fig. 17); from Talavera de la Reina and from the *Villa* of Las Tamujas, Malpica de Tajo (Toledo) (Blázquez 1982: 43-47 mosaic n. 31 fig. 21 lam. 35 and mosaic n. 33 fig. 22; Blázquez et al. 1993: 23).

Even later than in the above mentioned *uillae*, the same scheme is used in the mosaic of the church choir of San Pedro in Egara (Terrassa), Catalonia, showing us “the passage into the medieval world and, at the same time, the survival of the ancient world” (Barral i Altet 1975: 257 pl. XCVIII).

In North Africa, this scheme is also well documented, with, sometimes, the simple guilloche replaced by garlands of laurel leaves, with examples from the mid-second century, from El Djem; from the third century, in Utica, an example of a black and white mosaic of the “Maison de la Cascade”, corridor XII (Alexander - Ennaïfer 1975: 37 pl. XIV); from the fourth century, from Thuburbo Maius, from Leptis Magna or the examples from the Christian Basilicas of Sabratha (Blázquez et al. 1993: 23)<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> The enveloping band shows a row of circles and tangent poised squares, framed by a simple guilloche. The mosaic field presents a centralized pattern, with the corners bearing a crater.

<sup>6</sup> The authors point out to the composition of bands with squares and circles, among other examples, a mosaic from the *uilla* of Abicada, Portimão (Portugal).

<sup>7</sup> For the mentioned African mosaics, the authors quote the corresponding bibliography.

## The Mosaics of D. Afonso Henriques Street, N. 20-28

At the XIII AIEMA Conference held in Madrid in 2015, for the first time, a brief description was presented of the mosaic fragments that were discovered in the building of D. Afonso Henriques Street, numbers 20-28 (Abraços in print). The archaeological excavations carried out in this site have revealed a more or less continuous occupation since the last quarter of the first century BC until the end of the twentieth century, as proved by the construction phases presented in the excavation report. From that set, it is important to give relevance to phases I, II and III, whose structures focus on the northeast corner of a Roman *insula*, where numerous fragments of multi-coloured mosaics were collected, having been deposited as debris from the documented remodelling in phase III and that show the existence of houses with mosaic paving and late Empire dating<sup>8</sup>. The numerous fragments of the mosaic were raised and directed to the MDDS, where they were cleaned and consolidated.

Recent bibliography invites us to complete, with a new approach, the themes of this mosaic. These fragments are part of the same mosaic, where circular medallions are predominant, outlined by white bands, four *tesserae* wide, bearing rosettes composed of white, ochre, yellow and pink *tesserae* over a black *tesserae* background. From this set, we highlight a fragment which features a unitary rosette of four (4) non-contiguous elements, as lanceolate petal with volutes, here the centre as a circle (Décor II: pl. 255f, variety). The density of the *tesserae* is 135/dm<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 8). This rosette is similar to the one number XII b from the Ocean mosaic from Faro. Janine Lancha and Cristina Oliveira (Lancha – Oliveira 2013: 212) while describing the rosettes from the Ocean Mosaic, refer the existence of stylistic approaches to rosettes from North Africa and claim that the likely source of these rosettes would have come from an African *officina*.

All rosettes that are identifiable in this set of fragments discovered in Braga belong to the category of unitary rosettes with one corolla and appear integrated in an outlined orthogonal pattern of tangent circles, forming poised concave squares (Décor I: 233, variety) with parallels in North Africa and dating from the third-fourth century AD<sup>9</sup>.

Mercedes Torres Carro, by analysing the geometric structure of the decoration of the antechamber mosaic from the *oecus* of the *Domus Oceani* of Lugo, similar to the composition of the Braga mosaic, infers that the sources of inspiration and learning of the Lugo's *officina* would have been imported from North Africa, more specifically, from places like Cherchel, Thuburbo Majus and Timgad (Torres Carro 2015: 336).

