

Study of Two Roman Mosaics from the Area of Influence of the *PAX IVLIA CIVITAS (CONVENTVS PACENSIS)* Housed at the Regional Archaeological Museum of Beja and the Museum of Archaeology of the Castle of Vila Viçosa (Alentejo) - Mosaic Documentation, Restoration and Conservation Procedures

PAX IVLIA CIVITAS (CONVENTVS PACENSIS) Etki Alanından Gelen İki Roma Mozaığının İncelenmesi – Beja Bölgesel Arkeoloji Müzesi ve Vila Viçosa Kalesi Arkeoloji Müzesi’nde (Alentejo) Bulunan Örnekler: Mozaik Belgeleme, Restorasyon ve Koruma Yöntemleri

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Abstract

In Portugal, during the second half of the 19th century, a few individuals and institutions, guardians of archaeological finds, tried to publicize and preserve the mosaics that were being discovered. Mosaic pavements with figurative motifs, or emblemata, were removed from their original locations, mounted on plaster or cement supports, and framed for exhibition.

In Portugal, there are currently more than thirty museums with mosaic fragments in their collections. However, most of these fragments lack discovery and survey information as detailed records of findings and their architectural integration were rarely made when structures with mosaics were excavated. Archaeologists in charge of excavations often removed small fragments of newly discovered mosaic pavements and sent them as gifts or samples to friends responsible for museum collections. However, these pieces were usually not described, drawn, or photographed, nor were they given an inventory number when included in museum collections. Unfortunately, due to these practices, few written, graphic, or photographic records of these pieces exist today.

Until the mid-20th century, it was common practice to transport mosaics to museums to prevent their disappearance or destruction due to the lack of support for their protection and maintenance in situ. This practice has allowed us to enjoy the beauty of some of these pieces, study them, monitor them, and preserve them for future use.

Most of the archaeological materials, including many mosaic fragments, from the archaeological sites in the area of the Pax Iulia ciuitas, are now housed in the Regional Archaeological Museum of Beja and the Museum of Archaeology of the Castle of Vila Viçosa (Portalegre). The majority of these fragments feature geometric and plant motifs, while some also display interesting figurative motifs. Many of these fragments remain unpublished and have not yet been subject to detailed study. Our study focuses on two figurative mosaics from two archaeological sites in the area of influence of Pax Iulia. One was discovered in Pax Iulia (now known as

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Beja, in the Portuguese region of Baixo Alentejo) and the other is from the Villa of Monte do Meio, S. Brissos (Beja). Our study aims to analyse these mosaics, as well as examine aspects related to the reports on their findings, the restorations carried out, their conservation, and musealization.

Keywords: Pax Iulia Ciuitas, Roman mosaics, Portuguese archaeological museums, restoration, conservation.

Öz

Portekiz’de, arkeolojik buluntuların hamisi olan bazı kişi ve kurumlar; 19. yüzyılın ikinci yarısında, keşfedilmekte olan mozaikleri tanıtmak ve muhafaza etmek amacıyla girişimlerde bulunmuşlardır. Figüratif motiflere sahip mozaik döşemeler, yani emblemata, insitu konumlarından alınarak alçı ya da çimento zeminlere monte edilmiş ve sergilenmek üzere çerçevelenmiştir.

Günümüzde Portekiz’de, otuzdan fazla müzede mozaik parçaları koleksiyonlarda yer almaktadır. Ancak, bu parçaların büyük kısmı keşif ve belgeleme bilgilerini içermemektedir; zira mozaikli yapıların kazıları sırasında buluntuların ayrıntılı kayıtları ve mimari bağamlarına dair veriler nadiren tutulmuştur. Kazı başkanlığı yapan arkeologlar, yeni ortaya çıkarılan mozaik döşemelerden küçük parçaları sökerek, müze koleksiyonlarından sorumlu dostlarına hediye ya da örnek olarak göndermekteydiler. Ne var ki bu parçalar genellikle ne betimlenmiş, ne çizilmiş, ne fotoğraflanmış, ne de müze koleksiyonuna dahil edilirken envanter numarası verilmiştir. Bu uygulamalar nedeniyle, günümüzde bu eserlerin yazılı, görsel ya da fotoğraflık belgeleri son derece sınırlıdır.

