

Looking at Two Patterns Inspired in Coffered Ceilings: Some Examples in the Portuguese Roman Mosaics

Tavan Süslemelerinden Esinlenen İki Motifin İncelenmesi: Portekiz-Roma Dönemi Mozaiklerinden Bazı Örnekler

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Abstract

For the present study, we selected a set of Portuguese Roman mosaics in which the orthogonal grid compositions and adjacent octagons forming squares are present, supposedly inspired by the coffered ceilings. Therefore, in this study we try to ascertain:

1. *Their degree of proximity to the pattern of the ceilings that have originated them;*
2. *Their relationship with other patterns and decorative motifs, occurring in the same mosaic pavement;*
3. *Their relationship with the functionality of the architectural space in which they are integrated.*

In the interweaving of this data and given the timelines of the different mosaics, we will try to elaborate conclusions on the application of these patterns to certain architectural spaces; the frequency of their use, either alone or in conjunction with other patterns in the same mosaic; the possible link of the mosaics in which these patterns occur with local or regional workshops, or even schools.

Keywords: *Portuguese Roman mosaics, grid compositions, adjacent octagons forming squares, decorative/structural relationships, workshops.*

Öz

Bu çalışmada, tavan süslemelerinden esinlenerek yapıldığı tahmin edilen sekizgen biçimli kareler ve dikey ızgara kompozisyonlarından oluşan bir grup Portekiz-Roma mozaikleri ele alındı. Bu çalışmanın sonucundaki tespitler;

1. *Tavan desenlerinden kaynaklanan motiflerin yakınlık dereceleri*
2. *Aynı mozaik döşemede görülen diğer desen ve dekoratif motiflerin ilişkileri*
3. *Desen ve dekoratif motiflerin bütünlüştüğü mimari mekanın işlevselliği ile ilişkileri*

İç içe geçmiş bu bilgilerin ve farklı mozaiklerin zaman çizelgelerinin verilmesinde ve bu desenlerin belirli mimari mekanlarda uygulanmasında sonuçları ortaya koymaya çalışacağız: bunların kullanım sıklığı, aynı mozaikte diğer desenlerle birlikte ya da tek başına kullanımı; bu motiflerin kullanıldığı mozaiklerle yerel ya da bölgesel atölyeler hatta okullarla mozaiklerin muhtemel bağlantısı.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Portekiz Roma mozaikleri, ızgara kompozisyonu, kareler oluşturan bitişik sekizgen, dekoratif/yapısal ilişkiler, atölyeler.*

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Compositions with squared pattern surface and adjacent octagons forming squares are very widespread patterns in *tessellatum* pavements, presenting a much extended chronological range. Their use dates back to the days when the Roman mosaic began to become independent from their Greek and Hellenistic predecessors, opting for linear geometric patterns, preferably dichromatic. The austerity in the use of colour and the geometrics present in the floor mosaics of the Italian Peninsula of an earlier period seem to be in accordance with the understanding of their structural nature, expressed in Vitruvius recommendations on the preparation of pavements in *sectilia* or *tesseræ* so that these coatings (*expolitiones*) would be able to become sufficiently resistant (Maciel 2006: 263-264; Vitr. 7, 1: 1-4)¹.

It seems plausible to think about the possibility of the mosaicists having been inspired by the patterns that the architectural structures of the ceilings in *lacunaria* offered them or by the “pseudo coffers”, painted or in stucco, to perform patterns identical to those in the mosaic pavement. In fact, the practice of using painting for the simulation of actual structures, such as the crossed wooden beams of the ceilings, is observed very early in some Etruscan tombs, in the coloured chess-board pattern that mimics the ceiling. And some *hypogea* of an Alexandrian necropolis, dated from the 2nd – 3rd centuries B.C., feature ceilings painted with coffers in different ways (Barbet 1985: 21 figs. 7-8)².

Both the great Greek architecture, classical and from the Hellenistic period, and the Roman architecture, in *opus caementicium*, offered various examples of ceilings in *lacunaria*. Coffers could be square, rectangular, in a diamond shape, hexagonal, etc., and a single building or a single compartment could present coffers with several dimensions, as was the case with the ceilings of the portico and the *pronaos* of the Hiéron of Samothrace (Ginouvès 1992: 137 note 36).

The slabs, frequently in marble, in which the *lacunaria* were carved, with two or three vertical planes, became lighter, but also more decorative due to the grading done, being this decorative value reinforced if the “ceiling” of the coffer itself would be painted or carved (Ginouvès 1992: 138 notes 40, 43-44 pl. 69.1-4)³. The stone cover of the bigger sides of the Parthenon shows us square coffers, with two vertical planes and the Hiéron of Samothrace, more deeply excavated, features three vertical planes.

The monumental Roman architecture, from a very early age, also offers us beautiful examples of coffers as the ones in the annular dome of the Sanctuary of Fortuna in Palestrina (Ginouvès 1992: pl. 69.4).

In the context of domestic architecture, one of the oldest examples of a ceiling with “pseudo coffers” in stucco is the “Casa dei Grifi” on the Palatine in Rome (Barbet 1985: 78 figs. 40-41).

The patterns using squares, adjacent octagons forming squares, diamonds, etc. would have inspired the decoration of the floor mosaics. It should be noted that some Italian mosaics of earlier chronology, with surface compositions that would imitate the ceilings, are treated in polychrome, possibly because of the

¹ Vitr. 7, 1, 3: *Supra nucleum ad regulam et libelam exacta pauimenta struantur siue sectilia seu tessaris.* Quote in Alves 2011: 950. According to the author, the structural nature of the Roman mosaic floor is quite explicit in this recommendation of Vitruvius, distinguishing itself from the nature of parietal mosaic that ‘emerged as a replacement of the mural painting at the time that this was an *ars moriens*.’