Another fragment of the same mosaic shows a circular medallion of about 70 cm in diameter, in a polychrome simple guilloche which presents the partial bulge of a crater with a very rudimentary base (Fig. 9). A kind of volute is visible in white *tesserae* on either side of the base of the crater. We found the exact parallel for the base of this vase in a mosaic in the church of Zahrani, in Lebanon (Balty 1995: 374). The craters could be used in different types of compositions, but the most common was the positioning in the angles; it was also very much used in the centre of the apses or in the central medallions (Lancha – Oliveira 2013: 232). That may be the case with the crater represented here.

<sup>8</sup> Leite et al. 2012: Archaeological works from UAUM/Memoirs, 25, 2012, Excavation report of 2009 fig. 2. (repositorium.sdum.uminho.pt/bitstream/1822/19004/1/Memorias\_25.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> In relation to the rosette, see Thuburbo Majus, Tunisia, Alexander et al. 1980: 1, n. 42 A, pl. XXIII.





Figure 8  
Mosaic of D. Afonso Henriques  
Street, numbers 20-28.  
Fragment with a rosette  
(25X22 cm). © AFMDDS



Figure 9  
Mosaic of D. Afonso Henriques  
Street, numbers 20-28.  
Fragment decorated with crater.  
(23X30 cm). © AFMDDS

This mosaic of Braga is very interesting due to the repertoire of illustrated rosettes in a composition of circles, as well as to the presence of a crater. Until this moment, it is the only mosaic from *Conuentus Bracaraugustanus* with the representation of a vase, which associated with rosettes, can refer us to different meanings (Dionysian? Christian?).

### The Mosaic of the “Casa da Roda” (House of the Wheel), San John Street, Braga (Figs. 10-11)

The mosaic of the “Casa da Roda” was mentioned for the first time by Fátima Abraços (Abraços 2005: 218-219; Annex I: 339-340). It remains *in situ*, covered with a suitable material, after being consolidated by the Team from the D. Diogo de Sousa Museum and inventoried with number 2003.0515 (Fig. 12). We had the opportunity to approach it, together with other Portuguese mosaics, in the context of the first International Olympos (Uludağ) Studies Workshop, held in Olympos in 2014 (Wrench 2014: 49-59) and deepen the analysis of the same mosaic in the context of the XIV *AD SAECVLVM AVGVSTVM* International Conference, held in Lisbon in 2014 (Wrench in print).

Therefore, we have already had the opportunity to describe and analyse, in comparison with other mosaics, the geometric themes present in it, pointing as likely chronology for its execution the end of the third century to the beginning of the fourth century, a period in which *Bracara Augusta* undertakes considerable constructive works, after its passage to capital of *Galaecia* (Wrench 2014: 57).

In this text, we will highlight some stylistic aspects and make reference to a few more parallels which meanwhile we noted (Fig. 13).

Concerning the frame of an undulating row of alternately inverted *peltae* with *hederae* on the *apices* (Décor I: pl. 58e, variety) and its use in mosaics of the Portuguese territory, we mention the example of the mosaic of Martim Gil, Leiria, *Conuentus Scalabitanus*, with probable dating from the fourth century (Costa 1905: 49-50; Correia Wrench 2005: 65-67 fig.19 est. 23), and the frames of three mosaics from the *Villa* of Quinta das Longas, Elvas: mosaics from rooms numbers 12 and 17, with trilobe *hederae*, dated from the early fourth century and the one from the apse of room 5, dated from the early fifth century (Oliveira et



Figure 10  
General view of the  
“Casa da Roda”.  
(photograph of the authors)

al. 2011: 907-908 figs. 10, 13, 16). Another Portuguese example of frames of alternately inverted *peltae* with a heart on the central point comes from Mértola, from the area of the *forum/citadel*, as the band of a much destroyed panel, near the one of the defied Lions, in mosaics dated from the Justinian period (Lopes 2003: 106-107 fig. 74; Lopes 2015: 27 fig. 4). It is important to note that in the mosaic of the “House of the Wheel”, as in the examples of the *Villa* of Quinta das Longas, the side points of the *peltae* are united by a small group of *tesserae*, interrupting the undulating row that appears continuous in other examples of Portuguese mosaics with an undulating line of *peltae*. The same individualisation of each *pelta* through a group of *tesserae* is used in the mosaics of Soria



