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A Newly Discovered Mosaic from Myrleia

Myrleia'dan Yeni Keşfedilen Bir Mozaik

Derya ŞAHİN – Hazal ÇITAKOĞLU*

(Received 05 June 2016, accepted after revision 11 November 2016)

Abstract

Previously unknown parts of the ancient city of Myrleia which today is located in Mudanya in the province of Bursa, have begun to appear gradually in recent excavations. In 2015 – 2016, excavations were started on the site which was previously declared a third degree site by the Bursa Archaeology Museum Directorate. As a result of the trial trenchings, in addition to structural remains that can be defined as workshops, residential structures built up on the slopes have been determined. These residential buildings on the hillside consist of a row of rooms and provide valuable information about the late period house architecture of the ancient city. The floor of one of these partially uncovered houses is covered with a geometric patterned mosaic floor. In addition to geometric designs on this mosaic, motifs such as kantharos, guilloche, wave pattern and ivy leaves are used together to create a highly visual and artistic composition. The mosaic floor is dated approximately to the 4th century BC.

Keywords: Myrleia, Roman villa, geometric mosaic, opus tessellatum.

Öz

Günümüzde Bursa'nın Mudanya ilçesinde yer alan Myrleia antik kenti ile ilgili bilinmeyenler, son dönemde yapılan kazılar neticesinde yavaş yavaş ortaya çıkmaya başlamıştır. 2015-2016 yıllarında Bursa Arkeoloji Müze Müdürlüğü tarafından daha önce 3. Derece sit alanı ilan edilen arazide kazı çalışmaları başlatılmıştır. Sondaj kazıları sonucunda işlik olarak tanımlanabilecek yapı kalıntılarının yanı sıra yamaca yerleştirilmiş konut yapıları tespit edilmiştir. Yamaç üzerinde bulunan bu konut yapıları, bir sıra oda dizisinden oluşmaktadır ve kentin geç dönem ev mimarisi hakkında oldukça değerli bilgiler sunmaktadır. Kısmen ortaya çıkartılmış bu evlerden birinin zemini geometrik desenli mozaik döşeme ile kaplıdır. Mozaik üzerinde geometrik desenlere ilave olarak kantharos, örgü bant, dalga deseni, sarmaşık yaprakları gibi motifler bir arada kullanılarak son derece görsel ve sanatsal bir durum ortaya konmuştur. Mozaik döşeme yaklaşık olarak M.S. 4. yüzyıla tarihlenmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Myrleia, Roma villası, geometrik mozaik, opus tessellatum.

Introduction

The ancient city of Myrleia is located in Mudanya which is one of the districts of Bursa. There was barely any information about the ancient city because of its state, as it was mostly buried under fields of olive trees (Fig. 1). However the last excavations have exposed more of the area since the summer of 2015, when the Archaeological Museum of Bursa was first asked to explore the site by the owners of the fields. The museum has carried out 18 trial trenchings of the 3rd degree protected area in order to decide whether the ruins are ancient or not to determine whether to build housing on it (Fig. 2)¹. In the southern part of the same area it has previously been determined

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Figure 1
Aerial view of the excavation area
(Uludağ University, Department
of Archaeology Archive)



Figure 2
Aerial view of the excavation area
(Uludağ University, Department
of Archaeology Archive)

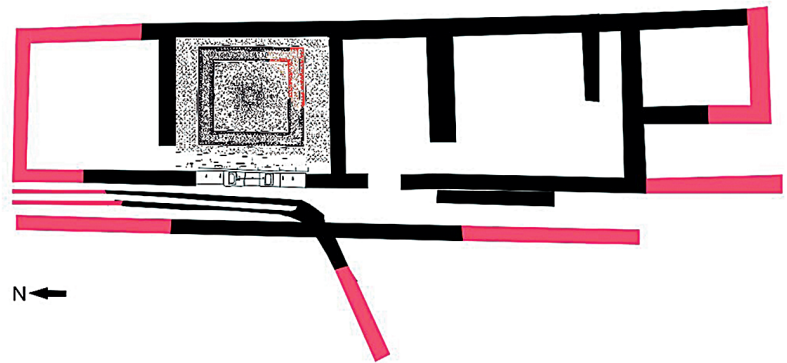
by the museum that the ancient city's port facilities are located here from the excavations. However it has been decided to close the area by covering the ruins with a glass roof by the property owners and building a shopping mall on it. The previous studies of the shore have led us to guess that there must be ruins of the ancient city of Myrleia on the Northern part of the district as well. Therefore it was not a surprise for us to discover more ancient ruins under the olive tree fields in Mudanya.