² On p.77, the author states: ‘Du fait des précédents alexandrins, on peut affirmer que la mode, qui s’étend à l’Italie, a toute chance de provenir d’Egypte.’

³ The author gives examples of decorated coffers, carved or painted.

fact that the mosaicists also considered the relationship with the polychrome painting of the ceilings. This way, a floor mosaic of Teramo, from the Sylla period or the mosaics of a House of the *Via Nomentana* in Rome, of the 2nd half of the 1st century B.C. (Lancha 1977: 34) would be considered examples. Gradually, however, and still on the Italian Peninsula since the beginning of the 1st century A.D., these compositional patterns used in the *tessellatum* start to become independent from the tectonic referents which have originated them, expanding in two colours, omitting frames in coffers and showing the designs of patterns by guilloche (Lancha 1977: 34)⁴, rows of tangent poised small squares, or other types of strips. In the centre of the “coffers”, instead of rosettes, helmets, melee weapons or shields, geometric and/or figurative decoration begins to be used (Lancha 1977: 35-36)⁵. These recreations by the mosaicists cause the relationship of the later mosaics with the *lacunaria* ceilings to only manifest itself or in the patterns used or in some of the referred decorations introduced in the coffers. Due to this, the patterns in question are presented in relation to the examples of mosaics coming from the Portuguese territory, whose vast majority is of late production.

From a fairly comprehensive *corpus* in which patterns occur in gridlines and in adjacent octagons forming squares, we have selected some mosaics that we subsequently present.

1. Grid-pattern (orthogonal)

This type of composition covers a very wide range of accomplishments. We only record the patterns in grid which present concentric squares in the grid's compartments, because we believe that their markings, performed by fillets inside the boxes of the grid would be a reflection, despite the distance, of the carving of the vertical levels of the ceilings coffers.

1.1. Grid of small poised squares

A. “Mosaic of Póvoa do Cós (I)”

One of the earliest examples of this pattern is dated from the end of the 1st century or 2nd century A.D. (Moita 1951: 149)⁶. It occurs in conjunction with other geometric patterns in a mosaic of a *Villa* of the *Conuentus Scallabitanus*, found in Pedrógão, parish of Cós, Alcobaça, Leiria, known as “the mosaic of Póvoa do Cós” (Fig. 1). According to the drawing that remains from it, kept in the National Archaeological Museum of Lisbon (Abraços 2005: Anexo II: 213), and according to the dimensions given on the sidelines of the drawing, its total area was 9,08 x 7,40 m (Moita 1951: 143). The area of mosaic presents three geometrical patterns, drawn with black and grey *tesserae* over a white background and a central carpet, with some polychrome, where it was drawn, in the centre,

⁴ The author cites the example of a pavement of the “House of the *Cryptoporticus*” in Pompeii, *Salone degli elefanti e degli filosofi* that considers an intermediate stage between the pattern directly imitating *lacunaria* and the pattern of square compartments connected by simple guilloche or bands of other type.

⁵ The author refers to the evolution that the decorative repertoire suffered in the Rodanian mosaics “à décor multiple”, in relation to the completion of the Italian pattern.

⁶ The author proposes this dating because of the stylistic characteristics of the mosaic which are added by the fact that a coin of Augustus was found in the rubble extracted from the mosaic. See the above article for Irisalva Moita also in: (http://www.patrimoniocultural.pt/static/data/publicacoes/o_arqueologo_portugues/serie_2/volume_1/mosaico_povoa_cos.pdf).

