

Revisiting the Leda Mosaic Found at Kornmarkt, Trier (*Augusta Treverorum*)

Kornmarkt, Trier’de (*Augusta Treverorum*) Bulunan Leda Mozaiğini Yeniden Ziyaret Etmek

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Abstract

This article aims to review the representations of the exceptional mosaic found in the vicinity of the Kornmarkt in Trier, which, since its discovery, has been subject to different interpretations.

Undoubtedly, the unique character and the inexplicable, at least in appearance, conjugation of the two main scenes, with various inscriptions, in the two large concave octagons that stand out in the geometric scheme of the field, that is, a scene perhaps of sleight of hand and another of mythological inspiration with the birth of Helena, have given rise to theories, among others, as opposite as the representation of a mystery cult and, in the completely opposite sense, another that identifies it as an expression of the mockery of traditional cults from the most critical Christian sectors of Augusta Treverorum.

In this paper, however, the analysis of the figures contained in the geometric compartments in the shape of a circle and a spindle, with servants and saltatrices, who are also identified by epigraphs with their own names, sheds light on the interpretation of the mosaic. In this regard, the consideration of some parallels for the figures of servants and saltatrices, as well as information from literary sources and the context of the ancient Augusta Treverorum in which the mosaic was commissioned are equally revealing when drawing our conclusions. on the identification of a banquet, including the entertainments of the comissatio

Keywords: Banquet, servants, saltatrices, prestidigitation, Helena’s birth.


Öz

Bu makale, keşfedildiği günden bu yana farklı yorumlara konu olan Trier’deki Kornmarkt civarında bulunan sıradışı mozaikteki temsilleri incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Kuşkusuz, alanın geometrik şemasında öne çıkan iki büyük içbükey sekizgende benzersiz karakter ve en azından görünüşte, iki ana sahnenin çeşitli yazıtlarla birleşimi, iki büyük konkav oktagonunda yer alan bir sihirbazlık ve Helena’nın doğumundan ilham alan bir mitolojik sahnenin yer aldığı sahneler, bir gizem kültürünün temsili ya da Augusta Treverorum’un en eleştirel Hristiyan kesimlerinin geleneksel kültürlere karşı takındıkları alaycı tavır gibi birbirine zıt yöndeki pek çok teorinin ileri sürülmesine neden olmuştur.

Ancak bu makalede, kendi isimleriyle kitabelerle de tanımlanan daire ve iç şeklindeki geometrik bölmelerde yer alan hizmetli ve saltatrice figürlerinin analizi, mozaığın yorumuna ışık tutmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, hizmetçi ve saltatrice figürleri ile edebi kaynaklardan alınan bilgiler ve mozaığın yer aldığı antik Augusta Treverorum’un bağlamı için bazı paralelliklerin dikkate alınması, comissatio eğlenceleri de dahil olmak üzere bir ziyafetin tanımlanması hakkında sonuçları çıkarırken eşit derecede açıklayıcıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ziyafet, hizmetçiler, saltatrice, prestij, Helena’nın doğumu.

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Two female figures contained in the very interesting pavement found in 1950 near the Kornmarkt in Trier (Parlasca 1951: 109-125)¹ are among the representations of Visual Culture, object of study in a recent book on music and dance in the Roman world which has just been published (Neira 2021: 105-110 figs. 25-27). In concrete, due to the inscription with their name, they are Eleni and Criscentia, the two young women depicted dancing to the sound of the *crotala*², in two of the seven geometric compartments in the shape of spindle in the mosaic field.

The mosaic from the ancient *Augusta Treverorum* (Fig. 1) is dated to the third quarter of the 4th century AD³ and is based on a composition scheme with the alternation of six circular and six spindle-shaped medallions, arranged on the four sides of the rectangular field, and a seventh spindle in the center, that results in two large irregular octagons with concave sides, all of them well delimited by a guilloche.

Figure 1
Leda mosaic Trier. © GDKE/Rheinisches Landesmuseum Trier, Photo: Th. Zühmer.



A similar scheme is documented in a polychrome pavement found in the Esquiline (Fig. 2), from the beginning of the 3rd century A.D. (Blake 1940: 99-100 pl. 19,1)⁴. However, the seven spindles are smaller and all the geometric compartments are decorated with vegetal motifs.

Another version is reproduced on a large mosaic of Dionysus and the Four Seasons at *Volubilis* (Fig. 3), from the first third of the 3rd century AD. (Thouvenot 1948:

- 1 Parlasca 1951: 109, recorded just a year after its discovery all the news that had been published about the mosaic, all of them echoing the interest that its figurative representations aroused.
- 2 Doubtless by mistake, Gindsberg-Klar 1981: 318 pl. 80, calls them “clapper cymbals.”
- 3 By virtue of archaeological finds, Eiden 1950: 52-71; Petrikovits 1950: 500; Parlasca 1951: 117-118; Parlasca 1959: 56-57 pl. 54-55; Moreau 1960; Dunbabin 1999: 82-86 note 22 fig. 85; Ghetta 2007: 224.
- 4 Currently this mosaic is preserved in the deposits of the Museo Nazionale Romano, with inventory number 124703.



Figure 2
Pavement found in the Esquiline. Museo Nazionale Romano. According to Blake 1940.



Figure 3
Mosaic of Dionysus and the Four Seasons at *Volubilis*.

348-353; Étienne 1951: 93-118), where, also with smaller spindles without space for figural depictions, there are the circular medallions and concave octagons that contain the aforementioned figures of Dionysus and the Seasons, as well as several members of the Dionysian *thiasos*. As a distinctive characteristic presents the reproduction of eight circles and twelve spindles and, consequently, four concave octagons, although the adaptation to the rectangular field has not been carried out correctly, since the scheme lacks symmetry on the smaller sides of the field, with the circles cut off, unfinished, in one of them, while the Four Seasons do not occupy the corners as might have been expected.

In this regard, it seems that the original scheme, based on six circular and seven elliptical medallions, with two octagons, where the Four Seasons would appear in the circles at the corners of the field, would have been modified and expanded in a decision on the terrain, which proves and documents a certain autonomy of the mosaicists and their freedom to modify a scheme, although not always in a successful way⁵, and, therefore, the adaptation of the mosaics to the space to be paved, resulting unique and exclusive works.

Another similar pattern is documented in the fragmentary mosaic of the Seasons *Ostia* (Fig. 4), which Becatti located from the so-called Suburban Villa in Reg.

⁵ Thouvenot 1936: 9 and Étienne 1951: 113-114, already influenced this fact, pointing out as a defect of some African mosaicists not knowing how to adapt the model to the surface to be decorated.



Figure 4
Seasons mosaic from Ostia. Photo: Luz Neira.

I. Is. IV, from the 4th century AD. (Becatti 1961: no. 438 tav. CCII, CCXVII). Its state of conservation does not allow confirming the original surface of the field or the complete development of the scheme, but the guilloche and the laurel wreath, which delimits circles and spindles of similar size as in the Trier mosaic, does, resulting in irregular octagons concaves, at least two in the preserved part, in which a square decorated with a figurative scene is inscribed, respectively. Judging by the identification of the female bust in a circular medallion as a representation of one of the Seasons and the interpretation of the two scenes as festivities celebrated in certain months (Becatti 1961: 235-240; Salzman 1990: 89; Parodo 2014: 31), presumably the mosaic originally would have had much larger dimensions.