Figure 11  
Detail of the Mosaic from  
the “Casa da Roda”  
(House of the Wheel).  
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Figure 12  
 General view of the mosaic  
 from the “Casa da Roda”.  
 © AFMDDS



Figure 13  
 Detail of the band with  
 inverted *peltae* of the mosaic  
 from the “Casa da Roda”.  
 © AFMDDS



from the *uillae* of Los Quintanares and Santervás del Burgo. In this last case the *peltae* band is associated with a narrow frame of polychrome tangent juxtaposed bells<sup>10</sup>, as it appears in the mosaic of the “House of the Wheel”.

In relation to the detail of the *modus faciendi* of the *peltae* junction, this could indicate the use by the mosaicists of the same model that, in this particular

<sup>10</sup> See Blázquez – Ortego 1983: 27-28 lám. 28 mosaic n. 14 from Los Quintanares; Blázquez – Ortego 1983: 41-42 lám.14 mosaic n. 37 from Santervás del Burgo.

decoration, is used in Braga and the mosaics of Soria. It is important to highlight the existence, in the aforementioned Hispanic regions, of the Roman roads *Asturica-Caesaraugustana* and *Bracara-Asturica* which would have been important vehicles of circulation for models and mosaicists. Such exchanges would have allowed the repetition of the procedure regarding the *peltae* junction in the aforementioned mosaics of the *Villa* of Quinta das Longas, *Conuentus emeritensis*<sup>11</sup>.

In regard to parallels in the eastern part of the Empire, a similar frame to the mosaic from the “House of the Wheel” is found in *Apollonia* (in modern-day Albania), involving squares from the mosaic field, dating from the third century AD (Anamali - Adhami 1974: 41-42) (Figs. 14- 15).

The other two frames present in the mosaic of the “House of the Wheel” are decorated with an “undulating polychrome band” (Décor I: pl. 60e, polychrome variety; Viegas et al. 1993: 74), simplified designation used by Cristina Oliveira (Oliveira 2003: 98ff), and with «a row of tangent cuboids with serrated sides” (Décor I: pl. 99f; Viegas et al. 1993: 96)<sup>12</sup>. These geometric themes of a pictorial/ volumetric nature refer us to Greek and Hellenistic mosaic. About them, we can highlight the following:

- The row of tangent juxtaposed shaded bells, forming tangent inverted bells and an undulating line, possible derivation from the ribbon, which visually connects to the row of adjacent calices, alternately inverted, horizontally shaded in late performances (Oliveira 2003: 98), in the mosaic of the “House of the Wheel” presents little volume if compared, for example, with the undulating polychrome bands carried out in the mosaics from the *Villa* of Santiago da Guarda, Ansião, Leiria or from the “House of the Medusa” in Alter do Chão, in the frame surrounding the figured panel of the *triclinium*. The one from the mosaic of the “House of the Wheel”, among other Hispanic examples<sup>13</sup>, is compared to the undulating polychrome bands used in some panels of the *oecus* mosaic from the *Domus Oceani* of Lugo, dated from the same period of the mosaic from Braga (González Fernandez 2005: 94, 103, 128 figs. 104, 105, 124). If we take into account, in addition to the geographical proximity of the two cities, the possible existence of an itinerant *officina*, active in the second half of the third century, in the area of the Roman road which connected *Lucus* to *Bracara Augusta* (Balil 1975: 262), we can consider these creations as coming from the same *officina*.