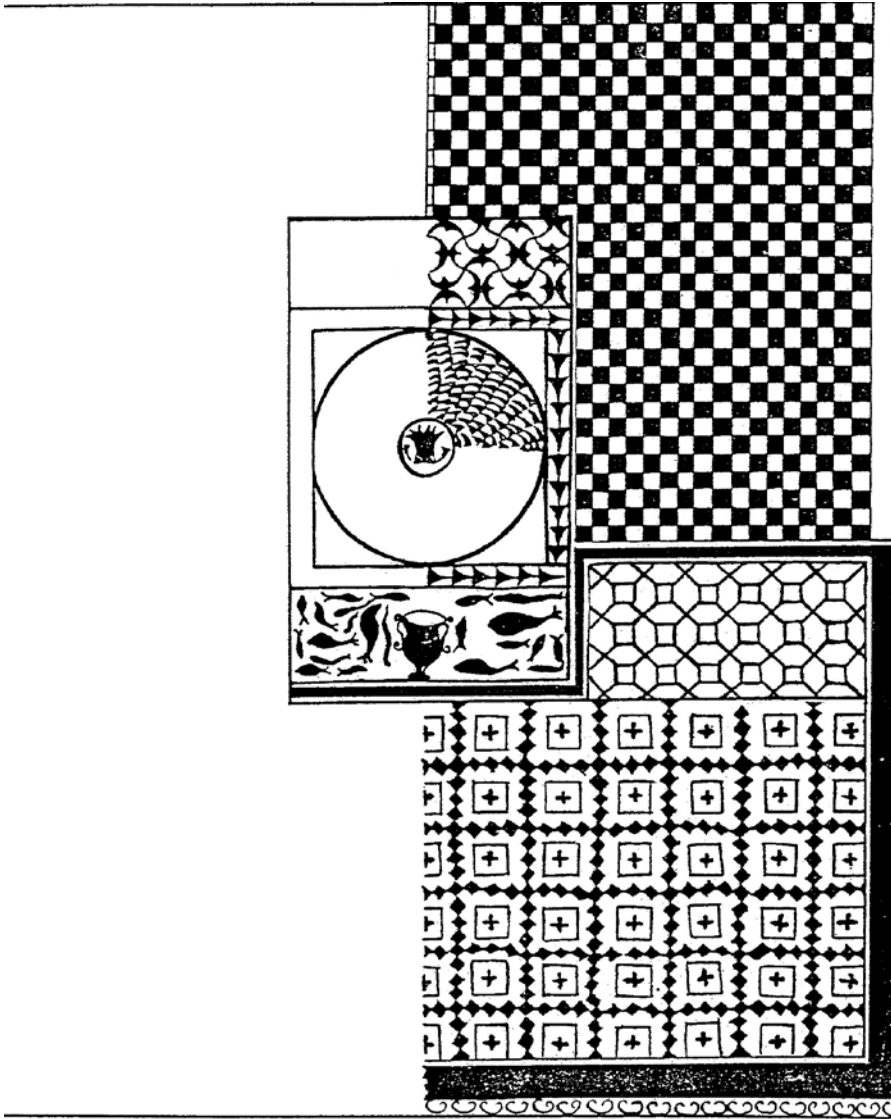


Figure 1
 “Mosaic of Póvoa do Cós (I)”,
impluuium? (Drawing)
 (Moita 1951: EST. I).

a radial head⁷. The chessboard pattern occupies the largest Panel on one side of the central carpet, juxtaposed to another opposite to it, with two patterns: one of smaller dimension with octagons adjacent and intersecting on the shorter sides, forming squares and oblong hexagons (Décor I: 169b, variety), and another one bigger with a grid of rows of tangent poised squares, forming stepped compartments (Décor I: 133d, variety of 133c). The squares enclosed are designed by a fillet, containing in the centres a motif that seems a small quatrefoil or a crosslet.

In the context of this pavement mosaic, the ornamental value of the grid-pattern is equivalent to that of the two other geometric patterns, all serving as framing to the figurative panel. It should be noted that the three geometric patterns used would have been originated in the imitation of the ceilings and that only the squares of the grid-pattern have decoration, possibly quatrefoils. These are a reminiscence of the vegetal decoration, often used in the coffered ceilings.

⁷ This panel is exposed in the National Archaeology Museum of Lisbon, being the sole survivor of the mosaic, in addition to small fragments of the remainder decoration. To read the iconography present in it, see: (Torres Caro 1989: 145-160; Mourão 2008: 38-41), who dates this panel from the end of the 2nd century, beginning of the 3th.

The pavement which this mosaic covered could be the one of an *impluvium* (Moita 1951: 148).

An identical pattern, also designed by poised squares, occurs in two floor mosaics of *Conimbriga*, *Conuentus Scallabitanus*, one from the “House of Cantaber” (Casa de Cantaber) and the “House of the Swastika Cross” (Casa da Cruz Suástica).

B. Mosaic of Conimbriga, “House of Cantaber” (Casa de Cantaber), cenatio

On the mosaic from the “House of Cantaber” (Casa de Cantaber) (Fig. 2), chronologically assigned to the mid or late 2nd century A.D. (Oliveira 2005: 51)⁸, the grid-pattern (Décor I: 20a) is limited to a wide band that would involve a central panel, from which it is only visible part of a strip with consoles in perspective and one half of the *cantharus*, on the corner. The pattern of this wide band is drawn with black *tesserae* over a white background. The squares concentric to the ones on the grid are marked by a double fillet, containing another concentric square lined by a narrow strip of black *tesserae*, giving the suggestion of a certain depth, as the one performed in the coffers of ceilings, carved in vertical planes. The decoration of the squares is geometric: cross of *scuta*, square of four *peltae*, pelta-wheel around a Solomon knot. Also in this mosaic, it is mainly the motif of the crossed *scuta* which reports us to the decoration of ceilings in *lacunaria*, where this motif was quite frequent, often performed in stucco.

Figure 2
Conimbriga, “Casa de Cantaber”,
cenatio. Photo LW 2005.

The linear and dichromatic representation of this pattern fits the flat surface of the pavement, contrasting with the polychrome and the representation of the



⁸ Mosaic n. 32, *Cenatio* (C 6). This fragment of mosaic (4, 60 x 3, 85 m) is exposed at the entrance of the ruins of *Conimbriga*. Its thorough analysis was performed by (Oleiro 1973: 76-92, Est. III-IV), dating this mosaic, with reservations, from the middle or the end of the 2nd century A.D.; (Pessoa 2005: 379), adds to the parallels singled out by Oleiro, in the work previously cited, a mosaic of Piacenza from the Augustus Period and another of Rome from the 2nd half of the 1st century B.C., quoting (Ghedini 1998: 178 figs. 1-2); See also (Abraços 2005: Annex I: 104-105).

consoles in perspective. These appear to support the central panel of a ceiling which appears as reflected in the mosaic (Oleiro 1973: 88-89).

It is assigned the functionality of *cenatio* to the room to which this mosaic belonged.

C. Mosaic of Conimbriga, “House of the Swastika Cross” (*Casa da Cruz Suástica*), *cubiculum*

In the “House of the Swastika Cross” (*Casa da Cruz Suástica*), a *cubiculum* of 3,50 X 3,00 m is paved by a mosaic made with a dichromatic technique (Fig. 3), dating from the 2nd half of the 3rd century (Oliveira 2005: 36)⁹. Although the grid pattern is designed by small poised squares, as in mosaics previously mentioned, unlike them, it presents poised squares inscribed in the squares of the grid (Décor I: 133c). The poised inscribed squares have a geometric decoration based on small squares (Pessoa 2005: 380 fig. 19)¹⁰.

The grid pattern, performed this way, seems to demonstrate the creativity of mosaicists in the carrying out of new combinations that, although being originated from models most directly linked to the pattern of *lacunaria*, progressively started to diverge from them.