So, the adaptation of the scheme, including enlargement, presents different solutions, as can be seen in one of the panels that are part of the great pavement of the famous Basilica of *Aquileia* (Fig. 5), also from the 4th century (Bertacchi 1994), where the composition of circles, decorated with a Solomon's knot and perhaps with the figure of a bird, and spindles, smaller in size, with a floral motif, results in eight irregular octagons of concaves sides, with figures of animals, although the adaptation to the rectangular field does not offer a symmetrical arrangement on one of the larger sides and on the other of the smaller ones, with an unorthodox culmination⁶.

Returning to the Trier mosaic in question and specifically to its figurative representations, there are the busts of six men appearing, holding with the hands raised on the head great platters full of diverse foods in the six circular medallions arranged on the four sides, at the angles and in the center of the larger sides, towards the outside. They are also identified by an inscription with their first name, Peregorius, Eusebius and Felix, names that are repeated to designate each of them two males (Figs. 6-9), although with the distinction between Felix (Fig. 10) and Felex (Fig. 11). Likewise, there are the full-length figures of four more men, in four other spindle-shaped compartments. They are dressed in long robes, except one that wears a short one, carry a skylight, a jug, another jug, and a bowl and an amphora. Also they are identified, respectively, as Secundus (Fig. 12), Theodulus (Fig. 13), Calemer (Fig. 14) and Andegasus (Fig. 15), and a fifth, in the spindle located in the center of the composition, named Florus, apparently captured in the instant of pouring incense on a tripod (Fig. 16).

Figure 5
Pavement of Great Basilica *Aquileia*. Detail.
Photo: Luz Neira.



⁶ In this respect, it seems that the faulty adaptation of a scheme would not have been exclusive to the Mosaists who practiced their profession in the North African provinces. See previous note.



Figures 6-7

Leda mosaic Trier. Detail of Paregorius. © GDKE/Rheinisches Landesmuseum Trier, Photo: Th. Zühmer.



Figures 8-9

Leda mosaic Trier. Detail of Eusebius. © GDKE/Rheinisches Landesmuseum Trier, Photo: Th. Zühmer.



Figure 10 Leda mosaic Trier. Detail of Felix. © GDKE/Rheinisches Landesmuseum Trier, Photo: Th. Zühmer.

Figure 11 Leda mosaic Trier. Detail of Felex. © GDKE/Rheinisches Landesmuseum Trier, Photo: Th. Zühmer.



Figure 12
Leda mosaic Trier. Detail of Secundus.
© GDKE/Rheinisches Landesmuseum Trier,
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Figure 13
Leda mosaic Trier. Detail of Theodolus.
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Figure 14
Leda mosaic Trier. Detail of Calemer.
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Photo: Th. Zühmer.

Figure 15
Leda mosaic Trier. Detail of Andegasus.
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Photo: Th. Zühmer.

Figure 16
Leda mosaic Trier. Detail of Florus.
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Photo: Th. Zühmer.

In the two irregular octagons with concaves sides, larger than the rest of the geometric compartments in the form of circles and spindles, the two main scenes are located.

At first, with a mortar and three characters, QODVOLDEVS carries in his right hand a long-handled spoon and in his left a dead bird⁷ on a bowl held by another male, with an inscription flanking his head - FELOXSO / MEDIX - (Fig. 17). Both wear a short tunic and a kind of small wings on their back, while the third, smaller, kneeling on the ground, appears very attentive with his left hand on his head in a gesture of absolute astonishment and supports with his right a bowl with an egg. Another inscription in two lines ANDEG / ASIPONE completes the scene. According to Moreau “Qodvoldevs said: Felix put it down; Andegasi take it” (Moreau 1960: 13-14).

In the second scene (Fig. 18) there is a unique and equally enigmatic representation of the legend about the birth of Helena, with common characters from the mythological episode, identified with their names by inscriptions, such as Jupiter

⁷ According to Parlasca 1951: 118-119, a goose; according to Städele 2008-2009: 343, a plucked chicken.



Figure 17
Leda mosaic Trier. Detail of scene with Qodvoldeus. © GDKE/Rheinisches Landesmuseum Trier, Photo: Th. Zühmer.



Figure 18
Leda mosaic Trier. Detail of scene with Leda. © GDKE/Rheinisches Landesmuseum Trier, Photo: Th. Zühmer.

- IOBIS - under the image of the eagle, Leda - LYDA - and Helena - AELENA, with the Dioscuri Castor - CASTOR - and Pollux - POLVS -, the three together in the same egg⁸, as an amniotic bag, in the presence of Agamemnon, identified as such by the inscription AGAMEMNON-, like the rest of the characters. Had he not been designated as Agamemnon, his image of strangeness in the episode, questioning Leda with his gaze, would rather have led us to identify Tindareo⁹.

Due to the unique character of both scenes and their unusual conjugation, the mosaic has given rise to different interpretation since its discovery. Parlasca alluded to the link between Leda and Isis, proposing in this sense the hypothesis that the composition could reflect the survival of a cult of the Egyptian deities, of a mysterious nature, as can already be seen in the title of his paper (Parlasca 1951: 118-119).

On the contrary, Grégoire and Louis (Grégoire 1953: 454-457; Louis 1953: 222-224) already raised in the 1950s its possible relationship with the Christian cult.

However, in the line of Parlasca, Moreau defended the interpretation of the scenes as extracts from the ritual of a mysterious cult, including the preparation of the ceremonial banquet, and attributed the pavement to a building that may have been the seat of that place of cult, although this author identified it with the mysterious cult dedicated to Nemesis, very popular in late Antiquity, and, according to a variant of the legend, the biological mother of Helena, while Leda would have been her adoptive mother (Moreau 1960: 20- 29).

The theory about the role of Nemesis was questioned by Brandenburg (Brandenburg 1964: 149-155), as well as later by Schwartz and Hatt, who proposed the interpretation of the aforementioned scene of the birth of Helena and the Dioscuri and the image of "prestidigitation" starring by Qodvoldeus, Felex and Andegasivs as a parody, putting forward the figurative ensemble of the mosaic as a criticism, not without mockery, from Christian sectors towards

8 On the variants of the legend, Ruiz de Elvira 1974: 107-109, already referred that the version about the birth of Helena and the twins from the same egg dates back to the Cypria (fragm. 8,3), citing in schol. Callim.in Dian 232, schol. Arat. 273 and Eustath. 1321.38, and later by Ausonius (Epigr. 54). See, more recently, Marcos Pérez 2000: 203-221

9 According already Parlasca 1951: 112.

some of the pagan rites, developed within the framework of ritual banquets and sacrifices (Schwartz - Hatt 1987: 37-45; Hoffmann 1999: 70; Ghetta 2007: 224)¹⁰.

Against this hypothesis, Hunter has argued that it is unthinkable to regard the mosaic scenes as expressions of mockery and criticism of Christians, and has proposed that, in the context of perceptible Christianization at *Augusta Treverorum*, the mosaic might reflect the need of reaffirming and vindicating themselves on the part of certain pagan sectors and those initiated in ancient mystery cults that even include their name (Hunter 2013: figs. 16-18).

In my opinion, there is no evidence that shows the intellectual authorship of a militant Christian, nor so much effort to identify and give prominence to each of the members represented in the mosaic as supposed devotees practicing pagan rites, object of caricature, in the two main scenes of uncertain identification. Nor are there any clear elements to interpret the composition as the reflection of mystery cults.

From my point of view, the study of the figures inscribed on the circular medallions and on the spindles is key. Thus, when analyzing these representations, it should be taken into account that the two designated as Eusebio and the two identified as Peregrius, as well as those called Felix and Felex, appear carrying a platter full of food with both hands on their heads, while Calemer, Theodolus and Andegasus carry utensils related to drinks, and Floro and Segundo other objects, in my opinion unequivocally, like servants in the context of a banquet.