20. yüzyılın ortalarına dek, mozaiklerin in situ korunmaları için gerekli destek ve bakım olanaklarının bulunmaması nedeniyle, bunların müzelere taşınması yaygın bir uygulama olmuştur. Bu yöntem sayesinde, bazı eserlerin günümüze ulaşması, güzelliklerinin sergilenmesi, incelenmesi, izlenmesi ve gelecek kuşaklara aktarılması mümkün olmuştur.

Pax Iulia civitas bölgesindeki arkeolojik alanlardan elde edilen pek çok mozaik parçası da dahil olmak üzere, arkeolojik malzemenin büyük kısmı günümüzde Beja Bölgesel Arkeoloji Müzesi ile Vila Viçosa Kalesi Arkeoloji Müzesi’nde (Portalegre) muhafaza edilmektedir. Bu parçaların çoğu geometrik ve bitkisel motifler içerirken, bir kısmında dikkat çekici figüratif bezemeler de görülmektedir. Söz konusu parçaların önemli bir bölümü henüz yayımlanmamış ve ayrıntılı incelemeye tabi tutulmamıştır. Çalışmamız, Pax Iulia etki alanındaki iki arkeolojik yerleşimden bulunmuş iki figüratif mozaik odaklanmaktadır. Bunlardan biri Pax Iulia’da (günümüzde Portekiz’in Baixo Alentejo bölgesindeki Beja) keşfedilmiş, diğeri ise Monte do Meio, S. Brissos (Beja) Villası’ndan gelmektedir. Araştırmamız, bu mozaiklerin analizini yapmakla birlikte, keşif raporları, gerçekleştirilen restorasyonlar, korunma süreçleri ve müzeleştirilme biçimleri üzerine de odaklanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Pax Iulia, Civitas, Roma mozaikleri, Portekiz arkeoloji müzeleri, restorasyon, koruma.

1. Museums and Other Public and Religious Institutions with Mosaics in their Collections

Most Portuguese national and regional museums have small mosaic fragments in their collections. These fragments result from archaeological excavations or were offered by archaeologists as small gifts to friends and/ or samples to museum directors. Unfortunately, many of these fragments are now lost as it was not common practice to provide them with an inventory number or complete a registration form with their description. Therefore, most of the records that exist are scarce and imprecise.

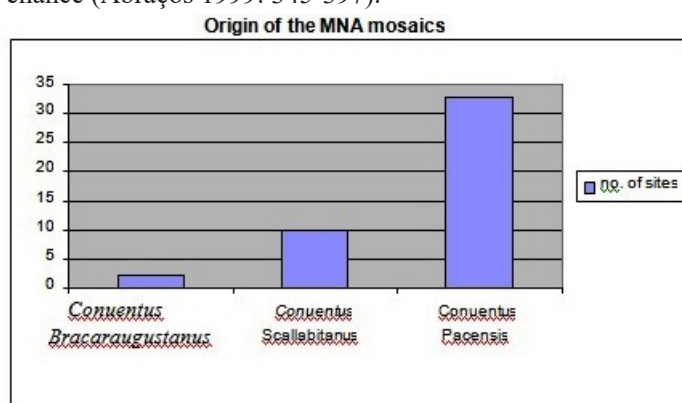
From northern to southern Portugal, we have examined 114 pieces of mosaic from the collections of several museums (Abraços 2006). To the north of the Tagus River, in the city of Braga, the museums with mosaic fragments are: the D. Diogo Sousa Archaeological Museum, with mosaic fragments from Braga and musealized mosaics belonging to a *domus in situ*; the Biscainhos Museum; the Pius XII Museum, which has in its vicinity the structures of a Roman *domus* from whose *impluvium* was taken a mosaic with fish decoration in its exhibition; and the Chapter Museum of the Cathedral of Braga. Other museums with mosaics in their collections are: the Martins Sarmiento Society Museum in Guimarães; the Sacred Art and Archaeology Museum in Porto; the Mendes Correia Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology/University of Porto; the Flaviense Region Museum in Chaves; the Caramulo Museum in Viseu (Abel de Lacerda

Foundation); the Santos Rocha Museum in Figueira da Foz; the Joaquim Tavares Proença Júnior Museum in Castelo Branco; the Fundação Archaeology Museum; the Machado de Castro National Museum in Coimbra; the National Museum of Conímbriga; the Museum and Roman *Villa* of Rabaçal in Penela; the Convent of Christ in Tomar (with some mosaic fragments deposited there); the Vila Franca de Xira Archaeology Museum; the Amadora Municipal Archaeology Museum; the Loures Archaeology Museum; the S. Miguel de Odrinhas Archaeology Museum in Odrinhas (Sintra).