1.2. Grid of simple guilloche

A. Mosaic of the Villa of Odrinhas

An example of this pattern is the polychromatic mosaic, *in situ*, which paves a room of the *Villa* of S. Miguel de Odrinhas, Sintra (*Conuentus Scallabitanus*), of 4,00 X 3,00 m, dating from the 1st half of the 4th century (Caetano 2008: 44-49) (Fig. 4). It features an orthogonal grid of an intersecting simple guilloche, framed by a three-strand guilloche. The compartments of the grid have a concentric square outlined by a black file, with 48 cm side. The geometrical decoration of the squares alternates Solomon knot with cross of loops.

The use of the braid to perform the grid seems to “transpose” to the mosaic’s “language” the pattern of a ceiling in *lacunaria*, in this type of ceilings the coffers were not delineated this way (Lancha 1977: 34)¹¹.

The functionality of this room, in the context of the *Villa*, is difficult to determine, given the scarcity of existing structures. Taking into consideration, however, its dimensions and careful decoration of the pavement, one could think that it was a room with a certain importance that would assume different functionalities.

B. Mosaic of the Villa of Rabaçal, Penela, Coimbra (Conuentus Scallabitanus)

Also the grid, resulting from the intersection of simple guilloche is used in the mosaics paving the wings south, southeast and southwest of this sumptuous *Villa* octagonal *peristylum*, dated from the 2nd half of the 4th century (Pessoa 1998: 58)¹² (Fig. 5). In the East wing the grid results of a four strand guilloche crossing.

Figure 3
Conimbriga, «Casa da Cruz Suástica», *cubiculum*
(Oliveira 2005: 36).

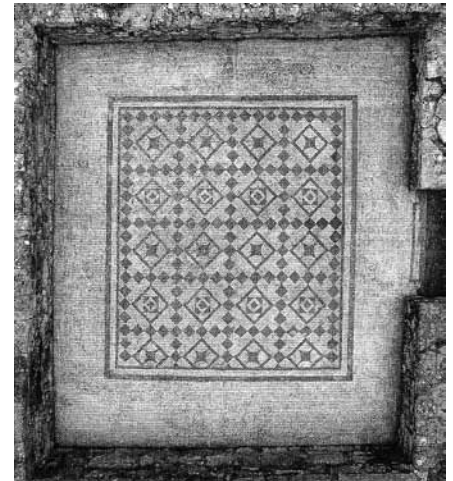


Figure 4
Mosaic, *in situ*, at the
Villa of Odrinhas, Sintra
(Caetano 2008: 48 fig. 6).

⁹ Mosaic n. 20, *Cubiculum* (B 7), with dating proposed by Correia 2003: 25.

¹⁰ The author points out parallels to this mosaic dating from the 2nd century A.D. (Utica, Corpus Tunisie, I, 2, p. 18, pl. XIII, mosaic n. 169); from the third quarter of the 3rd century (Grand, Recueil, I, 2, 75-78, mosaic n. 255) and from the 4th century A.D. (Jobst 1977: 45 n. 79).

¹¹ The author refers to a dichromatic mosaic of the Augustus Period, as one of the earliest examples of this pattern performed with a braid.

¹² See the exhaustive analysis of the mosaics of this sumptuous *Villa* in Pessoa 2011.



Figure 5
Mosaic, *in situ*, of the South corridor of the *peristylum* at the *Villa* of Rabaçal, Penela (Pessoa 1998: fig. 13).

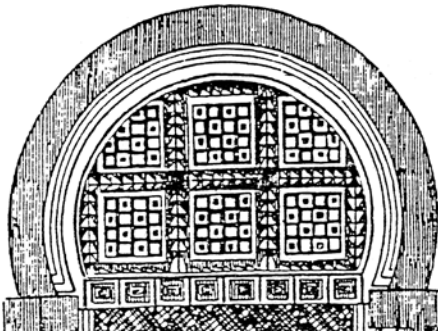


Figure 6
“Mosaic of Orpheus I” (drawing) from a *Villa* at Arnal (Arneiro), Maceira, Leiria. Detail of the apse (Borges 1986: EST. XIII).

The squares are completely filled by a multi-strand guilloche, resembling “padded coffers”, in the suggestive expression of Miguel Pessoa (Pessoa 2011: 315).

This would be a significant example of the revival of an ancient pattern, treated to the decorative liking of the period in which the mosaic was done, as Oliveira (2003: 87) observes apropos of a mosaic from a *Villa* of Rio Maior, Leiria, in which the large squares are equally filled by a multiple braid. The grid-pattern of *lacunaria* ceilings was recreated over time by the mosaicists, as it is confirmed by these quite late mosaics.

1.3. To complete the series of examples in which the grid pattern occurs, its use in the filling of the semicircular space of apse rooms should be referred.

Although the orthogonality of the pattern may seem maladjusted to the curve of the semi-circle, it is quite interesting that it emerges, in these cases, as a true reflection on the ground of the coffered ceiling performed on the half-domes covering the apses.

In examples of Portuguese mosaics, we register, in *Conuentus Scallabitanus*, a missing mosaic from Arneiro (Arnal), Maceira, Leiria, known only by a drawing and designated as the “Mosaic of Orpheus (I)” (Dougédroit 1964: mos. n. 6; Borges 1986: 45-50 EST. XIII) and a fragment of the mosaic of the apse of a room in the *Villa* of Santiago da Guarda, Ansião, Leiria.

On the Arneiro’s mosaic, dating from the 1st half of the 4th century, the grid seems to be drawn by a row of superposed triangles and the coffers filled with a grid of small squares, whose colour contrasts with the background colour (Fig. 6).