In Portuguese mosaics, this decoration presents a wide geographical distribution, being used both in panel frames, as defining the geometric figures of the mosaic field or even as surrounding some of the geometric figures from the surface

<sup>11</sup> Oliveira et al. 2011: 907 consider that the *peltae* with trilobe leaves on the central point featured in the mosaics from rooms 12 and 17 of the *uilla* of Quinta da Longas can be a distinguishing mark of the *officina* that carried them out, since the possible model from Merida from the fourth century presents the *peltae* decorated with simple heart leaves. However, we can consider it an interchange of “models” or mosaic makers among *officinae*, since we note a parallel for the trilobe leaf, in the angle of a frame of *peltae* alternately inverted, in a mosaic from Albalate de Cinca, Province of Huesca, dating from the last quarter of the fourth century (Fernandez-Galiano 1987: 62-63 lám. 29 mosaic n. 96). The relationship between a mosaic from the *uilla* of Quinta das Longas (mosaic from room n. 5 with a *crismon*) and a mosaic of the *Villa* of *Fortunatus*, also in the Hispanic Province of Huesca, is pointed out by Oliveira et al. 2011: 908. So we can see particular procedures, as the connection of the *peltae* and the trilobe leaves in mosaics from Braga, Los Quintanares and Santervás del Burgo, Quinta das Longas, Albalate de Cinca, procedures that can be more exchanges than distinguish marks of *officinae*.

<sup>12</sup> These two decorative themes in bands occurring in Portuguese Roman mosaics were specifically handled in the presentation we gave in the XIII AIEEMA Congress, Madrid, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> The “undulating row of tangent juxtaposed bells”, bichrome or polychrome, is common in Hispanic mosaics, being the polychromatic variety a characteristic of the later mosaics. Both in Portuguese territory, as well as in Spanish, its occurrence has a wide geographical distribution.

Figure 14  
Detail of the band with polychromatic inverted bells of the mosaic from the “Casa da Roda”. © AFMDDS



Figure 15  
Detail of the band with tangent cuboids of the mosaic from the “Casa da Roda”. © AFMDDS.



compositions. In a mosaic from the *Villa* of Milreu, Estói, Faro, a polychrome undulating band fills a rectangle framed by a simple guilloche of a panel at the entrance of the *domus* (Lancha – Oliveira 2013: 224-229).

Cristina Oliveira (Oliveira 2003: 100; Oliveira et al. 2011: 908; Lancha - Oliveira 2013: 229) mentions, apart from some of the mosaics from the *Villa* of Rio Maior, other Portuguese archaeological sites where this type of mosaic decoration occurs: the *Villa* of Prado Galego, Pinhel; the *Villa* of San Pedro de Caldelas, Tomar, *Conuentus Scalabitanus*; the *Villa* of Quinta Longas,

*Conuentus Emeritensis* and, in *Conuentus Pacensis*, the *Villa* of Monte do Meio, Beja, and a mosaic coming from Lagos, in a bicolour version of the undulating band (Lancha – Oliveira 2013: 228-229)<sup>14</sup>.

- The row of tangent cuboids (Décor I: pl. 99e; Viegas et al. 1993: 96)<sup>15</sup> also occurs in mosaics from the *Villae* of Rabaçal, Penela, Coimbra and from Santiago da Guarda, Ansião, Leiria, both integrated in the *Conuentus Scalabitanus*. Used in frames, the solids are aligned, either all facing the angles of the square polygon which they involve, as in this mosaic of the “House of the Wheel”, in Santiago da Guarda and in one of the mosaics from the *Villa* of Rabaçal, or they are placed converging to the midpoint of the frame (as in other mosaics from the *Villa* of Rabaçal).

In Spain, this geometric decoration occurs with a wide geographical dispersion, although it seems more frequent in later mosaics from the Meseta.

Among other parallels present in mosaics of late Hispanic *villae*, we can point the mosaic of Bellerophon and the Chimera of Bell-Lloch (Gerona) from the mid-third century; mosaics from the fourth century, as the ones from Quintanares of Soria (Blázquez – Ortego 1983: 13 lam. 7 mosaic n. 13), from Carranque (Toledo), in the mosaic of the Ocean (Fernández-Galiano et al. 1994: 325 fig. 6) or the mosaic of Atalanta and Meleagro from Cardeñajimeno (Burgos), from the late fourth century (Monteagudo et al. 1998: 21-28; 35-42 fig. 5 lams. 7-12, mosaic n. 9)<sup>16</sup>.

This type of decoration is also quite common in North African and East Mediterranean mosaics, including those from Antioch and Zeugma, dating from the second-third century and later<sup>17</sup>, or those from Apamea, in Syria (Balty 1977: 90-91).