The city of Lisbon has seven museums with mosaic fragments in their collections: the City Museum of Lisbon with some *tesserae* found in the Casa dos Bicos; the Roman Theatre Museum, with small mosaic fragments discovered in the Palácio do Correio-Mor and Rua dos Correeiros; the Rua dos Correeiros Archeological Site (NARC)/Fundação Millennium BCP), with a mosaic *in situ* from a room belonging to a Roman thermal structure; the Archaeology Museum of Carmo, with two fragments, (Abraços 2005b: 241-245); the Ajuda National Palace Museum, with a mosaic from Conímbriga (Sales - Abraços 2019); the Museum of Antiquities of the Portuguese National Library in Lisbon, with nine small fragments from archaeological sites in the southern region of Portugal; and the Portuguese National Archaeology Museum (MNA = *Museu Nacional de Arqueologia*) in Lisbon, with 250 fragments from various locations throughout the country, five fragments from Balquis, and fragments of unknown provenance (Abraços 1999: 345-397).

Figure 1
Origin of the mosaics from the Portuguese National Archaeology Museum.

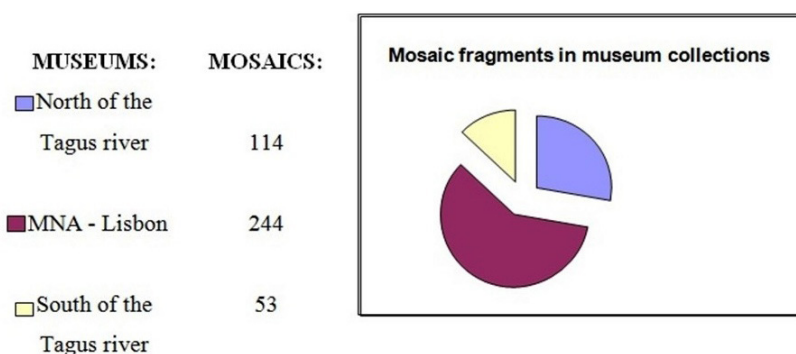
Note: MNA - the Portuguese National Archaeology Museum; no. - number.



South of the Tagus River, most of the mosaic fragments housed in museums belong to nearby archaeological sites, including the Archaeological Museum of Évora; the Municipal Museum of Estremoz; the Museum of Archaeology of the Castle of Vila Viçosa; the Municipal Museum of Elvas; the Rainha D. Leonor Museum in Beja; the Municipal Museum of Portimão; the Municipal Archaeological Museum of Loulé; the Municipal Museum of Albufeira; the Municipal Museum of Faro, and the Municipal Museum of Lagos (Abraços 2016: 372).

Figure 2
Distribution of mosaic fragments across Portuguese museums with emphasis on the collection from the Portuguese National Archaeology Museum (with 244 fragments originating from Portugal).

Note: MNA - the Portuguese National Archaeology Museum



2. Sites of Origin of Mosaics in Portugal

Until the mid-20th century, it was common practice to transport mosaics to museums due to the challenges associated with their study and the lack of support for their protection and preservation *in situ*. Thus, due to the efforts of its first director José Leite de Vasconcelos, and his successor Manuel Heleno, by 1947 the MNA had mosaics from 45 Portuguese sites: two from the *Conuentus Bracaraugustanus*, ten from the *Conuentus Scallabitanus* and 33 from sites in the *Conuentus Pacensis*. Figure 3 shows the administrative division of Roman *Hispania* in *Conuentus* and Provinces, as presented by Jorge de Alarcão.



Figure 3
Map, with Conuentus ab Province, adapted from Jorge de Alarcão, “Divisões administrativas da Hispânia romana”, *História de Portugal*, Vol. I, ed. C. Leitores, 1992.

