

## LATE ANTIQUE FLOOR MOSAICS IN THE BALKANS<sup>1</sup>

The late antique floor mosaics of the Balkans are among the most important mosaics of their time.<sup>2</sup> The prominence of Illyrian rulers in the late third and early fourth centuries and their frequent presence in the strategic Balkan provinces encouraged building there during this period. Monumental complexes with large scale floor mosaics were constructed at Split, Sirmium, Thessaloniki, Romuliana (Gamzigrad) and Mediana near Niš. Many of these complexes can be associated with rulers, although only the Palace of Galerius in Thessaloniki is an imperial palace in the strictest sense of the term. The lack of an extensive previous tradition of floor mosaics in this region during the second and early third centuries as well as the location of these provinces along the dividing line between the eastern and western halves of the Roman empire make these mosaics all the more significant. By adapting ornamental patterns to the enormous pavements of these imperial complexes and creating two-dimensional geometric carpets, mosaicists working in the Balkans and Greece emphasized surface decoration as would be typical of the late antique style. Such all-over designs had a long history in the western part of the Empire. At the same time the framed pictures at Romuliana and Mediana are more typical of eastern tradition.

The retirement residence of Diocletian at Split dates to 295-305.<sup>3</sup> Mosaic floors, probably belonging to its original construction, have been found east of the vestibule in a courtyard<sup>4</sup> (Figure 1). Each corridor has a single geometric

---

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank the city of Niš and the organizers of the Niš and Byzantium conference, particularly Miša Rakocija, for their kind invitation, skillful organization and warm hospitality during the conference. My participation was supported by research funds from the Colorado College.

<sup>2</sup> For additional illustrations and bibliography see my earlier article, R. Kolarik, *Tetrarchic Mosaics of the Balkans*, La Mosaïque Gréco-romaine IV, Trier 1988, 171-183. While my earlier conclusions remain sound, subsequent work on monuments in Serbia and Thessaloniki offers new material for analysis.

<sup>3</sup> A useful summary of the Palace of Diocletian with extensive bibliography is J. J. Wilkes, *Diocletian's Palace Split: Residence of a Retired Roman Emperor*, Sheffield 1993.

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion and summary with earlier bibliography see S. McNally, *Joint American-Croatian Excavations in Split (1965-1974)*, *Antiquity Tardive* 2 (1994), 107-121. Some have speculated that the mosaics actually belong to a later phase, but there is no trace

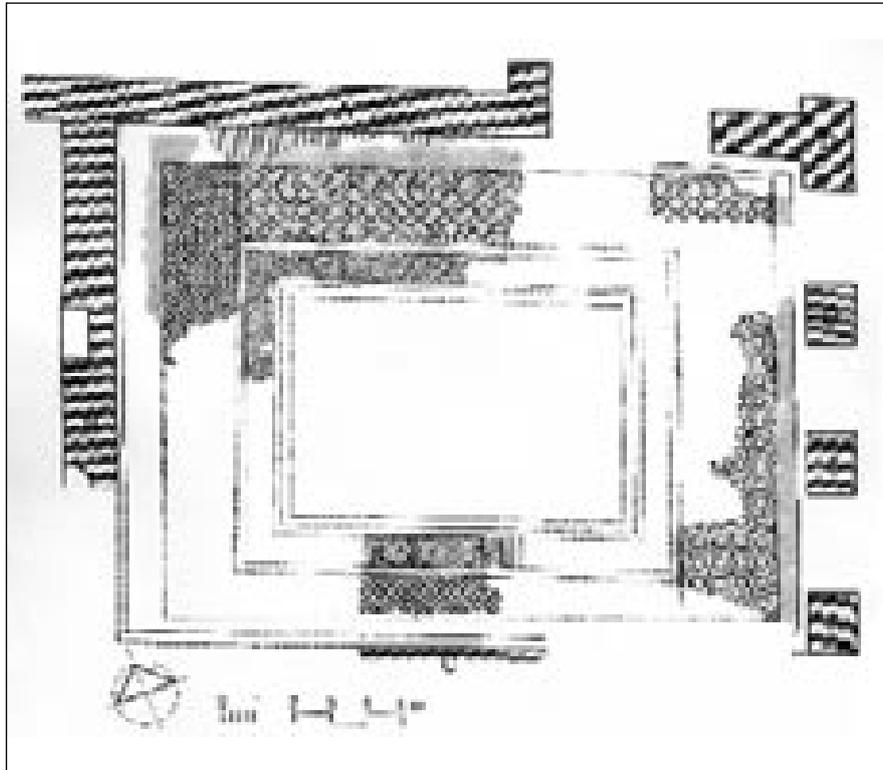


Fig. 1. Split, mosaics of a peristyle, after J. and T. Marašović, S. McNally and J. Wilkes, Diocletian's Palace