Remember that, in the setting of a banquet, depictions of domestic servants are documented in the fragmentary parietal mosaic of Sant'Angelo in Formis (Campania) (Robotti 2005: 1171-1173 fig. 4), on a pavement, also fragmentary, from *Carthago*, preserved in the Louvre (Fig. 19), with servants carrying various dishes and baskets (Dunbabin 2003: 446-447 fig. 5), and on another large pavement in *Carthago*, found at Douar Chott (Fig. 20) from the late 4th to early 5th centuries (Yacoub 1995: fig. 126, ac; Blanchard-Lémée et al. 1995; Neira 2011: 405-406 figs. 9-10), with the recreation of a magnificent banquet, in which

Figure 19
Fragment of Mosaic from *Carthago*. Louvre.

Figure 20
Mosaic of Douar Chott (*Carthago*). Bardo Museum. Photo: Luz Neira.



¹⁰ According to these authors, the kitchen utensils represented would play a special role (Schwartz-Hatt 1987: 39).

numerous diners participate, seated “at the table” in several groups and attended by a series of servants who also carry jugs and huge trays on their heads.

Some years ago, in a work on the self-representations of the *domini* and their universe in Roman mosaics (Neira 2011: 387-410), we reflected on the presence of servants and, among them, on those of the domestic sphere that appear with a certain prominence in scenes of magnificent banquets. It was argued that they had been included to highlight the wealth, power and prestige of the *domini*, in such a way that the incorporation and presence of the employees responds to a uniformity and homogeneity, not accidental, but premeditated and conscious when trying to offer an idyllic image of the “domains”, in the most literal sense, of an owner, where submission is part of a conception of power and rules that they guarantee peace, prosperity and, in summary, the fruits of civilization.

Along these lines, in addition to the servants who carry the food and to the cupbearers, other events in the context of a banquet are offered and depicted to further highlight the power of a *dominus*. Although it is not known with certainty if the banquet starring in the parietal mosaic of Sant’Angelo in Formis (Campania) and in the fragmentary pavement from *Carthago* preserved in the Louvre was enlivened by music and dance (Neira 2011: 400; Neira - Rodríguez 2021: 224 fig. 7), the aforementioned pavement found in Douar Chott (Fig. 20) preserves at least two musicians – a man and a woman - sounding the *crotala* and a third, elderly-looking, the *sirinx*, attesting that the *dominus* had as its objective the demonstration of its economic and social high status, not only through the number of invited guests and delicacies, but also by the contract of musicians, whose practice was not limited to the *scaena* (Neira 2021: 108).

A scene of this type is also documented in a pavement from the ancient *Germanicia* (currently Kahramanmaraş, Turkey), found very recently in the course of excavations under the leadership of Safinaz Acipayam, director of the Museum of the aforementioned town, which has been dated in the first half of the 6th century AD. In process of publication, as Cottet advances (Cottet 2022: 29, notes 92-93), the images that we have been able to contemplate (<https://www.dailysabah.com/gallery/party-like-its-522-1500-year-old-feast-mosaic-found-in-turkey/images>) show a magnificent representation of a banquet in the open air, where, despite a large gap, it seems to be appreciated, in addition to a table with glass jars, the figures of three couples reclining around a semicircle, similar to a *stibadium*, accompanied by two servants, who contemplate with great prominence, the performance of a man playing a *sirinx* and three female figures dancing to the sound of instruments, two of them the cymbals and the from the center the *crotala*.

Regarding the performances commissioned by a *dominus*, a mosaic panel that is paved the center of the entrance hall to the main salle of the Baths E of *Antiocheia*, also from the 4th century (Levi 1947: 273-277 pl. LXIII e), show the preparations for another series of entertainments with which the guests, perhaps the users of the baths, were entertained, with three young men, dressed in a short tunic, who standing in the same direction carry on their left shoulder an animal of long tail, identified with a monkey, although its tail seems mottled, the second in the center a stool, perhaps for the animal, and the third in the right hand a rope from which small balls seem to hang (Dunbabin 2016: 126; Tedeschi 2019: note 96), of those used in juggling numbers, funambulism and animal training (Dasen 2019: 129 fig. 1).

Returning, however, to the pavement of Douar Chott and the one recently found in *Germanicia*, their depictions are the most illustrative when interpreting

the *Augusta Treverorum* mosaic, since, despite the partial destruction of the *crotalistrinae* in the North African mosaic, it is still perceptible how the one located in the center also danced, probably the same as her partner, showing in the three mosaics the combination of servants and *saltatrices* that outline her body to the sound of the *crotala*.

In this regard, Eleni¹¹ (Fig. 21) and Criscentia (Fig. 22), also identified with their name, are dressed in a long tunic, showing loose hair, the first blond and the second saffron, a detail described by ancient authors as an unmistakable sign of their dedication to the prostitution, to the point that women who practiced this trade were forced to dye their hair this shade to be clearly identified, although it is also possible that the origin of this trend is due to an old cliché about the type of traits of those slave women from certain territories who would have survived practicing prostitution and to whose immoral customs many authors attributed moral degradation in Rome.



Figure 21
Leda mosaic Trier. Detail of Eleni.
© GDKE/Rheinisches Landesmuseum Trier,
Photo: Th. Zühmer.

Figure 22
Leda mosaic Trier. Detail of Criscentia.
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Photo: Th. Zühmer.

To this is added that percussion instruments, such as the *crotala*, with negative connotations, always linked to *saltatrices*, sometimes of strange origin, who due to their sensual body movements were classified as not very respectable and even as prostitutes since the end of the Republican era (Neira 2021: 58-59).

Just like the *cinaedi* were associated with foreigners, dancers and effeminate, the figure of the prostitute-dancer, such as Quintia and Telethusa - originally described as prostitutes who dance-, was also disseminated in the Roman imaginary to a point that any woman associated with performances, such as mimes, musicians, or dancers, was potentially considered as a prostitute (Naerebout 2009: 156-157). This derogative character was emphasised if women danced in a *commissatio*: they would be considered prostitutes for moral, social and cultural reasons, according to the already noted preconceived prejudices (Péché 2002: 134-135; Webb 2002: 284-285; Perea 2004: 14; Vesterinen 2007: 66-77).

¹¹ Cited in the referenced bibliography on the mosaic, it was also the object of attention in a work on music (Melini 2008: 48).

This issue is analyzed in the study of a mosaic of Aventine's *domus*, which has just been published (Neira – Rodríguez 2021: 217-233 figs. 1, 4-6). In this work the success of the performances by *saltatrices* of non-Roman origin from the late republican period and throughout the imperial period is remembered, by virtue of the description in Appendix Vergiliana (App. Verg. Copa, 1-4), the Priapea (Carm. Priapea I.27.1 -5), Martial (Mart. Ep. 1.41.12), Juvenal (Sat. 11.3.62)¹², Statius (Silv. 1.6.67-74) and Suetonius (Dom. 4), as well as references to Pliny (Epist. 3.12; 9.17.1-4), Lucian (Symp. 18-19) and particularly Clement of Alexandria, contemporary author of the mosaic.

The mentions to Quintia and Telethusa in the Appendix Vergiliana and the Priapea and the epigraphic testimonies of *embolia*, among others, evoked a scene of performance / prostitution in the vicinity of the Circus Maximus. However both the numerous references of Martial (Ep. 10.40; 9.77.5-6; 6.71, 1.41.12), the critical account of Pliny the Younger in his Letters and that of Luciano, which include a precise description of the “performances” with dwarfs and dwarves and buffoons, during the *comissatio* of some, as well as some depictions of banquets in mosaics have led us to identify the scene of the pavement found in the Aventine not as a sequence of mime, according to some researchers¹³, but as the representation of one of those lascivious dances in the celebration of a great banquet (Neira- Rodríguez 2021: 222-224).