Archaeological sites with mosaics are present in various regions of Portugal, including:

Braga; Leiria; Conímbriga; the Mondego River Valley; Egítania; the Tagus River Valley; Évora; the *Alto Alentejo* area included in the *Conuentus Emeritensis*; Beja; the Sado River Valley, and the Algarve coastline.

In his inventory, Jorge de Alarcão (1988) lists 167 sites of Roman mosaics sites in Portugal. Since then, numerous additional sites have been discovered. Bairrão Oleiro in his final lecture at the Art History Department of the Universidade Nova de Lisboa (Oleiro 1996: 13), pointed out the existence of nearly 200 sites.

Since then, discoveries have been made, such as those uncovered in Braga (the *Conuentus Bracaraugustanus* [CMRCB, 2019] inventory includes 39 archaeological sites with mosaics in Braga); the Casa do Infante in the riverside area of Porto; Coriscada in Mêda; Coimbra University Courtyard; S. Simão in Penela; Paço dos Vasconcelos in Santiago da Guarda (Ansião); Prado Galego in Pinhel; Rio Maior in Santarém; Frietas in Loures; and various locations in Lisbon - such as, Rua dos Correeiros; the Cloister of the Cathedral of Lisbon; the

Sommer Warehouses in Largo de Santo António, and the Correio-Mor Palace. Discoveries were also made in Quinta da Bolacha in Amadora; Almargem do Bispo in Sintra; Rua António Joaquim Granjo and Rua Arronches Junqueiro (nº. 75) in Setúbal; Alter do Chão (in Portalegre); Quinta das Longas in Elvas; Porto da Lama, Santa Catarina de Sítimos in the área of Alcácer do Sal, discovered in 2022; Herdade das Argamassas in Campo Maior; and at the forum/*alcaçova* of Mértola (where a new find was made in 2022).

Cristina Oliveira (Oliveira 2003) published a monograph on the Rio Maior mosaics, while Virgílio Lopes (Lopes 2003) studied the Mértola mosaics. The other mosaics mentioned above have also been studied and published by various authors in magazines and conference proceedings. Archaeologists from the Municipal Council of Alcácer do Sal, in collaboration with the company *ArcheoEstudos*, are studying the mosaics recently discovered at Sta. Catarina de Sítimos (*Villa* of the Centaurs), and Virgílio Lopes is currently studying a polychrome figurative Paleochristian mosaic recently discovered at Mértola.

The number of mosaic sites known to date located north of the Tagus River (*Conuentus Bracaraugustanus* and *Conuentus Scallabitanus*) has increased significantly, which seems to contradict the theory that Roman mosaics were less usual in the northern regions.

3. Procedures for Lifting and Preserving Mosaics: Examples of Interventions

It was only in 1947 that Roman mosaic pavements in Portugal began to be surveyed, and set in cement supports using the knowledge gathered from contacts with an Italian restoration team from Florence (Abraços 2005a: 414-435; Abraços 2010: 187-206) that was called to measure and restore the mosaics from Torre de Palma. Subsequently, a team from the Portuguese Directorate-General for National Buildings and Monuments began to apply the Florence team's method in Roman mosaics from Conímbriga and other Portuguese locations.

However, the method implemented by the Florence team, advocated by European restorers, and confirmed in the Venice Charter proved to be ineffective. Therefore, in the 1960s, a new technological approach was introduced with the use of lighter supports. In Portugal, this new approach only began to be implemented in the 1980s, specifically in the mosaics of Torre de Palma and those at the MNA collection.

Thus, the mosaics from Torre de Palma were subject to two methods of lifting. The first method was applied when the mosaics were lifted in 1948, and the second method was applied when the mosaics were lifted in 1982, as part of the remodeling process of the MNA. In 1982, the reinforced cement supports were removed and the "Mosaic of the Muses" and the "Mosaic of the Horses" received new, lighter, and reversible supports at the *Oficina de Restauro de Mosaicos de Conímbriga* (Conímbriga Mosaic Restoration Workshop). The funding attributed by the former Portuguese Institute of Cultural Heritage (IPPC) enabled the interventions on these two mosaics, as well as the installation of lighter supports on the old collection of wooden-framed mosaic fragments from the Portuguese regions of Algarve and Alentejo and five mosaic fragments from Balquis, in current Syrian territory (Abraços 1999: 376).