In regard to the Portuguese Roman mosaics with this frame decoration, it is possible to observe that, as far as we know, in contrast with the dispersion of polychrome undulating bands, the bands with tangent cuboids are concentrated in mosaics from the *Conuentus Scalabitanus*<sup>18</sup>, widening, with the mosaic from the “House of the Wheel”, to the *Conuentus Bracaraugustanus*.

In this late mosaic from Braga, the row of cuboids, a representation already very distant from the architectural cornice which would have inspired it, is associated with the decoration of the polychrome undulating band that is also quite distant from the volume of the ribbon which could have been in its origin.

<sup>14</sup> Oliveira refers the example of this dichromatic variety of the undulating band, originating from the House of Mitreo, in Merida, from the second century (quoting Freijeiro 1978: 38-39 n. 18). For the polychromic version, several examples from the African provinces are pointed out, especially from the period of its greatest expansion, in the third and fourth centuries. See, also, Oliveira 2003: 98-101.

<sup>15</sup> This theme should be distinguished from the “row of consoles in lateral perspective” (Décor I: pl. 99i; Viegas et al. 1993: 27), as it appears in two mosaic floors from *Conimbriga*, dating from the second century, which are exhibited at the entrance of the Ruins of Conimbriga. Oleiro 1973: 76-110 dates the mosaic, which later was considered to have paved the *cenatio* of the “House of Cantaber”, from the middle or third quarter of the second century, with reserves (p. 92) and the mosaic, whose original location is unknown, from the end of the Antonine period (p. 110). See also Oliveira 2005: 51 mosaic n. 32 (from the “House of Cantaber”); 84 mosaic n. 60 (from an unknown location).

<sup>16</sup> The examples referred to by the authors concerning the mosaic study from Cardeñajimeno, n. 9.

<sup>17</sup> See Cimok 2000: 79, 81, 83, 92, among other examples.

<sup>18</sup> The use of isolated solids, placed in the centre of the squares of a surface composition, occurs in a mosaic from the *Villa* of Coriscada, Meda, Guarda (Légier 2015: 191).

## Final Considerations

Taking into account the work developed and published by the Recovery Team of *Bracara Augusta*, it is possible to conclude that the period corresponding to the end of the third century-early fourth century represents a period of great constructive activity in *Bracara Augusta*, confirming numerous renovations in many buildings and also registering great transformations in the urban layout.

In the excavations carried out in the various archaeological sites where the above mentioned mosaics were found, archaeologists have found that they relate to a remodelling phase attributed, generically, to the late Antiquity. This phase would have been contemporary to the great transformations of Braga's urban area, associated with the construction of the first Paleo-Christian Basilica on the site of the current Cathedral, during the fifth century. This fact would have determined the concentration of the urban fabric in the northeast quadrant of the city and the abandonment of some central and southern areas of the ancient Roman city (Leite et al. 2012: 42).

As for the decorative grammar present in mosaics from the region of Braga, it is noted that, for the most part, it consists of geometrical and vegetal motifs, but five archaeological sites that feature mosaics decorated with marine fauna are also known. To the figurative motifs, it is possible to add the fragment decorated with the crater.

This decorative grammar of Hispanic, North African and Eastern Mediterranean inspiration features in local particularities of *Bracara Augusta*. The crossroads of influences present in the mosaics of Braga were certainly consolidated by the relationships of this northwest region with southern *Hispania*, made through the Atlantic route.

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### Abbreviations used in the text

<b>AFMDDS</b>	Photographic Archive of D. Diogo de Sousa Museum
<b>AIEMA</b>	Association Internationale pour l'Étude de la Mosaïque Antique
<b>AMDDS</b>	Archive of D. Diogo de Sousa Museum
<b>MDDS</b>	D. Diogo de Sousa Museum of Braga
<b>MMSR</b>	Santos Rocha Municipal Museum of Figueira da Foz
<b>APECMA</b>	Portuguese Association for the Study and Conservation of Ancient Mosaic
<b>ICCM</b>	International Committee for the Conservation of Mosaics