Since the last century of the Republic and the first centuries of the Empire, it is certainly revealing the excessive interest of some people to attend one of them performances, even cancelling a previous appointment to attend a last-minute invitation to this type of events, as Pliny the Younger (Epist. 3.12) reproaches Clarus. Although the same author confesses that other guests at the beginning of these *comissationes* do not leave the *domus* out of respect for the host (Epist. 9.17.1-4). A diversity of situations that would persist over the centuries.

The critical text by Clement of Alexandria, between the end of the second and the beginning of the third centuries AD, the mosaic image faithfully represents the performances in one of those banquets that continued to be organized in Rome and in other urban centres of the Empire (Neira-Rodríguez 2021: 226-229). It is to be assumed that the owner of the *domus* del Aventino, the architect of the commission for the decoration of the pavements found on the grounds of Santa Sabina, would have belonged to the sector that favoured these performances, maybe trying to boast his patronage of the *venationes* with the preserved figurative representations (Berthier 1910: 19-20; Nogara 1910: 6-7; Blake 1940: 115-116. pl. 31, 1-4). The owner would also appear to be the organiser and host of a great banquet and in this context, of a *commissatio*, which would include every type of entertainment expected by his guests, although they are not represented in the *stibadium*. In addition to the delicacies and wine, the attendees would be delighted by the graces of a dwarf as a jester, as well as the sensual and lascivious dances of three *cinaedi* and two *saltatrices*, dressed in transparent silks, who contort to the rhythm set by the *crotala*, the *scabellum* and the *tibia* played by the two musicians.

Later, the success of the *saltatrices* does not seem to have decreased. On his

12 Identified as prostitutes, the *puellae gaditanae* and the *Syrian ambubaiae* appeared related in Schol. Iuv. 11: *id est, speras forsitan, quod incipiant saltare delicatae ac pulchrae puellae Syriae, quoniam de Syris en Afris Gades condita est.*

13 Guidobaldi 1992: fig. 18; Kondoleon 1999: fig. 5. Dunbabin, judging by a text by Plutarch (Mor. 712E), thinks that perhaps it could be the staging of a mime during a banquet (Dunbabin 2004: 161-182 notes 27-28). See below.

popularity in Rome at the end of the 4th century, the testimony of Ammianus Marcellinus (Amm. Marc. 14.6.19) is very revealing when he refers to an event that affected him personally and of which he himself gives a good account in the following passage:

“Postremo ad id indignitatis est ventum, ut cum peregrini ob formidatam haut ita dudum alimentorum inopiam pellerentur ab urbe praecipites, sectatoribus disciplinarum liberalium inpendio paucis sine respiratione ulla extrusis, tenerentur mimarum adseclae veri, quique id simularunt ad tempus, et tria milia saltatricum ne interpellata quidem cum choris totidemque remanerent magistris”

He mentions that, due to a famine, he himself was part of the group of foreigners forced to leave Rome in 383¹⁴, while, despite the shortage, 3.000 *saltatrices* and numerous members of the world of the *scaena* obtained permission to remain in the city, by virtue, no doubt, of the predilection that even certain aristocratic sectors felt for these diversions rather than for study and erudition. For this reason, Ammianus writes from disappointment and resentment, not only when he was expelled from the city, but especially because of the comparison that supposed to be undervalued in front of the *saltatrices* and other people on the scene, with whom he was always very critical, without any of the members of the most privileged circle to which he belonged had prevented it.

Even more critical is a fragment of the Latin Anthology, where likewise the infamous character of *saltatores*, *saltatrices*, and second-rate artists is outlined. Because of their itinerant way of life and because of the movements and gestures of the body, they were considered indecent, against *decorum*, and they did not have the same economic and social position as other artists or professional actors. Some Artists even received fierce criticism for their lousy art:

*In psaltriam foedam
Cum fallas misero, Gatlula, corpore
Nec cui (iuam libiilo est, liorritla, quod facis,
Insauam potius te probo psaltriam,
Quae focdani faciem motibus iigraues
Et, dum displiceas, (iuos(ue feras iocos.
Credis, (luod populos cymbala mulceant,
Nemo iudicium tale animi gerit,
Pro te ut non etiam gaudia deserant?*

(AL, Epigr. 361).

Something similar is observed in the eastern part of the Empire at that time, since between 386-395 the most radical homilies of John Chrysostom in *Antiocheia* against spectacles and, specifically, against the theater, were pronounced furiously against those who act in the *scaena* and against the Christians who were attending as spectators, because, as a paradox, the officially Christian state maintained the organization of most of the spectacles, even under the presidency of the maximum responsible of the official conversion, Theodosius. He himself is represented in the company of his two sons in the reliefs of the base created in 390 to erect the obelisk from Egypt at Constantinople, where the organ, scenes of mime and the *saltatrices* playing the *crotala* are documented, as a reflection of the *interludi* held in the *circus* (Kiilerich 1998: 57-60, 163 fig. 71; Simpson 2000: 633-639; Nelis-Clément 2002: 265-302).

14 Guzmán 2006: 427-438; Harto 2016. However, it is known that, despite having been effectively expelled from Rome, he soon returned thanks to the help of Simmaco, of whose cult circle with Eunapio, Oribasio or Libanio he was part.

Even more revealing, John Chrysostom in another of his writings also condemns anyone who “invites mimes and pantomimes and prostitutes to the banquets of his house, turning his house into a theater” (*Expositio in Psalmum* 41), and documents the characteristic practice of pagan banquets from centuries ago¹⁵ that, according to Chrysostom’s reference, continued to be held in Antioch at the end of the 4th century AD.

Regarding the evenings organized in the domestic and private sphere of the “pagan” banquets, it is worth highlighting the exceptional depiction of a concert of music in a mosaic found in a *villa* in Mariamin (Zaqzuq-Duchesne-Guillemin 1970: 93- 125 figs. 1-28; Duchesne-Guillemin 1975: 99-111; Balty 1977: 94-100; Balty 1995: 72 pl. XVII; Neira 2021: 160-165 fig. 39), in the former province of Syria, which has also been dated to the Theodosian period¹⁶ (Fig. 23).

Figure 23
Mariamin mosaic. Hama Museum.
Photo: Public domain.



Originally, the mosaic paved a reception salle, the villa’s *triclinium*, where diners would occupy the apse head, possibly the *stibadium*, and contemplate the scene represented in the rectangular part of the room. Framed by an acanthus border decorated with hunting *erotes* on a black background, the field included six standing female musicians with several instruments. From right to left, a young woman plays the cymbals, while, judging by her right foot, according to Kiilerich (Kiilerich 2011: 91 figs. 1, 12 and 18; Kiilerich 2017: 107) dance; another the *kythara*, a third with individual chopsticks in his hands on two of the eight metal bowls, on a table completely covered with a large tablecloth down to the ground, which have been identified by Böhm as an *oxybaphon* (Böhm 1998: 47-73), the fourth the double *tibia*, the fifth the *hydraulis*¹⁷, aided by two erotes, in an attitude of stepping on the bellows of the organ, and behind them in the background, finally, the sixth with the *crotale* (Cottet 2022: 1-43).

¹⁵ From the late republican to the imperial times, Cf. Neira 2021: 43-44; 100 note 109, respectively.