The mosaic of Santiago da Guarda, belonging to one of the apse rooms on the south side of the *Villa* and exposed *in situ* in the Museum (Fig. 7), presents the grid squares designed by a double fillet, having another concentric square designed by a dentilled simple fillet facing the interior.

In the squares are still visible Salomon knots and a shaded circle with a cross. The mosaics of this *Villa* would, *in genere*, be dated from the 4th – 5th centuries (Pereira 2008: 175).

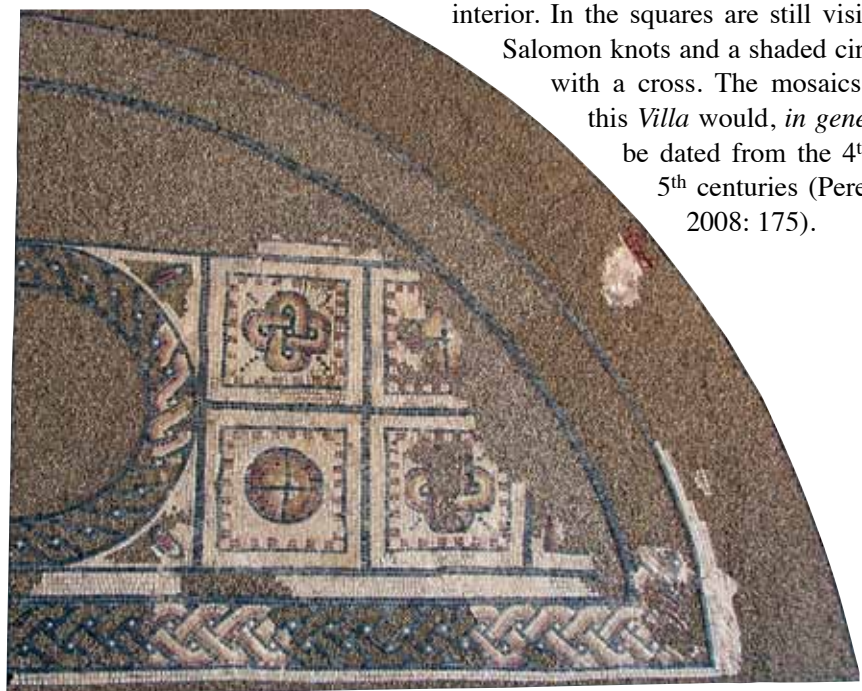


Figure 7
Mosaic of the apse from a southern room in the *Villa* of Santiago da Guarda, Ansião, Leiria. On display in the Museum of Santiago da Guarda. Photo LW 2013, authorized by the Town Council of Ansião.



2. “Adjacent octagons forming squares”

They are one of the most commonly used compositions in Roman pavement mosaics (Oleiro 1992: 95 notes 2-3, 100 note 18)¹³. Used in the painted decoration of domes, they would have been transferred for the *tessellatum medium* since the 2nd style (Barbet 1985: 22). One of their predecessors in funeral painting would be the *hypogeum* dome number 2 d ‘Anfuschi, in Alexandria, in Egypt, dated from the 3rd – 2nd centuries B.C. (Barbet 1985: 21 fig. 7). This decorative pattern would survive for a long time, whether in the *tessellatum* pavement or in painting.

A Portuguese example of this survival in mural painting is the decoration of the Paleo-Christian Basilica of Tróia, Setúbal (Fig. 8). The decorative function of this compositional pattern based on octagons, may relate, in this context, with the Christian symbolism of the Ogdoad (Maciel 1996: 251)¹⁴. The symbolism of Salvation, assigned by the Christians to the number eight, would be connected

Figure 8
Mural painting of the Paleochristian Basilica in Tróia, Setúbal (Portugal).
Photo LW 2009.

¹³ The author considers that this pattern, with examples since the 1st century B.C., is more frequent at the 2nd and beginning of the 3rd centuries A.D. and much frequent till the 4th century A.D..

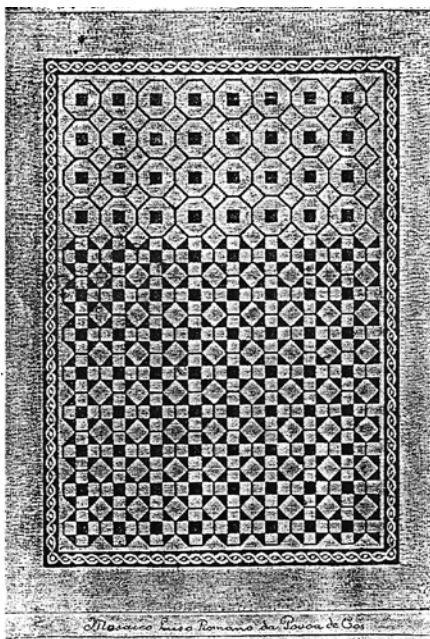
¹⁴ For the mural paintings of this Basilica, the author proposes a chronology between the late 4th century and early 5th century; the author underlines the importance given to octagonal geometric figures in Christian architectural contexts either on the plants or the decorations, considering the theme of the “Ogdoade” in Christian Antiquity. On this subject, the author quotes A. Quacquarelli 1973, L’Ogdoade patristica e suoi riflessi nella liturgia e nei monumenti, Bari.

with the importance that these gave to the “*Dominicus Dies*”, the most sacred day to them, followed by the seventh or the Jewish “Sabbath”. This began to be the first day (*prima dies sabbati*), its repetition in the “eighth” or “eighth day” (ogdon êméra) leads to the enumeration of the other days beginning from the *dies dominica*, this way creating the “Christian Week”, enumerative¹⁵.