In the 1980s, Carlos Beloto, conservator of the Monographic Museum of Conímbriga, at the request of director Adília Alarcão, created a computerized

list of archaeological sites with Roman mosaics. The list included three fields for each mosaic: location, summary description, and available documentation. This work was considered groundbreaking and established the basis for subsequent mosaic conservation and restoration works (Beloto 1989).

In 1983, Carlos Beloto's team consolidated several mosaics from archaeological sites in the Algarve, including those from Boca do Rio in the municipality of Vila do Bispo. Additionally, in 1987, a team from the Founding Committee of the Municipal Museum of Portimão collaborated with the Museum of Conímbriga in the restoration of some mosaics from Abicada in Portimão, Algarve. Several archaeological campaigns were held to study and restore the mosaics from the *Villa* of Milreu in Estói, Faro. In 1987, Carlos Beloto lifted several of them and the soil was analysed. All of these mosaics were restored in Conímbriga and returned to their original location. In 1988, Carlos Beloto examined all the mosaics in the MNA and resumed the process of working on the mosaics in the museum's collection. The mosaics from Campo Maior, S. Salvador, and Argamassas were cleaned and consolidated (Abraços 2006: Annex II: 143-146). The same was done for those from Quinta das Longas, Elvas (Abraços 2006: Annex I, 154-01 to 154-05). Eduardo Arsénio (see footnote 6) consolidated the five fragments of the same mosaic found in 1984 in Vale da Arrancada, which are now included in the collection of the Museum of Portimão (Abraços 2006: Annex I, sheet 401). The mosaic was also given a new reinforced cement support.

The mosaics from Pisões underwent several interventions. Eduardo Arsénio replaced most of the original supports with reinforced cement ones at the end of the 1960s. In 1983, Carlos Beloto cleaned and consolidated some of the mosaics at this station (Beloto 1989). In 1986, Rui Parreira (IPPC senior archaeology technician) presented to the IPPC a program to restore and safeguard the *Villa* of Pisões (Beja). Rural workers from Alentejo were trained in Conímbriga to learn mosaic treatment techniques. The station was cleaned and a visitor route was established. In 1987, the mosaics were restored to their original condition. Gaps were filled with lightweight mortar and some mosaic pavements were covered with sand.¹

4. Sites and Mosaics Located in the Area of Influence of *Pax Iulia* (*Conuentus Pacensis*) and the Museums that House them

The mosaic sites in the *Conuentus Pacensis*² are mainly located in the area of *Pax Iulia*, (the capital of this *Conuentus*), as well as in *Ebora*, *Myrtilis*, and along the entire Algarve coast. Many of the mosaics from the Portuguese regions of Alentejo and Algarve are *in situ*, although several are also present in the collections of various museums.

The mosaics from the city of Beja and several *Villae* in the *Pax Iulia* area of influence were discovered in Baleizão (Quinta de S. Pedro), Monte do Meio, S. Brissos, Quintos (Herdade do Montinho), Mina de Algares (Aljustrel), Herdade da Calçada (Sta Clara do Louredo), Beringel (Ponte de Lisboa and Horta do Pombal), Alcaçarias (N. Sra das Neves), and Fonte da Moura (Pardais).

The Rainha D. Leonor Archaeological Museum in Beja currently houses fragments of mosaics from the archaeological sites mentioned above, as well as those found within the city of Beja. Most of these fragments were brought by

¹ AAVV 1994: 102.

² A large part of the Portuguese regions as Beira Alta, Beira Baixa and Northeast Alentejo were part of the *Conuentus Emeritensis* which includes *Abelterium*, now Alter do Chão (Portalegre).

Abel Viana (Abraços - Wrench 2023).

The Regional Museum of Beja is located in the Convent of Nossa Senhora da Conceição, founded in 1459 by infantes Dom Fernando and Dona Brites, parents of King Manuel I. The church, the chapter house, and the cloister from the original building have been preserved and house the museum's collection since 1927. This collection has been expanded with collections from other convents and palaces in the region. The archaeology section focuses primarily on the Roman period, which is abundant in this region. The Roman nucleus and the collection of classical capitals from the Roman Forum of *Pax Iulia* are noteworthy (<http://patrimoniocultural.gov.pt/>).