¹⁶ Against the earliest date given by its discoverer, Balty 1977: 98; Balty 1995: 77; and Dunbabin 1999: 171-172 note 21, highlight the style known as Theodosian and advocate a dating to the end of the 4th century AD. However, by virtue of one of the instruments depicted, the *oxybaphon* that one of the musics plays, Böhm 1998: 65, he finds it impossible for the mosaic to be earlier than 400/450 AD. See below.

¹⁷ On this type of organ, Perrot 1973: 99-105.

Among these instruments, the so-called *oxybaphon*¹⁸ stands out for its singularity. Only is documented in a depiction of the identified as the pharaoh's banquet in the illuminated manuscript known as the Vienna Genesis¹⁹, from 500/550 AD, where, however, there are four bowls on a table those who play with a stick in each hand one of the songs, also together with another with the double flute (Fig. 24).



Figure 24
Genesis Vienna. Österreichische
Nationalbibliothek. Photo: according to P.
Gavrili.

In this miniature a passage from Genesis (Gen. 40.20) is evoked about the banquet offered by the pharaoh, in which he replaced the chief of his butlers and condemned the chief of the bakers, according to the interpretation and prediction of Joseph, but the image shows a banquet with the diners around a *stibadium* in the typical way of Late Antiquity and the figures of three other men in an attitude of offering and serving the wine to the diners, so they can be identified as the servants, although they are represented with theatrical masks.

Despite illustrating a biblical episode that took place in the Egyptian past, the scene responds in the late-ancient way²⁰ and, in this sense, reminds us of those banquets to which John Chrysostom alluded when he criticized and condemned “everyone who invites mimes and pantomimes and prostitutes to the banquets of his house, turning his house into a theater”. Based on this image, musicians would also have been invited, in this case female musicians, as Neiiendam suggested (Neiiendam 1992: 104).

Returning to the depiction of the Mariamin mosaic, several researchers have interpreted it as a staging of a concert of female musicians in the theater (Balty 1977: 94-100; Dareggi 1993: 19-30; Kiilerich 2011: 88, 103-105), by as the performance is developed on a *podium*, reproduced in detail, formed by individual wooden boards joined by nails, well perceptible, on three partially visible arches, probably with an acoustic function, in the manner of the *hypopodia*²¹ for *symphonia*, while several panels appear arranged as a backdrop,

18 The *oxybaphoi* described by Chappell 1874: 293, as small cymbals with the same shape as those metal bowls destined for vinegar, which the Romans also used silver, designating them for this reason *acetabula*, are the object of analysis by Gavrili 2006: 49-65.

19 Preserved in the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. Vindob. Theol. Gr. 31, fol. 17 v. See Zimmermann 2003.

20 Expositio in Psalmum 41. Not in vain it responds to a prototype from the 4th century AD. cf. Weitzmann 1978; Gavrili 2006; Gavrili 2010: 11, who calls it the banquet of Herod Antipas.

21 Gebhard 1996: 119-120, “hypopodia for the symphonia (musicians) and ventures that they could have been large wooden platforms to provide better acoustics for the musicians and to separate them for

movable walls, which, nevertheless, give an appearance of provisionality to the stage, according to Böhm²².

In favor of this interpretation of the concert of female musicians in a theater and before a large audience, some of the aforementioned authors indicate the complexity and, therefore, the training required to play several of these instruments, specifically, the *hydraulos*, the *kythara* and the *oxybaphon*, for which a special skill worthy of a professional is needed, as well as their correct depiction in the mosaic (Perrot 1973: 103-104), and others allude to precedents such as contracts documented in papyri, in particular from Egypt, although from previous centuries, which attest to the hiring of female musicians, *krotalistris*, identified with their name, also pantomimes, dancers and musicians, to perform in various functions for a few days within the context of local festivals (Westermann 1924: 137; Kiilerich 2011: 98-99).

On the contrary, Böhm (Böhm 1998: 60-63) ruled out that they were in fact authentic music professionals, since far from having been captured in the instant of playing the instrument, they seemed to show them, as a reflection rather of the style of cultured life and privileged status, that arises from the appearance and attitude of the six female figures. Along these lines, Molholt (Molholt 2005: 201, 222-227) also rejected the professional nature of female musicians and advocated its belonging to a high-level family group, which, by virtue of the physiognomic characteristics between 15 and 30 years, seems to be posing; while Gavriili (Gavriili 2010: 8-12) interprets the Mariamin scene, apart from *agones* and public or semi-public festivals, as the representation of a concert during a private banquet, exposing as arguments the survival of this custom of organizing banquets enlivened with various entertainment even in Late Antiquity.

In this regard, it should be remembered the quotation of Macrobius (Macr. Sat. 3.14.4), when he said that before the table had been used for entertainment, probably alluding to the space, the room, where the food of the banquet itself was tasted, and the mention of Gregory of Nyssa when expressing that musicians, female musicians, *saltatrices* and mimes performed in an extravagantly rich house (Greg. Nyss. Paup. I).

According to Böhm the appearance of the six female figures, their costumes, hairstyles and jewels and, in particular, their solemnity, in the way of the wives and daughters of a notable male in Syrian society, just like six other women depicted in a banquet in a Antioch tomb's mosaic from the same period (Dunbabin 2003: pl. 14; Cimok 2000: 230-231; Gavriili 2010: 10 note 11), seems to be moving away from the image of a musical company, hired to perform in a theater before a large audience, since the stage as an argument would not justify the identification with a theatrical building in the strict sense, since, judging by the provisional nature of the background, based on mobile panels that can be easily placed or removed, it could well be an improvised montage for this genre of musical interventions in reception rooms of a *domus* in the urban or rural environment.

At this point, it could then be considered a group of female musicians hired to give a concert on the stage composed for the occasion in the context of a banquet at the residence of a *domus* or *villa*, from whose patronage the *dominus*

others performers"; Kiilerich 2011: 88

²² Böhm 1998: 49. Also Kiilerich 2011: 88, in order to be able to change the scene with certain speed for the exhibition of another later number.

would have wanted to leave constancy²³, in the same line of different events of other *domini*. However, the prominence given to the six female figures and their instruments, as well as the detail of their faces and features, the redheads seem to be the youngest, who play the simplest instruments, the *crotala*, the cymbals and the double flute, the older brunettes the more complex instruments, the organ, the *kythara* and the *oxybaphon*, which would require more training and experience (Kiilerich 2011: 94-95) could also be an indication of their belonging to the *dominus* family of the town of Mariamin and at the time of his degree of knowledge, training, ability and specialization in an instrument²⁴, perhaps as a reflection of the cultural tradition, in which the study of music together with other sciences servants of philosophy had a fundamental role, and in opposition to the Christian vision and postulates that considered not only dance, but also song and music inappropriate and dangerous for Christian morality²⁵.

Despite the obvious differences between the women who appear linked to different instruments in the Mariamin mosaic and the *saltatrices* Eleni and Criscentia on the Trier pavement, the testimony of ancient authors and the representations of Visual Culture about servants, musicians and female dancers, among others, that have been cited seem to confirm the custom, current still at the end of the 4th century AD. C. and in Late Antiquity, to celebrate banquets enlivened by various attractions, among which music and dance played an important role.

Considering that both the servants and the *saltatrices* in the *Augusta Treverorum* mosaic were part of the celebration of a banquet, the next question is what type of banquet. In this regard, it must be remembered that Moreau, by virtue of the scenes documented in the irregular octagons with concaves sides, defined it as a ritual feast in the context of a mystery cult.