The extent of the excavation had to be limited because the area surrounding the excavation is also on private property. The subject of our studies considers two houses, one of them is near the drainage channel (Fig. 3). Unfortunately some part of the second house is on another private property, therefore it was not possible to excavate and study that area (Fig. 6).

Figure 3
Aerial view of the excavation area
(Uludağ University, Department
of Archaeology Archive)



Figure 4
Plan of the house with mosaic
(drawn by H. Çitakoğlu)



Architecture

The structure has been exposed in Myrleia, after the excavation studies carried out by the Museum of Bursa Headship. The structure lies on a hill which has an incredible view of the sea and has a series of rooms, which give a good idea of the architecture of the city in the late antique period. That structure also provides much information about high class architecture of that period by its large portico and surrounding rooms. The drainage system which is just in front of the structure must be connected to the house's latrine. This structure has been partially unearthed, revealing only one room floored with mosaic (Fig. 3-4).

The West side of the structure's entrance has two steps. On one of the steps there are two column base which form the entrance. On the rear part of the entrance to the structure, a terracotta canal has been discovered 295 cm deep. On the rear of the east wall a pipe system has been unearthed 60 cm under the floor, which is 430 cm long and has a diameter of 11 centimeters. The mosaic was found three meters deep because it had been buried by soil slipping down the slope. The archaeological deposit was found below alluvium approximately two meters deep. Hellenistic and Roman fragments of everyday pottery have been found in the archaeological deposit, mostly red and black glazed pottery (Fig. 5). Cooking pots for everyday use, pieces of amphora and glass fragments have also been discovered. The position on an unstable hillside caused the structure to be covered with earth. Because of the lack of an archaeological context, it was not possible to date the structure precisely.



Figure 5
Hellenistic and Roman
plain - ware ceramic fragments
(Uludağ University, Department
of Archaeology Archive)



Figure 6
The mosaics of another house
from the excavation area
(Uludağ University, Department
of Archaeology Archive)

Other structures with similar plans and mosaic floors can be seen in the same field. Another floor with a geometric design was unearthed after one of the drills (Fig. 6). Unfortunately only part of the mosaic could be unearthed since the other part belongs to another private property. The part that has been unearthed shows that it must have belonged to a large space and has two colours, white and navy. The design has an orthogonal pattern of intersecting circles, forming saltires of quasi-tangent solid spindles and concave squares with a concave square including an alternately larger and smaller concave square (Décor I: pl. 237g). The architecture could not be determined as it was not possible to excavate the structure completely.

Mosaic Pavement

After the mosaic was found in trench S1 by the Archaeology Museum, the trench was enlarged around the pavement (Fig. 7). The excavations located the east, west and south walls of the structure. There was an entrance with a marble step.

Figure 7
Aerial view of the excavation area
(Uludağ University, Department
of Archaeology Archive)



Figure 8
Drawing of the mosaic
(drawn by H. Çitakoğlu)