Five mosaics were displayed at the cloister of the museum building:³ a mosaic depicting Hercules discovered next to the museum on March 28, 1958; a mosaic fragment decorated with a Solomon's knot; a mosaic fragment decorated with a fish inside a circle and a mosaic fragment decorated with a simple guilloche (both originating from the Herdade do Montinho, in Quintos), and a mosaic fragment decorated with a composition of adjacent hexagons with a *quadrifolium* in the centre of unknown origin. A small fragment decorated with a vase, arch, and branch of leaves, possibly from Quinta de S. Pedro, Baleizão (Beja), was on display in a showcase inside the museum.

The "Mosaic of Hercules" (1,00 x 0,63 m) is considered one of the most significant. It was discovered in the city of Beja during the excavation of a trench between the Municipal Market and the yard of the Convent of Nossa Senhora da Conceição (Regional Museum). After Abel Viana excavated the site, Eduardo Arsénio, the Museum's warehouse keeper, conducted the examination, consolidation, and restoration of this mosaic.⁴

Regarding the conditions in which mosaics were found and preserved, Abel Viana stated that mosaics were among the most frequently destroyed pieces of archaeological evidence, both in the countryside and within certain Roman settlements. According to Abel Viana, this was due not only to the large surface area of mosaics but also because they are typically located at key points affected by urban development or in prime areas of cities and towns, valuable farmland, or important historical sites. As a result, intact sites are rare, and even those that are relatively well preserved can often be destroyed because of the lack of interest in preserving them *in situ* or collecting them in museums (Viana 1962: 102).

The other figurative mosaic found in the *Pax Iulia* area of influence is the "Mosaic of Medusa" (1,02 x 0,52 m) from Monte do Meio, S. Brissos. It is currently exhibited at the Archaeological Museum of the Castle of Vila Viçosa

3 Five of the fragments were on display and inserted into the walls of the Quadra de Nossa Senhora do Rosário, except for the mosaic decorated with a vase, arch, and branch of foliage (MRB.3007), which was on display in a showcase in the Museum. According to senior technician Dr. João Barreira, they will soon be removed and stored properly as the Museum is undergoing intervention.

4 Abel Viana (1896-1964) was born in Viana do Castelo. He became a primary school teacher in 1917, after spending three years in Rio de Janeiro. In 1938, he took up the post of Director of the School District in Faro, then moved to Setúbal and later, in the early 1940s, to Beja. He was the Director-editor of the "Beja Archive", a member of the Beja Art and Archaeology Commission, and a fellow of the Institute of High Culture and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. He contributed to magazines, newspapers, and other national and foreign publications (Ferreira 1964: 172-176).

Eduardo Arsénio, who was Abel Viana's primary school pupil, carried out various excavation works under his direction. In the ceramics and metal restoration laboratory at Abel Viana's house, Eduardo Arsénio collaborated with the master in restoring different materials. Later, as a fellow of the Institute of High Culture, he dedicated himself to the study and restoration of archaeological materials at the Museum of Beja.

(Évora). (<https://www.fcbraganca.pt/museu/museu-arqueologia/>).

Abel Viana created and organized this museum considering the volume and importance of the heritage discovered in the region. The museum houses three Roman mosaics, one from Pardais (Vila Viçosa), and two from Monte do Meio, which probably belonged to the same mosaic pavement of one of the rooms of the *Villa* (Viana 1954: XI, 15; Nolen 2004: 14-17). One fragment of this mosaic has a geometric decoration and the other depicts the upper part of Medusa's face.

5. Study of the “Mosaic of Hercules” and the “Mosaic of Medusa”

5.1. The “Mosaic of Hercules”

The panel features a (apparently) three-sided frame composed of two parallel black fillets, with an embattled band between them.

Hercules is depicted in a “three-quarter view”, holding a mace with his left hand at shoulder level, surrounded by a row of black *tesserae*. The hero's face is round, outlined by black *tesserae*, and his curly hair is adorned with a crown of vine leaves.