In this regard, on the theory later defended by numerous authors, which advocates the identification of the figurative representations in the Trier mosaic as allusive to a mystery cult, it could be objected that precisely the mystery character of this type of cults implies a secrecy, even hermeticism, which in our opinion clashes with the representation of the rituals in the mosaic of a room, whose context has been linked according to this hypothesis to a building destined for this supposed mystery cult, without providing any evidence about its original functionality.

In my view, the identification of the main scenes as the expression of criticism, even mockery, on the part of a Christian *dominus*, belonging to a rising sector in the *Augusta Treverorum* at the end of the fourth century, should be discarded, since, in addition to the non-existence of parallels regarding this procedure, how a Christian *dominus* or a Mosaic artisan could have known the rituals of a mystery nature, and in this sense, exclusively for initiates. A convert, perhaps? However, even in this case, even from a critical perspective, the representation of rituals would not have made sense, which in this way would have been given more diffusion and publicity.

23 This was already expressed by González Galera 2016: 114.

24 Admitting that it was depiction of a real concert, it is logical to ask then, if it is presumable that the sound of the instruments represented here was combined and, ultimately, if the image is credible as a sequence of the beginning of a concert. Today it is impossible to answer this question rigorously, although in principle the sound seems strange and alien to what is known to date, since the sound of the organ would make the sound of the rest of the instruments inaudible, except that, as Perrot 1973: 103-104, estimated in their detailed description of the organ only a pressure of 10 cm was achieved of water, away from 30 cm most common, producing a sweet and elegant sound.

25 According to Ashbrook-Harvey 1983: 293, at the end of the 2nd century AD. Christians considered heretics and those who were delighted with this type of music, wrote hymns that were sung in Edessa by girls' choirs. The Church Fathers, however, reacted against female singing and denied women any participation in church songs and readings (Hannick 1980: 368). See Resta 2014: 215-237.

The study of the onomastic of servants and *saltatrices* reflects Greeks *cognomina* - Calemer (us), Eusebius, Paregorius, Theodulus and Eleni - and Latin *cognomina*, Criscentia, Felix, Florus and Secundus, names in common use in Late Antiquity, often carried, mainly by servants and slaves (Städele 2008-2009: 346 note 12), some surely from other provinces. This is the case, among others, of Calemerus, a servant's name, common in the Greek provinces, although not in the north-western (Moreau 1960: 13), and that of Andegasus, a name of Gallic origin (Eiden 1950: 61; Städele 2008-2009: 347). Theodulus and Qodvoldeus probably referring to Quodvultdeus - attested in *Augusta Treverorum*, but also in Sardinia, Sicily and North Africa - are undoubtedly Christian names, probably also Crescentia and Eusebius (Städele 2008-2009: 346 note 8).

However, much more complex is, by virtue of their names, the religious affiliation of those represented on which various speculations have been made (Städele 2008-2009: 346 note 12). In this line, the equalization of the origin of the name with the beliefs of the designated person would lead us to identify Christians participating in rituals of mystery cults or, on the contrary, Christians who make fun of the pagan rituals practiced by characters identified as Christians.

But then, what would have been the significance of the main scenes located in the two great irregular octagons with concave sides that, since the discovery of the mosaic, led to their identification as ritual images of a mystery cult?

At this point, if, judging by the analysis of the figures of servants and *saltatrices* on the Trier pavement and the parallels exposed, we identified the context of a banquet, it would be possible to think of both scenes as images of other activities of the convivial atmosphere and suggest if the two scenes represented, of confused interpretation, do not really allude to scenic representations, perhaps mime, since they are images that combine one the daily nature of entanglement and the other the mythological theme, as part of the entertainment offered at the banquet.

Regarding the scene of "prestidigitation" starring Qodvoldeus, Felex and Andegasivs, that was identified as a parody (Schwartz - Hatt 1987: 37-45), if its link to practices of a mystery cult is disregarded, it could well be explained as one of the attractions destined to the amusement of the guests at a banquet, along the lines indicated above in the aforementioned Antioch mosaic and in the fragmentary of *Carthago*, preserved in the Louvre.

In relation to the diversity of attractions and numbers offered to the delight of those attending a banquet, let us not forget the famous story of the *Cena Trimalchionis* (Petr. Sat. 27-78), from the middle of the 1st century AD. Despite being work of fiction, it seems unanimous that the description is at least plausible. In this regard, in addition to the extensive references and details about the setting, the crockery, the food, the glasses, the wines and the conversations held between the host and the guests, it is worth highlighting the starring of the musicians at different moments of the evening (Petr. Sat. 28, 5; 31, 5-7; 32, 1, 4; 34, 1; 36, 1, 6; 53, 11-13; 68, 5; 78, 5), and, in particular, the scenic presentation of the delicacies, according to which nothing is what it seems to the surprise and astonishment of the diners, as can be seen in the case of the wooden hen that had turkey eggs inside it, in reality works of pastry, and the case of the mythological decoration based on Pegasus and Marsyas in another of the foods served on a large tray (Petr. Sat. 32, 3-7; 36, 1-4).

The rise of the *praestigia* transcended the circle of banquets. This is how remembered by Tedeschi (Tedeschi 2019, notes 100 and 23, respectively), who

recalls that Quintilian (Inst. X.7.11) describes the exhibitions of *praestigiatores* y *ventilatores*, while Apuleyo (Flor. 18) confessed how in the Carthago theater it was possible to attend numbers of different types: in addition to recitals of tragic and comic actors, exhibitions of mimes, pantomimes, funambulistes and *praestigiatores*. In this same line, Dasen (Dasen 2019: 134 note 56) insists by placing the *praestigiator* in the same universe of the mime, citing Pliny. It is not surprising, if we consider the criticisms, later, by Arnobio, who in his *Adversus Nationes* does not limit himself to a generalized rejection of the spectacles, with affirmations in which he expresses his desire to “demolish, destroy these theaters, where they are made public daily in representation infamies against the gods”, since in his condemnation he offers a detailed repertoire of all the varieties (Arnob. Nat. 2.42) that took place there, from the “obscene” songs sung by the musicians, as well as the “lascivious” movements of the dancers, “lifting the buttocks and thighs” and “wagging the waist”, identifying of course the women dedicated to music and dance and the actresses with prostitutes, and listing all the professionals linked to the entertainment world, “The pantomime comedians, the mimes, the histriones, the singers, those who play the trumpet, the flutes, the reed, the runners, the boxers, the charioteers, the acrobats, the who walk on stilts, acrobats, *praestigiatores*” (Arnob. Nat. 2.38).

On the mythological representation, the interest arisen by this legend in theatrical performances is already attested by Juvenal, who literally quotes a pantomime entitled Leda (Sat. 6.63-66):

*“chironomon Ledam molli saltante Bathyllo
Tuccia uesicae non imperat, Apula gannit,
[sicut in amplexu, subito et miserabile longum.]
Attendit Thymele: Thymele tunc rustica discit.”*

Nor can it be forgotten that the mythological scene about the birth of the Dioscuri and Helena, where the name of Clytemnestra is omitted, is with the same omission the title and subject of an epigram - De Castore, Polluce et Helena - by Ausonio (Epigr. 54), the famous poet from *Burdigala*, who lived several years in *Augusta Treverorum*, who, according to several researchers, could have written it by looking at the pavement²⁶.

*Istos, tergemino nasci quos cernis ab ovo,
patribus ambiguis et matribus assere natos.
hos genuit Nemesis, sed Leda puerpera fovit;
Tyndareus pater his et Iuppiter – hic putat, hic scit.*

Regardless of whether Ausonius had written his epigram when he saw the mosaic, it is true that the inclusion of epigraphs identifying the protagonists of the mythological scene could be an indication in favor of its interpretation as depiction of a mime, since both the male figure designated under the name AGAMEMNON as the female named LYDA have been captured in a truly scenographic attitude, which perhaps, by appearing without a mask, it could suppose that we are really facing the depiction of a *mimus* and a *mima* in the course of a performance during the celebration of a great banquet.