Сл. 1. Сплит, мозаици у перистиљу, према Ј. и Т. Марашовићу, С. Мекналију и Џ. Вилкесу, Диоклецијанова палата

pattern: on the west squares and tangent diamonds, on the east eight-pointed lozenge stars determining large squares and small squares, on the south knucklebone shapes in oblique rows and on the north octagons alternating with and adjacent to crosses determining oblong hexagons. The patterns are either common or easily derived from established motifs. The color scheme is limited to black/gray, red and light brown. The dark on white designs are only accented with color or have simple geometric filling motifs.

Although the geometric mosaics of Split are mediocre in quality and have common patterns, it is possible to make some observations on their style. The frame and the interior lines form uniform two-dimensional linear patterns that

of any earlier construction below them. Other geometric mosaics have also been found in the palace, listed by McNally, *Ibid.* note 24, with bibliography. Illustrated in J. and T. Marasović, *Pregled radova urbanističkog biroa na istraživanju zaštiti i uređenju Dioklecijanove Palače od 1955 do 1965 g.*, Urbs 4 (1961-62), 34. The latter mosaics are of similar style and materials, but higher quality. They are not as well documented.

emphasize the surface plane. Such layouts find their ultimate source in the western Roman tradition of mosaic design. They were typical decoration for the floors of large imperial buildings in Rome.<sup>5</sup>

Various rulers, Diocletian, Galerius, Licinius and Constantine among others, sojourned or resided at Sirmium (modern Sremska Mitrovica) in the late third and early fourth centuries.<sup>6</sup> Some of the floor mosaics in Locality Ia, the „Palace,“ can be compared in a general way to the Tetrarchic mosaics from Split.<sup>7</sup> In Room 2, a hallway at least fifty meters long, two layers of partially-preserved mosaic have been discovered (Figure 2). The later mosaic is more homogenous and less complex in design than the earlier mosaic it replaced. This upper mosaic has a pattern of meanders and lozenges extended evenly over the



Fig. 2. Sirmium, Room 1, two layers of mosaic, photo author

Сл. 2. Сирмијум, Соба 1, два слоја мозаика, фотографија аутора

<sup>5</sup> For example both the Baths of Caracalla and the Baths of Diocletian had geometric mosaic floors on a large scale. Although some of the Caracalla mosaics were black and white, others are polychrome. J. Delaine, *The Baths of Caracalla*, Portsmouth RI 1997, 24-31; M. E. Blake, *Mosaics of the Late Empire in Rome and Vicinity*, *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*, 17 (1940), 88-90.

<sup>6</sup> M. Mirković, *Sirmium, Its History from the 1 Century a.d. to 582 a.d.*, Sirmium I, Belgrade 1971, 36-41. Recent bibliography in V. Popović, *Sirmium: A Town of Emperors and Martyrs*, in D. Srejović, *Roman Imperial Towns and Palaces in Serbia*, Gallery of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Belgrade 1993, 15-27.

<sup>7</sup> Its identity as an imperial palace has been called into question by Duval. N. Duval, *Sirmium, 'Ville imp'riale' ou 'Capitale'*, XXVI Corso di cultura sull'arte ravennate e bizantine, Ravenna 1979, 53-90. It is nevertheless maintained in subsequent publications. O. Brukner, *Прилог проучавања споменика урбаног развоја Сирмијума*, Града за проучавање споменика културе Војводине 11-12 (1981-82), 5-31; M. Jeremić, *The Imperial Palace*, *Roman Imperial Towns*, 90-96.

floor. There is really no frame to speak of other than the white surround along the lateral wall. The simple layout parallels the style of the Split peristyle. At Sirmium too the color scheme is limited, comprising only black, red and light brown; the tesserae are relatively coarse. Archaeological evidence confirms a fourth-century date. It is possible that the Sirmium floor dates to 308-316, at the time when Licinius made his headquarters in Sirmium, although it is more prudent to think of it simply as early fourth century. The monumental scale of the hallway, the style of the mosaics and the possibility of imperial patronage relate it to others under discussion here.