Also in floor mosaics of Christian cultural contexts, compositions based on octagons are very common. In the Western World one can refer the paradigmatic example of the Basilica of Aquileia, in the Southern Theodorian Hall; in the Eastern World, one can see the interesting example of the Basilica of Derecik, Uludağ, Turkey (Şahin – Okçu 2008: fig. 14).

Of the relatively high number of Portuguese mosaics of domestic context in which this composition is present in all its variants¹⁶, we selected the following examples.

A. “Mosaic of Póvoa do Cós (II)”, *cubiculum*



From the *Villa* of Póvoa do Cós previously referred at 1.1. A., a pavement covered by a mosaic, was registered in old photography, showing the composition layout of adjacent octagons, forming small poised squares (Décor I: 163a) (Moita 1951: 147 Est. II; Borges 1986: 13-15 EST. IV) (Fig. 9). The differentiated treatment of the pattern leads to the visualization of two juxtaposed carpets. In the largest carpet, the filling of the octagons with four white squares in a cruciform arrangement, in which the central is filled with black *tesserae*, leads to the creation of a grid that hides the octagonal pattern. A similar treatment was carried out in two mosaics of *Conimbriga*, one of the “House of Fountains” (Casa dos Repuxos) (Oleiro 1992: 130-133)¹⁷ and other in the “House of the Skeletons” (Casa dos Esqueletos) which will be mentioned further.

Since the mosaics of this *Villa* were dated from the 1st century, or, at most, from the 2nd century (Moita 1951: 148), this mosaic of Póvoa do Cós would be one of the oldest Portuguese examples where this pattern was used.

The room’s functionality to which it belonged would be of a *cubiculum*, in which the smaller panel would mark the space for the placement of the *lectus* (Oliveira 2003: 132).

B. Mosaic in a southern room of the Villa of Pisões, Beja (Conuentus Pacensis)

In the mosaic that covers the floor of a room (5, 50 X 4, 70 m) located in the southern area of the *pars urbana* of this *Villa*, the pattern is designed by a simple guilloche that also involves all the field of the mosaic (Fig. 10). The

Figure 9
“Mosaic of Póvoa do Cós (II)”,
cubiculum. (Drawing)
(Borges 1986: 15 EST. IV).

¹⁵ On this topic, related to the enumerative designation of the days of the week in Portuguese (*Dominicus, Secunda feria; Tercia feria, etc*), different from the names used in other languages, which allude to deities, I did an article entitled “The days of the week in the cultural and artistic context of late Antiquity” (Os dias da semana no contexto cultural e artístico da Antiguidade Tardia), in *Saberes no Tempo. Homenagem a Maria Henriqueta Costa Campos* (coord. Maria Helena Mira Mateus, Clara Nunes Correia), Lisboa, Edições Colibri, 2002: 707-716.

¹⁶ About the occurrences of this pattern in Roman mosaics of various periods and in various geographic areas, see the excellent synthesis of great utility, written by Oliveira (Oliveira 2003: 128-137), and also the interesting and comprehensive analysis of Pessoa 2011, on this pattern in the mosaics of the *Villa* of Rabaçal, Penela, Coimbra.

¹⁷ Mosaic n. 12, Elephant and Camel Room, panels 6 and 4. The author proposes a chronology between the 3rd quarter of the 2nd century – and the 1st quarter of the 3rd century. See also (Pessoa 2005: 383 fig. 29).



Figure 10
Mosaic, *in situ*, of a Southern
room at the *Villa* of Pisões,
Beja. Photo LW 2003.

large octagons feature interior frames, or a simple dentilled fillet with dentils of squares of four *tesserae* or serrated saw-tooth pattern, some of the octagons have concentric circles with wreaths of undulating bands and poised squares with inscribed quatrefoils.

The squares, formed by the octagons, are filled with Solomon knot. The frame of the carpet is defined by a row of intersecting and tangent semi circles, designed by a double fillet of black *tesserae* over a white background.

This architectural framework that could have been inspired by the real support structures (Alves 2002: 10-12, 23-26)¹⁸ seems well suited for a surface pattern derived from the octagonal coffered ceilings, establishing a logical relationship between the ceiling/floor and its support/exterior frame.

The mosaic of the referred room in the *Villa* of Pisões, whose functionality is not explained by the differentiation of patterns, has been dated from the 2nd – 3rd centuries (Costa 1985: 121)¹⁹.

¹⁸ The author analyses different mosaics with “architectural” frames representative of supporting structures; this decoration assumes an architectural language in marking the peripheral limits of the floor mosaic.

¹⁹ About this dating, we think it is too earlier. The octagons’ various interior frames, the crowns suggesting polychromatic waves and the braid pattern design lead us to consider this mosaic performed in the advanced 3rd century. Oliveira (Oliveira 2003: 133) considered the dating proposed by Costa 1985 to be quite acceptable due to affinities with other productions.



Figure 11
Mosaic, *in situ*, of the North
corridor at the *Villa* of Pisões, Beja.
Photo LW 2008.

*C. Mosaic of the north corridor in the Villa of Pisões, Beja
(Conuentus Pacensis)*

In another mosaic of the same *Villa*, covering the long northern corridor (18,30 x 3,20 m) that gives access to the *pars urbana* (Fig. 11), the octagons are drawn by a black file, with concentric octagons over a white background, these being completely filled by a compound rosette (Décor II: 273a, variant)²⁰, repeated in all octagons, creating a beautiful decorative effect. These rosettes have the same constituent elements and forms of those which occur in two mosaic fragments of Mérida, in a surface composition equal to that of Pisões²¹. This fact leads to the assumption of the use of the same model for the mosaics of both sites.

In the same corridor, this pattern joins with another, also basically composed of octagons (Décor I: 169a).

The mosaic of this corridor has been dated from the early 3rd century (Costa 1985: 121).