²⁶ The reference to Ausonio is already contained in Schwartz - Hatt 1985: 37. Although Green 1991: XIII, 61, 81-82, does not consider it necessary, the epigram De Castore, Polluce et Helena, would have been written when seeing the mosaic according to Cagian de Azevedo 1976: 89-91. On Ausonio and Trier, see Kröner 1979: 10-19. Regarding the various variants of the legend, Ruiz de Elvira 1974: 107-109, refers that the version about the birth of Helena and the twins from the same egg dates back to the *Cypria* (fragm. 8,3), citing it in schol. Callim. In Dian 232, schol. Arat. 273 and Eustath. 1321.38, and later by Ausonius (Epigr. 54). More recently, Marcos Pérez 2000, 203-221.

On these performances, Suetonius (Aug. 74) tells that Augusto liked to entertain the intervals of the banquets “*et aut acroamata et histriones aut etiam triviales ex circo ludios interponebat ac frequentius aretalogos*” (Perea 2004: 26, note 100). Dunbabin (Dunbabin 2004: 161-182 notes 27-28) recalls that Domitian allowed the actors to perform in the houses, she mentions Ummidia Quadratilla who, with her own company, in her case, of pantomimes, was exhibited so much in the theater as in the houses, and, in the same line, the author also alludes to a text by Plutarch (Mor. 712E) that, by criticizing in the words of one of his characters certain mimes - *paignia* - as inappropriate for a *symposium*²⁷, documented and confirmed the staging also mimes in the context of a banquet.

As has already been mentioned when referring to the protagonists of music and dance at banquets, far from limiting these mentions to the first centuries of Empire, the custom of acting in the private and domestic sphere would have survived at the end of the 4th and early 5th centuries, judging by the critic of John Chrysostom condemning in one of his discourses everyone who “invites mimes and pantomimes and prostitutes to the banquets of his house, turning his house into a theater” (Chrys. Expositio in Psalmum 41), and by the comment of Gregory of Nyssa when expressing that in an extravagantly rich house musicians, female musicians, *saltatrices* and mimes performed (Greg. Nyss. Paup. I).

Likewise, from another perspective, Macrobius mentions that before the table, the room had been used for entertainment, probably alluding to the space, the room, where the food banquet itself was tasted (Macr. Sat. 3.14.4) and Olympiodoros quotes Constancius²⁸, “joking at table with the mimes performing before him”

Ἐν δὲ δείπνοις καὶ συμποσίοις τερπνὸς καὶ πολιτικὸς, ὡς καὶ ἐρίζειν τοῖς μίμοις πολλάκις, παίζουσι πρὸ τῆς τραπέζης” (Olymp. fr. 23 =*FHG* IV,6,2).

Mentions of Chrysostom and Gregory of Nyssa document a typical practice of pagan banquets that continued to be celebrated in Antioch in the late 4th century AD. and in general in the eastern part of the Empire, while the quotations from Macrobius and Olympiodoros refer to the survival of this tradition also in the western part of the Empire, even into the 5th century.

To the verification of this custom by ancient authors, being of particular relevance the mentions of those contemporaries of the *Augusta Treverorum* mosaic, it is also necessary to add its representation in the visual arts.

In this sense, the most representative is the aforementioned miniature of the so-called Pharaoh's banquet in the illuminated manuscript known as the Vienna Genesis, with the unmistakable image of a banquet with four assistants around a *stibadium* in the typical way of Late Antiquity and, in addition to the characters alluding to the episode and the two female musicians mentioned, three figures that, captured in an attitude of offering and serving the wine to the guests, could be identified as the servants, although they appear represented with theater masks, alluding to the celebration of a scenic representation during the *symposium*.

And perhaps also, although reflecting a different context, we should mention the mosaic of the *villa* of Noheda in the *Carthaginensis*, from the end of the 4th century AD. (Fernández-Galiano 2010: 111-136; Valero 2015; Neira in press),

27 According to a character of Plutarch, because these *paignia* were so full of *bomolochia* and *spermologia* that they were not fit even for the slaves who look after their masters' shoes; but he adds that *hoi polloi*, even when there are women and children present, exhibit *mimémata* of words and deeds that are more disruptive even than drunkenness” (Dunbabin 2004: notes 27-28).

28 Obviously, this is Constantius III, who, having reached the dignity of patrician, briefly became co-emperor of the Western Roman Empire in 421 with Honorius.

which paves the great room of the residence. Specifically, the allusive scenes to the *certamina athletarum* and the scenic and musical representations that appear in two registers in two panels, to the left and right of the central pond, as part of an *agon gymnicus* (Lancha 2011: 127-170; Valero 2011: 103-126; Neira 2018: 307-308 pls. 29-30), a *musical agon* and an *agon scenicus* (Valero 2015; Dunbabin 2016: 120-122).

On the *agon scenicus*, it is noteworthy that in both panels appears the representation of a Roman theater, with the colonnaded *proscenium*, a wooden stage, with curtains on the sides and garlands in the upper area, where the characters appear, practically the same in both panels, although in different poses and attitudes. Among them, judging by the mask and the characteristic attitude, stands out a pantomime, accompanied, on the left side, by a group, among whom is a man playing the *scabellum*, two women probably playing the *chorus*, and two children with the hydraulic organ, while to the right is a *citharista*, a child and a group made up of a *tibicen* with a double *tibia*²⁹ with a mask and a man in a white dress, probably a poet or an orator, and at the end two figures, whose heads are affected by a deterioration, on two high platforms, undoubtedly the characteristic *cothurni* of tragic actors (Fig. 25). Except for the organist that is preserved in the second panel B, to the north, the most notable difference is the group located on the far right, where, instead of the tragic actors, there is a scene identified by an inscription in Latin letters such as the mime of the jealous husband.



Figure 25
Noheda mosaic. Detail panel with depiction
agon scenicus. Photo: Courtesy of J. Latova.

In this regard, in addition to containing the only representation of a pantomime in mosaic, really two (Neira 2021: 165-167 figs. 35, 41), the Noheda mosaic documents the survival of adultery mimes until Late Antiquity, being the object of the critic by Augustine of Hippo³⁰. Named by an inscription in Latin letters, MIMUS ZELOTYPI NUMFI, the staging of the mime of the jealous husband³¹ (Fig. 26) contains, as has been masterfully described by Dunbabin (Dunbabin

29 Pêché 1995: 71-91, on this instrument in comedies and pantomimes.

30 It should be remembered that *Historia Augusta* (HA. Heliog. 25.4) refers to how the emperor Heliogabalus ordered that “in mimic functions adulteries be actually consumed, and not in a simulated way as they used to be” (*In mimis adulteriis ea quae solent simulato fieri effici ad verum iussit*), a custom that must have continued until two centuries later, since it was the object of fierce criticism by Augustine of Hippo (Agust. Civ. Dei 2.26, written between 412 and 426. See Rodríguez Gervais 1999: 263-273; Neira 2021: 122-123; 134-137). Also Puchner 2002: 311.

31 Lledó 2010; Valero 2013: 316; Uscatescu 2013: 382-384, who recalls that Juvenal (Sat. 8, 196-197) is the only author who explicitly mentions *zelotypus*, a role played by the actor Thymeles; Lancha-Le Roux 2017: 201-217.