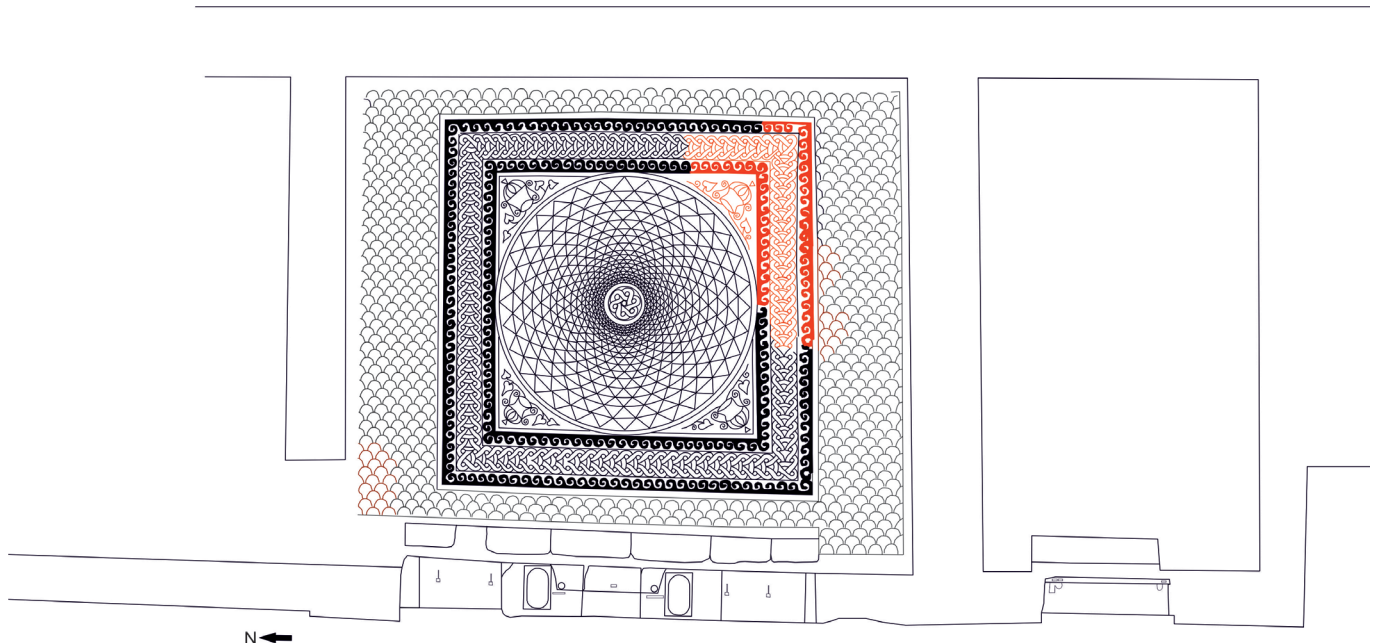




Figure 9
General view of the mosaic
(Uludağ University, Department
of Archaeology Archive)



Figure 10
General view of the mosaic
(Uludağ University, Department
of Archaeology Archive)

The mosaic which covers the floor of the structure was made of opus tessellatum (Fig. 7-8). The colours of the tesserae were black, white, yellow, red, pink and green which were approximately 1-2 cm big. In addition to the geometrical motifs, kantharos, guilloche, wave pattern, adjacent scale and ivy leaves have been used. In that way the appearance of the floor seems more artistic and interesting (Fig. 9). The pavement is surrounded by adjacent scale motifs. The width of border is 50 cm on the east, 46 cm on the west and 120 cm on north and the south. The motifs used on the west and south have a black contour on the outside and inside is yellow, green, red and white.

On the east and south, yellow, red and white colours have been used, different from the others. There is a 6 cm wide white strip adjacent to that adjacent scale



Figure 11
Detail of the kantharos
(Uludağ University, Department
of Archaeology Archive)

design. Next to that strip there is a guilloche design in the middle of the two strips of wave pattern. The width of the wave pattern is 20 cm and it is made of red and white colours. The central border of guilloche in between the two strips of wave pattern has a width of 35 cm. The guilloche design of polychrome round-tongued double guilloche opened to form eyelets (Décor I: pl. 75b) has a black contour and is made of red, pink, yellow and white tesserae.

The perspective view illustrated by using different sized and coloured triangles placed next to each other is actually called a shield of triangles design (Décor II: pl. 329a-b) (Fig. 10). That central motif is inside a square frame made of three lines of white tesserae and is 5 cm in width. The diameter of the central motif is 338 cm. The triangles have been made of black, white, yellow, red and green tesserae.

There is a knot of two curvilinear triangles (Décor II: 43) design in a circle at the center of the motif of a line made of triangle lines. That circle has a black contour and is white in colour with a 5 cm wide frame and diameter of 44.5 cm. In the middle of the circle there is a six-looped knot motif with a black contour, and colours of red, yellow and white.