²⁰ Concerning this mosaic see: (Oliveira 2003: 134; Correia (Wrench) 2005: 38-42, 83 EST.4 fig. 8, EST. 49 fig. 5).

²¹ Fragments dating from the 4th century by Alvarez Martinez (Alvarez Martinez 1990: 34-37, 178). These fragments were found in Mérida, Solar de la Antigua Ermita de la Piedad (n° 2) and Avenida de Extremadura (n° 17).



D. Mosaic of Conimbriga, “House of Fountains” (*Casa dos Repuxos*), *Oecus-triclinium* (Fig. 12)

It is already well-known the original mosaic of the *Oecus-triclinium* of the “House of Fountains” (*Casa dos Repuxos*) in *Conimbriga*, in which this pattern is used in the wide bands surrounding the central carpet. The large coffers, lightened by the tracery that fills them, feature a classical type of finial, which seems to reproduce the models used in sculpture or those carved in the *lacunaria* of architectural ceilings. This mosaic was dated from the last quarter of the 2nd century – 1st quarter of the 3rd century (Oleiro 1992: 110-116)²².

E. Mosaic of Conimbriga, “House of the Skeletons” (*Casa dos Esqueletos*), *triclinium* (Fig. 13)

In the mosaic covering the pavement of this room (9,40 x 7,80 m), the area intended for the *lecti* is decorated with the pattern of adjacent oblong octagons forming small straight squares. The dichromatic treatment proves to be quite unique in the opposition of the black and white colours of the squares and in the filling of the octagons, divided longitudinally by rectangles, also treated in chromatic opposition. This recreation of the base pattern, through a decoration that conceals it, as in the mosaic from Póvoa do Cós (II) (2. A., Fig. 9), means that the pattern’s relationship with the ones in *lacunaria* is not visually noticeable.

The mosaic was dated from the 3rd – 4th centuries (Oliveira 2005: 45 mosaic n. 26)²³.

Figure 12
Conimbriga, “Casa dos Repuxos”.
Detail of the *oecus-triclinium*
mosaic. Photo LW 1985.

²² Mosaic n. 10, EST. 39-43. Regarding the originality of this decoration, see also Correia (Wrench) 2005: 49, 85 EST. 11 fig. 1.

²³ The author indicates the dating proposed by Correia et al. 2003, *Mosaics of Conimbriga* (CD-Rom), ICAM, Ministério da Cultura, Lisboa. See also Pessoa 2005: 381 fig. 23.



Figure 13
Conimbriga, «Casa dos Esqueletos»,
triclinium (Oliveira 2005: 45).



Figure 14
Mosaic, *in situ*, of a Northern corridor at
the Villa of Santiago da Guarda, Ansião,
Leiria. Photo LW 2013, authorized
by the Town Council of Ansião.

*F. Mosaic in a corridor in the northern area of the Villa of Santiago da Guarda, Ansião*²⁴ (Fig. 14)

The pattern of adjacent octagons, visible in a large part of a corridor situated in the middle of a group of rooms in the north area of the Villa of Santiago da Guarda, Ansião, Leiria, *Conuentus Scallabitanus*, (Pereira 2008: 174 fig. 8) would be one of the later examples of the use of this pattern in the set of Portuguese mosaics of domestic context²⁵. The octagons are outlined by a black fillet, each containing another concentric octagon equally outlined, creating an interior frame filled with rows of *tesserae* in gradient colours alternating the colours red and yellow in the octagons.

The inner octagons over a white background mostly have a pointed serrated square also in gradient colours. The small squares, formed by the adjacent octagons, are filled with what seems the final loop of a simple guilloche, in which the black fillet of each eyelet is extended into the square's angle. The entire set is delimited externally by a frame decorated by a polychrome row of tangent juxtaposed bells, forming tangent inverted bells and a white undulating line (Décor I: 60e, variant).

²⁴ I would like to express my deepest appreciation to the Town Council of Ansião, represented in the person of its Vice-President, Mrs. Célia Freire, for authorizing the publication of the two photos of the mosaics from the Villa of Santiago da Guarda. Also, I would like to thank Claudia Santos, guide in the Monumental Complex of Santiago da Guarda, for her kindness and willingness in providing me with the information I asked for. And last but not the least, I would also like to show my appreciation to Archaeologist Rodrigo M. Pereira, who made available to me all the bibliography published by him about the various excavation campaigns he led on this Villa which allowed the discovery of such a magnificent set of mosaics.

²⁵ In Rabaçal's Villa, dated mid-fourth century, patterns based in octagons are widely used, cf. Pessoa 2011.

As previously referred, the *Villa's* mosaics may be located chronologically in the 4th – 5th centuries.

Final remarks

The sampling of the thirteen Portuguese mosaics with compositional patterns that we have set ourselves to observe in this study will not be significant to draw conclusions from the objectives that we have defined. We may, however, systematize the following:

1. The addressed patterns appear in conjunction with other patterns in the mosaic field of Póvoa do Cós (I) (Fig. 1), with the inclusion of a figurative central carpet (*impluuium*? 1st – 2nd centuries).
2. In wide strips, involving carpets with other decoration: in *Conimbriga*, “House of Cantaber” (Casa de Cantaber) (*cenatio*; 2nd century) (Fig. 2) and “House of Fountains” (Casa dos Repuxos) (*Oecus-triclinium*, 2nd – 3rd centuries) (Fig. 12).
3. Marking specific areas such as the placement of the *lecti* in Póvoa do Cós (II) (*cubiculum*, 1st – 2nd centuries) (Fig. 9), with differentiated treatment of the same compositional pattern; in *Conimbriga*, “House of the Skeletons” (Casa dos Esqueletos) (*triclinium*; 3rd – 4th centuries) (Fig. 13), with other decoration in the remaining pavement. In the *Villa* of Pisões (Mosaic of the north corridor, 1st half of the 3rd century) (Fig. 11), the pattern is used in two of its variants, possibly to break the monotony of the big extension of space in which it was applied.
4. The same compositional scheme is applied to the entire length of the pavement: decorating the *Villa* of Pisões (multifunction room, on the South, 2nd – 3rd centuries) (Fig. 10); in *Conimbriga*, “House of Swastika Cross” (Casa da Cruz Suástica) (*cubiculum*, 2nd half of the 3rd century) (Fig. 3); in the *Villa* of Odrinhas (multipurpose room, 1st half of the 4th century) (Fig. 4); *Villa* of Rabaçal (*peristylum* wings; 2nd half of the 4th century) (Fig. 5); in the *Villa* of Santiago da Guarda (corridor to the north, 4th – 5th centuries) (Fig. 14).

Therefore, we can observe that just like in *lacunaria* ceilings different forms and sequences of coffers were used, as for example in a domed cover of the “House of the *Cryptoporticus*” at Pompeii, also, in pavement mosaics the same pattern can be treated in different ways, being generally used for the marking of specific areas.

The creation of a unitary field through the use of a single pattern in the entire pavement is verified in passage areas such as corridors or *peristylum* wings, being also used uniformly in rooms without specific functionality, in which there is no need to create a distinct space. Also in small secondary rooms, as is the case of a *cubiculum* in the “House of Swastika Cross” (Casa da Cruz Suástica) in *Conimbriga*, the same pattern was used across the floor.

In the oldest Portuguese mosaics, the squared coffers are marked by a fillet and grids with poised squares. In the mosaics of the 3rd, 4th and 5th centuries, compositional patterns are designed by a fillet, a line of triangles or by a simple braid.

In the adjacent octagons pattern, within the observed mosaics, the octagons are outlined by a fillet. The mosaic of a southern room of the *Villa* of Pisões (Fig. 10), whose pattern is designed by a simple guilloche, is an early

example, if we consider the chronology of its implementation in the 2nd – 3rd centuries²⁶.

As for the possible connection of the referred mosaics to workshops, we point out, first, from the *Conuentus Scallabitanus*, the mosaics from *Conimbriga*: “House of Cantaber” (Casa de Cantaber) (Fig. 2), “House of the Swastika Cross” (Casa da Cruz Suástica) (Fig. 3) and the “House of Skeletons” (Casa dos Esqueletos) (Fig. 13), dated between the 2nd and the 4th centuries, integrated in a set of mosaics, treated by Pessoa 2005, which illustrate the typology of the reticulated of squares. This author (Pessoa 2005: 391) considers the probability of the existence of a permanent workshop in *Conimbriga* which implemented, over a few centuries, a pattern of squares, with different treatments in dichromatic geometric mosaics, over a white background, and very sober in terms of decoration.

The connection of some of these mosaics of *Conimbriga* to both mosaics of Póvoa do Cós, Leiria (Fig. 1, Fig. 9), due to the treatment given to the patterns in grid and in octagons, seems clear to us, so the relationship of Póvoa do Cós with the workshop of *Conimbriga* may have existed since the 2nd century²⁷.

As for the mosaics of the *Villa* of Rabaçal and of the *Villa* of Santiago da Guarda, both within the *ciuitas* of *Conimbriga*, of approximate timelines, Miguel Pessoa also presents the hypothesis that the same workshop could have operated in both (Pessoa 2011: 315, 722).

The connection between some decorative themes used in mosaics of these two *Villae* and a mosaic from *Bracara Augusta* (*Conuentus Bracaraugustanus*) such as the row of tangent cuboids and an undulating row with the bells horizontally shaded, led us to establish relationships between the mosaics of these three archaeological sites (Wrench 2014: 56, 58).

With regard to the mosaic of the northern corridor of the *Villa* of Pisões, Beja (*Conuentus Pacensis*) (Fig. 11), whose adjacent octagons are filled by a rosette similar to what occurs in two mosaics of Merida, with the same pattern, we are led to consider the existence of itinerant mosaic artisans who would have used the same “card” in the two archaeological sites (Correia 2005: 83 EST. 49 fig. 5). Cristina Oliveira, finding close parallels on the execution of the same type of finial in the octagons in the *Villae* of Pisões, Beja, of Rio Maior, Leiria, of Pesquero, Badajoz and in the two mosaics of Merida, envisages the possibility of the presence of a same workshop, whose establishment is unknown (Oliveira 2003: 134)²⁸.

Considering the anteriority of the northern corridor mosaic in the *Villa* of Pisões (early 3rd century) in relation to the other parallels (4th century), we hypothesize that it could be a “model” belonging to a workshop based in the area of *Pax Iulia*, related with the capital of *Lusitania*.

As aforementioned, more definitive conclusions from the observation of patterns in grid and adjacent octagons, inspired by the coffered ceilings, will be remitted to future studies, in which we will address a broader *corpus* of Portuguese mosaics which illustrate these two compositional patterns.

²⁶ See the above note number 19.

²⁷ Mourão 2008: 40, referring to the stylistic characteristics in the figured mosaic carpet of Póvoa de Cós I (see above 1. 1. A), considers it to be the work of the local workshop, corroborating the opinion of Torres Carro 1989: 145-160.

²⁸ Oliveira 2003: 128-137, mosaic n° 15, quoting for the *Villa* in Pesquero, Badajoz: Rubio Muñoz 1988: 194, est. II, “Excavaciones en la villa Romana de Pesquero (Pueblonuevo del Guadiana, Badajoz): campañas de 1983 y 1984”, in *Extremadura Arqueológica*, Cáceres. I. p. 187-200.

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