Figure 4

The “Mosaic of Hercules”, ©Museus e Monumentos de Portugal, EPE/Rainha D. Leonor Archaeological Museum

Hercules' beard and moustache are outlined by black *tesserae* as well as his eye's pupil and outline. His shoulder and right arm are inaccurately depicted as the latter appears to be slightly away from the body and bent with the hand seemingly closed. This is probably due to the *tesserae* replacement done after the mosaic was lifted. The replaced *tesserae* did not follow the original design, resulting in the misshaped arm and shoulder. Nemeia's lion skin falls from his left shoulder and runs down his back to his feet. The lion skin featured with brown, yellow, and brownish-red *tesserae*, and the outline is made up of black *tesserae*.

A row of *tesserae* marks a shadow projected backward along the heel of Hercules's left foot. The volume of the hero's body is depicted by rows of orange-red pointed *tesserae*. His right leg is bent almost at a right angle, and his left leg is slightly bent at the knee, giving him a stumbling posture, which supports the belief that this is a representation of Hercules drunk.

One of the mosaics from Torre de Palma, *Conuentus Pacensis*, dating from the 3rd and early 4th centuries (CMRP, II, 1, mosaic 2: 193; 196 pl. LVIIb) also provides a representation of an inebriated Hercules being supported by Mercury. Considering the mosaic from Beja, the representation of Hercules's body is clumsy and the hero appears isolated within a three-side framed panel. This may point to an artisan who was less skilled in copying a model, limitations in the representation space, or the trend to reduce the number of figures in certain mythological scenes. This trend is visible in some mosaics in the House of Fountains in Conímbriga, such as the circular medallion depicting the liberation of Andromeda by Perseus (CMRP, I, mosaic 1: 36). Nevertheless, the more plausible reasons for the deformity of the figure's right shoulder and arm are either the loss of *tesserae* during the lifting and restoration of the mosaic for display in the museum or a restoration poorly carried out in antiquity.

These two representations of Hercules "weakened" by the effects of alcohol are the only ones found in Portugal. The news of the lifting of the mosaic of Beja was given by Abel Viana (Viana 1959: vol. XV: 21-24, Est. 2), with a reference and description in Abraços 2006 (Annex 1: 350-352).

Among the various Hispanic mosaics depicting the Labors of Hercules, the one from Cártama (Málaga), dating from the beginning of the 3rd century, deserves special mention. In it, a "drunken Hercules" seen leaning on a satyr in one of the mosaic panels is also presented as a "victorious Hercules" in another panel, which would be in a central position, surrounded by other panels alluding to his Labors (CME, III, mosaic 62: 88-92, Lams. 72; 92-95 fig. 4). This is a way of presenting the duality of the hero's *persona*, more human than divine, able to attain the immortality of the gods and be welcomed in Olympus due to his "efforts" to overcome his human weaknesses and the help he gave to others, such as the return of Alceste to Admetus.

The cult of Hercules was prevalent in the Roman world, spanning various geographical regions. Imagery depicting the mythical hero and his "virtuous" Labours was found in Roman domestic mosaics in Hispania, Gaul, in Caesarean Mauretania in a *triclinium* mosaic depicting Hercules with the centaur Erythion (Ghedini 1989: 211-223), in Africa Proconsularis, and in the Mediterranean East. This imagery describes symbolically the *uirtus* of the hero and, by extension, the *uirtus* of those who commissioned the mosaics, the owners of the *Domus*.

The idea that one could achieve immortality and tranquility in the afterlife through the practice of *uirtus* appears to be evident in certain scenes depicting

the Labors of Hercules in pagan funerary contexts. According to André Grabar, the scenes of the Labors of Hercules found in the pagan hypogeum of Via Latina are closely linked to Christian images of salvation. On the Christian side, they refer to the believer's salvation by God. On the pagan side, they refer to the Labors of Hercules, who was a hero who devoted his life to working for the liberation of humankind. These images share a religious meaning, namely, the demonstration of divine power at the service of humanity (Grabar 1994: 32-34).

Probably dating from the last quarter of the 2nd century due to its surface pattern (Recueil III, 2, mosaic 306: 106-116 pl. XLIV), a mosaic from Vienne, in the Gallo-Roman Museum in Lyon also depicts a drunken Hercules, accompanied by an extended Dionysian entourage.