Kantharos figures and ivy leaf motifs have been placed on the corner spaces of central flower shaped sphere motif and the wave motif which surrounds it (Fig. 11). The area in which the southwestern corner kantharos is placed is 65 cm long. The kantharos has been placed on a white coloured ground. It has a conical form of base with volute handles and sharp profile. The outer contours have made with black coloured tesserae. The body of the kantharos has been designed with five segments. The colours of the middle segments are red with white inside, white and green for the two side ones, and white, pink and red on the edge. On the neck part the colour scheme goes from dark to light (with red on the edges, then yellow and white in the middle) which gives a shadow effect created by the tesserae. The spaces either side of the kantharos have been decorated with black-contoured, green-coloured ivy leaves. The kanthari on the southeast, northwest and northeast are similar.

The Place of the Myrleia Mosaic in the Decorative Repertory of Bithynia Province

The city of Bursa and its towns, which are in South Bithynia, have an important archaeological potential. The mosaics in this area are made by using the techniques of opus tessellatum and opus sectile. Generally geometrical designs were depicted on the mosaics. Figures of birds, kanthari, peacocks, human faces, the zodiac and personifications of the seasons have been used as well as geometrical shapes (Çitakoğlu 2015: 81-87).

The shield of triangles design, which is the main panel depiction on the Myrleia mosaic, is a very different and new pattern for South Bithynia. The general border designs show similar pattern and colour. For example, the border of the Yerkapı mosaics in Prusia ad Olympum has a design of polychrome round-tongued double guilloche opened to form eyelets (Décor I: pl. 75b; Okçu 2009: 37-38; Çitakoğlu 2015: 11, 13). The exact same design can be seen in the Myrleia mosaic border. Also the same wave pattern can be seen in both, Myrleia and Yerkapı mosaics. The other motif that we can compare is the kantharos. The kantharos has been used as a central motif in the Yerkapı mosaics (Okçu 2009: 37; Çitakoğlu 2015: 11), where in Myrleia it has been used in the spandrels as a supplemental element (Fig. 12).

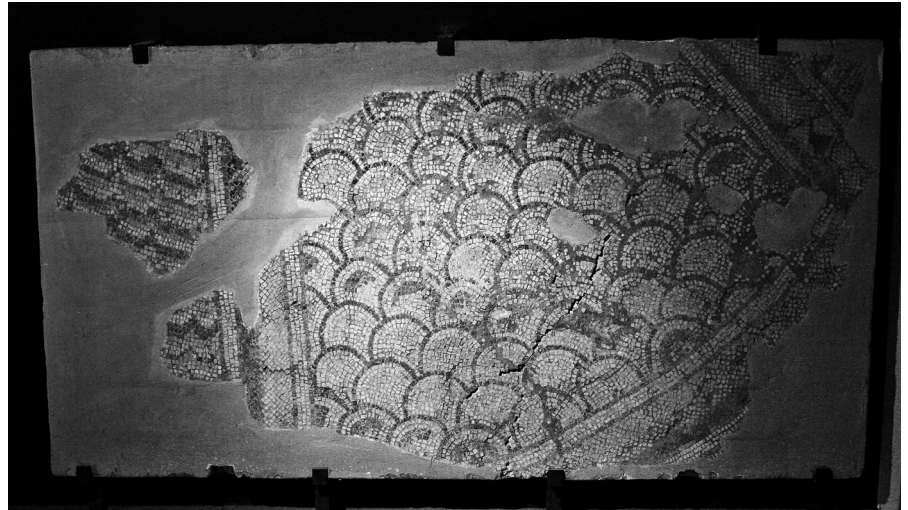


Figure 12
Yerkapı Mosaic
(Uludağ University, Department
of Archaeology Archive)

When we compare the depiction of the kanthari, we can see similar features in both mosaics. The sharp profiled kantharos has a base of conical form and with a voluted handle. The outer contour of vessel was depicted with black tesserae. The body of the kantharos has been designed with five segments. On the neck part the colour scheme goes from dark to light which gives a shadow effect by tesserae. The difference in the Myrleia mosaic is there are vine leaves emerging from the inside of the kantharos. The other example that can be compared is in Bursa Archaeology Museum (Çitakoğlu 2015: 38, 41) (Fig. 13). The design of trichrome orthogonal pattern of shaded adjacent scales (D'écór I: pl.219a), in counterchanged colours on the Myrleia mosaic, can also be seen on two panels in the museum. Even though the colours differ in both mosaics, the main composition is similar.