Figure 26
Noheda mosaic. Detail panel with depiction
of *mimus*. Photo: Courtesy of J. Latova.



2016: 120-122), the most characteristic characters and elements of this type of mime³², with the spouses, sitting side by side, with a prosperous appearance, he dressed in a toga, bald and with large ears, as typical features of the *stupidus* in mime³³, she well dressed, combed and jeweled. Despite a gap, it is still possible to appreciate that the wife is chained with a chain on her left wrist to the left wrist of her husband, who, exchanging their glances, points with his extended right hand, as if indicating the reason for his mistrust, towards the left part of the scene, where, behind a screen or a door, a half-dressed young man waits hidden, the same as in the background a figure emerging from a bed³⁴, apparently prevented by another woman, almost as elegant than the one in the foreground. At the husband's feet a young child appears sitting with his hands over his eyes, undoubtedly crying.

But, beyond the traditions and novelties of the mime depicted in Noheda, its inclusion among the events organized and selected by the *dominus* to leave a mark on the memory of its generosity and culture raised some questions for Dunbabin (Dunbabin 2016), who wonders to what extent this image reflects the real survival of representations of mimes in the West and, specifically, in *Hispania*. In this regard, at the same time of the Noheda mosaic, we echo the quote from Perea (Perea 2004: 43. Salvian. *gub. Dei* 6.8; 6.31; Paul. Nol. *Epist.* 14.1; 15.4; 19.1; 31.5; and Vict. Vit. *De pers. vand.* 1.159), who mentions how Salvian³⁵ in Germania attacked the performance of a mime or Pauline of Nola against another in southern Gaul around the year 398, while in Hispanic lands, around the year 428, an archimimus named Mascula, possibly a eunuch, acted.

Analyzing the two panels, with the representation of *certamina athletarum*, the

32 As Dunbabin 2016: 121, note 54, and Lancha-Le Roux 2017: 208-209 clearly point out, it is about the representation of the mime actors and actresses who embodied the characters of the work, not the *dominus* of the *villa*, no matter how fond that he was at mime, as proposed by Valero - Gómez Pallarès 2013: 97-103, since in no case would he want to be represented in the role of the stupid cuckold. See Neira 2021: 135 note 192.

33 Particularly documented in terracotta figurines (Dunbabin 2016: 122-127).

34 A couple and a bed are also seen in a relief from Ephesos (Uscatescu 2013: 284).

35 For Salvian, as Blázquez 1990: 59, cited "las obscenidades del teatro son tales que no se pueden contar decentemente; manchan al actor y al espectador. Todos los espectadores aprueban y contemplan con satisfacción estos espectáculos: son actores al aprobarlos".

musical *agôn* and various scenic modalities, among which the two pantomimes and the mime stand out, the evocation of *agones* of great tradition in the festivals organized in cities of the eastern part of the Empire seems unquestionable, but also of games such as those referred by Claudian (Claud. De Consulatu Fl. Malli. Theodori, 316-320), who describes the games organized in Mediolanum in 398 to celebrate the election of Flavio Manlio Teodoro as consul, mentioning, along with gladiators, buffons, funambulistes and tightrope walkers, aulets, lyre and *hydraulis* players, pantomimes, comical and tragic actors, and also citing mimic representations in the water in which the naked young women, when swimming, formed with their lewd bodies, boats. In short, some *agônes*, of which the rich and culted *dominus* of Noheda obviously wanted to put on record, evidencing a generosity typical of the most evergetism (Neira 2021: 134-137 fig. 35, 41).

Having documented the survival of these events, among others, in the western part of the Empire, it is worth wondering if the aforementioned representations in the Noheda mosaic allude to the desire of his *dominus* to record the sponsorship of these competitions and performances in the building for this purpose in the public context of a city, not always clearly identified, as has been generally assumed when studying the *circus ludi* scenes in mosaics, several *ludi* in the amphitheater's *arena*, theatrical performances, Greek games, etc. However, it is also worth asking if some of these representations could reflect the sponsorship of one of these events in a more private context, specifically those whose organization was possible in the context of a residence in urban or rural areas, such as the *lutta*, the *pugilato* and the *pancratio* between the *certamina athletarum*, for whose modalities were not a *conditio sine qua non* a great infrastructure, and musical competition and the staging of a comedy, a tragedy, a pantomime or a mime, for whose representation could be performed in temporary stage, with mobile structures. Along these lines, it is possible to consider whether the events represented in the two mentioned panels of the Noheda mosaic could be the demonstration of some *ludi* organized in the context of their own *villa*³⁶, since on the one hand the epigraphy testifies to the amount dedicated by certain members of the elites to the organization of small *certamina athletarum* (Neira 2018: 300-308), while on the other hand the aforementioned mentions by ancient authors about the custom of inviting mimes and pantomimes to perform in the domestic enclosure from high imperial times to Late Antiquity documents a practice that the *dominus* of Noheda could have exercised, especially if the setting with wooden planks is considered, well visible, perhaps in reference to the configuration of a provisional scene, articulated for these occasions.

Be that as it may, the Noheda mosaic documents and confirms the survival, among others, of scenic representations also in the western part of the Empire at the end of the 4th century AD. and its expression among the events sponsored by a *dominus* comes to highlight the prestige that the organization and financing of it supposed for the members of the elites.

In this sense, it is possible to propose that from the diversity, some *domini* would have preferred the depiction of a great banquet, with the explicit figuration of the diners, as in Sant'Angelo in Formis, *Carthago* (Douar-Chott) and *Germanicia*, where in the latter the inclusion of servants carrying all kinds of delicacies and drinks is very significant - also present in the fragmentary *Carthago* pavement

36 Lancha-Le Roux 2017: 201, begin their article by describing that the mosaic paves pavimenta "une pièce à trois absides qu'il faut qu'il faut identifier à un *triclinium* de *villa urbana* (l'un des plus grands jusqu'ici attestés: 290,64 m²), dont le modèle se diffuse à partir de la fin du III^e siècle ap. J.-C. pour accueillir banquets et spectacles selon un rituel hiérarchisé".

that is preserved in the Louvre - as well as musicians and dancers. An image completed by actors in the Vienna Genesis, on whose performance, among others, the powerful *dominus* of Noheda puts the emphasis.

Along these lines, it is worth asking whether the *dominus* of the pavement found in *Augusta Treverorum* would not have also wanted to boast, like the *domini* of *Carthago*, of the expense made in organizing a great banquet, not hesitating to show details of the preparations and the varieties offered - delicacies, wine, music and dance - through the numerous repertoire of male servants represented in various occupations and the two dancers to the sound of the *crotala* that enlivened the *comissatio*, so in vogue even at the end of the 4th century AD, who, all of them, through identification with a name, Calemer, Eleni, Eisebvs, Paregorivs and Theodvlvs of Greek origin, Criscentia, Felix, Florvs and Secvndvs, Latin names in common use in Late Antiquity, often carried mainly by slaves (Städele 2008-2009: 346 note 12)³⁷ personalize the mosaic, give it greater verism and further highlight the *status* of the *dominus* (Neira 2011: 399-406). But, in addition, the Trier's *dominus* would have liked to record one of the greatest attractions of the *symposia* held in the domestic sphere, perhaps a *praestigiatio* and the stellar depiction of a mime of those based on a mythological legend, such as that of Leda and the birth of Helena and the twins, of marked scenographic character.

37 Binsfeld - Ghetta 2019: 190-260. On the names of the male servants and the *saltatrices* in the pavement found in Trier, as well as on the epigraphs that appear in the main scenes, the most detailed study is that of Städele 2008-2009: 343-351, with the bibliography more complete.

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