The mosaics from Cártama, Torre de Palma, and Vienne, mentioned above, are linked to various North African mosaics from Acholla (CME III: 90-91), Themetra, Sousse, Sfax. Janine Lancha mentions a representation of Hercules staggering from the effects of Bacchus' nectar in a Pannonian mosaic from Aquincum, dating from the first half of the 3rd century, in which Hercules is supported by two satyrs (Recueil III, 2: 115; CMRP II, 1: 196).

5.2. The “Mosaic of Medusa”

When describing one of the mosaics found at the *Villa* of Monte do Meio, archaeologist Abel Viana (1954: XI:15, Est. III, 23 and 33) identified the representation of a human figure (bust) with only the upper part of the head remaining, which he believed to be Vertumnus. However, the fragment depicts the upper part of Medusa's head, with snakes emerging from her hair and large piercing eyes. Although the small wings at the top of the hair are not visible in this (rather) schematic representation, the intensity of the petrifying gaze of the only mortal of the three Gorgons stands out.



Figure 5
Medusa's head, Monte do Meio, S. Brissos, Beja. Museum of Archaeology of the Castle of Vila Viçosa (Nolen 2004: 16 fig. 14).

It differs from other depictions of Medusa, such as the one in the 2nd century Italica mosaic (Mourão 2010: vol. I: 229; vol. II: 94), where her face and expressionless gaze resemble common female representations despite the zoomorphic features in her hair, including two small wings and snakes.

In addition to the mosaic of Monte do Meio (Beja), Medusa also appears represented in Portugal in a mosaic medallion of the peristyle of the House of Fountains in Conímbriga (*Conuentus Scallabitanus*), dating from the 2nd-3rd century (CMRP I, mosaic 1: 32-36, Est.3) and in the figurative panel of the mosaic of the *triclinium* of a Roman house in Alter do Chão (*Conuentus Emeritensis*), dating from the first half of the 4th century (António 2015: 55; 63; 69, fig. 3; Caetano – Mourão 2011: 207-209). The Medusa's representation in

the mosaic from Monte do Meio is much more schematic, and less realistic, with the hair resembling a coif.⁵

In the mosaic of Beja, Medusa is placed in a prominent position at the centre of an eight-pointed star formed by the intersection of two squares drawn by a simple guilloche, which in turn occupy a circle. The spaces between the star and the circle are decorated with plant elements. The remaining decoration on the mosaic floor is geometric. The human figure of the Gorgon, with its piercing gaze, emphasizes its apotropaic function, protecting the inhabitants of the house and the guests who gathered in this room.

Figure 6
The “Mosaic of Medusa”, Museum of Archaeology of the Castle of Vila Viçosa, ©Fundação Casa de Bragança.



Final Notes

The conservation and restoration of mosaics have been an integral part of heritage policies. The discovery of mosaics from the *Villa* of Torre de Palma and the work of the Florence restoration team marked a turning point in the scientific safeguarding of this type of heritage.

Since the 1960s, the *Oficina de Restauro de Mosaicos de Conímbriga* (Conímbriga Mosaic Restoration Workshop) has been the official entity in Portugal providing regular conservation and restoration services for the archaeological mosaics that are part of the immense Portuguese collection. The current *Oficina* was built in 1986 under the aegis of Adília Alarcão, then director of the Conímbriga Monographic Museum. Given the intense workload and resulting wear and tear on the *Oficina*'s facilities, they must be renovated and modernized. There is hope that the *Oficina* will soon be relocated to a new physical space, in a wing to be added to the current museum building, according to a preliminary project submitted to the Institute of Museums and Conservation. Meanwhile, it will continue its task of responding to restoration requests for mosaics from various archaeological sites. These requests involve consolidating and restoring the mosaics *in situ*, or replacing the old reinforced cement supports with synthetic and lighter ones. Currently, under the direction of Pedro Sales, the *Oficina* is restoring the “Mosaic of Ulysses” from the *Villa* of Sta. Vitória do Ameixial (in Évora).

⁵ Abel Viana (Viana 1957: XIV: 25) mentions the finding of a coin of Honorius in the support of a mosaic from this *Villa*. Despite the scarce information, in addition to the Medusa's figure and the geometrical decoration of this mosaic pavement, it is possible to suggest a date between the late 4th century and (more probably) the 5th century.

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