One of the important criteria for determining the workshop is the border composition. Because of the same design it can be said that the mosaics of Myrleia and Yerkapı might have come from the same workshop, but the Yerkapı mosaics are dated to the early Christian period and have Christian motifs of shield-shaped

Figure 13
Mosaic panel from Bursa
Archaeology Museum
(Uludağ University, Department
of Archaeology Archive)



cross and bird. According to the archaeological context, the Myrleia mosaic can be dated to the Roman period. Therefore they can-not have come from the same workshop. However we can say that the similar designs in that area have been continued to be made throughout that time.

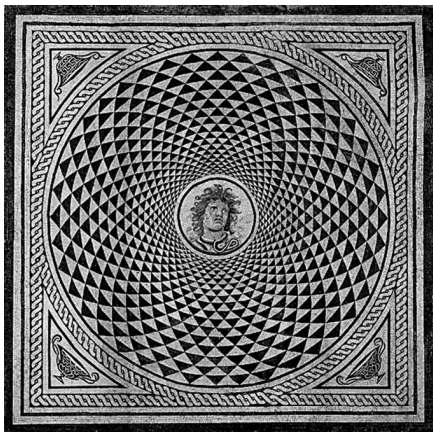


Figure 14
Mosaic floor with head of
Medusa, J. Paul Getty Museum
(Belis 2016: 6.)

Conclusion / Dating Through Iconography and Possible Parallels

The shield of triangles design has been used since the second century in all Roman provinces and can also be seen in the late period. During the centuries the only thing that changed was the centre of the design depending on the time and the location. Examples can be seen in Antandros where there is a kantharos and peacocks in the centre of the mosaic, in Korinth where there is a head of Dionysos, and in Myrleia where a knot design has been used. Otherwise the basic pattern is similar to each other. This suggests that there was a main pattern used in workshops which made some changes according to the wishes and needs of the patron.



Figure 15
Mosaics of Antandros
(<http://www.antandros.org/sectors/yamac-ev.html>)

A prototype of the shield of triangles design can be seen in a mosaic from Rome dated to the second century, where there is a Medusa head in the centre and kanthari in the corners of the mosaic (Belis 2016: 7) (Fig. 14). The head of Medusa is made with colourful tesserae and the other parts have been made of black and white tesserae. A similar example can be seen in a Roman villa at Corinth, where the centre includes a head of Dionysos and is polychrome. Like the other examples in this one ivy scrolls emerge from the kanthari in the corners, which is dated to the second half of the second century (Dunbabin 1999: 212-213). The structure in Myrleia shows similar features to the late antique Villa of Antandros in its plan and mosaic design (Polat et al. 2008: 470 Plan 1) (Fig. 15). The structure in Antandros is dated by scholars to the end of the third century, and with some restoration to the structure it was used until the seventh century (Polat 2003: 21-22).

The mosaic of Myrleia is a floor mosaic placed on the ground of a Roman villa in the city and is comprised of a single panel which is a Roman feature. The composition is placed in a square mosaic. Unfortunately, excavation finds cannot be utilized in order to date the mosaics because it is not known whether there will be artifacts above the ground that will provide dates in an excavation to be performed in this area. On the other hand, it is beyond any doubt that the mosaic has to be in a Roman villa in terms of its location and craftsmanship. Since there is no possibility of dating the mosaic according to excavation finds, we can only date it on the basis of similar examples. The mosaics of Antandros have been dated to the period between the end of the third and the beginning of the fourth century for the date of the mosaic of Myrleia most likely we have a terminus post quem of the end of the third century A.D.

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