The palace complex of Galerius in Thessaloniki dating to 308-311, when Galerius ruled there, contains vast geometric floor mosaics in its enormous spaces: two peristyles, an apsidal hall (perhaps a reception room) and other associated rooms. Many different patterns have been recorded—geometric as well as floral motifs (Figures 3, 5, 7, 11, 20). These mosaics, discovered at varying times over the last century and incompletely published, have recently been brought together and cataloged by Atzaka-Asimakopoulou.<sup>8</sup>



Fig. 3. Thessaloniki, Palace of Galerius, plan after Atzaka

Сл. 3. Солун, Галеријусова палата, план према Ацаки

<sup>8</sup> P. Asimakopoulou- Atzaka, *Σύνταγμα των παλαιοχριστιανικών ψηφιδωτών δαπέδων της Ελλάδος III Μακεδονία – Θράκη 1*. Τα ψηφιδωτά δάπεδα της Θεσσαλονίκης (Thessaloniki 1998), 71-112, 181-208, pls. 1-56, geometric patterns used in the palace mosaics, drawings 1-8, color plates I-XIII.

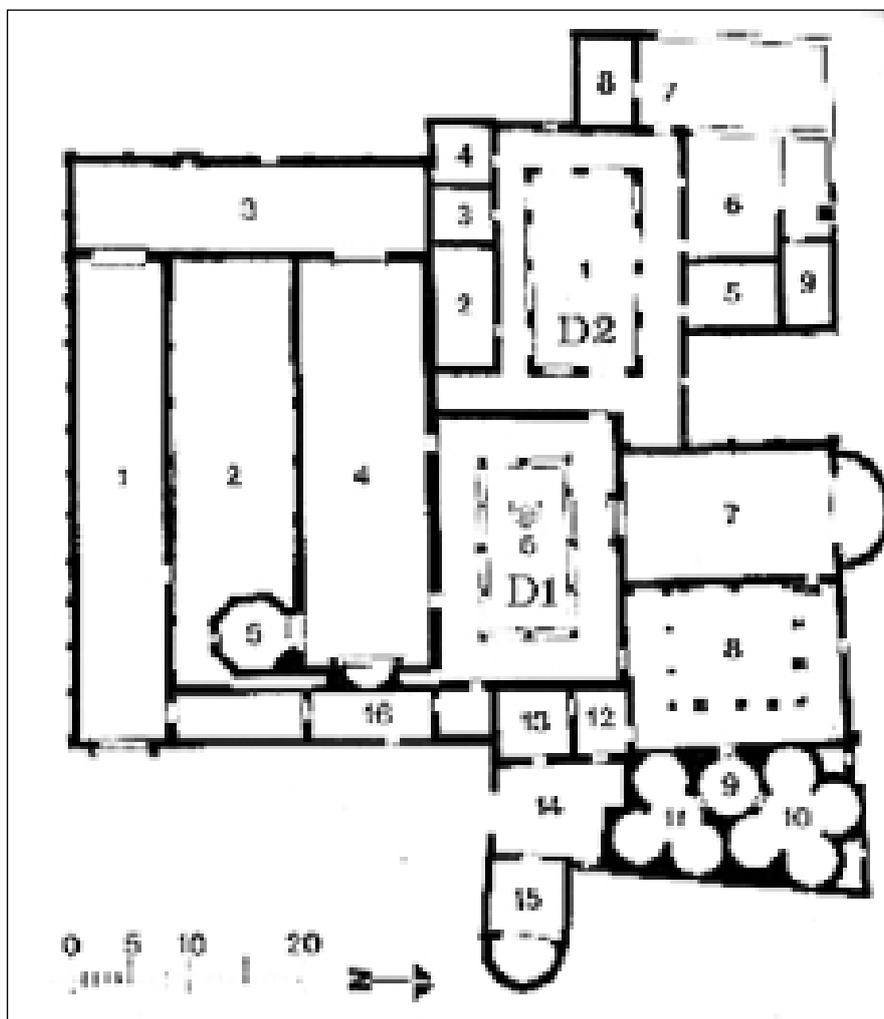


Fig. 4. Romuliana, overall plan after Srejović, Roman Imperial Towns

Сл. 4. Ромулијана, генерални план према Срејовићу, Римски царски градови

The north peristyle is immense; the mosaic in its north corridor, featuring meanders in perspective, measures sixty-five meters long ( Figure 11). The south hallway is decorated with a design of stars of eight lozenges with tangent squares forming octagons and lozenges (Figure 5); the east hallway has an all-over design of intersecting dodecagons forming squares and triangles around hexagons (Figure 7). Other patterns include a grid of diamonds with squares (Figure 20), a popular pattern used also at Mediana (Figure 19). Like the mosaics from Split and Sirmium, those at Thessaloniki also have geometric designs repeated to cover long corridors, but they are somewhat higher in quality and

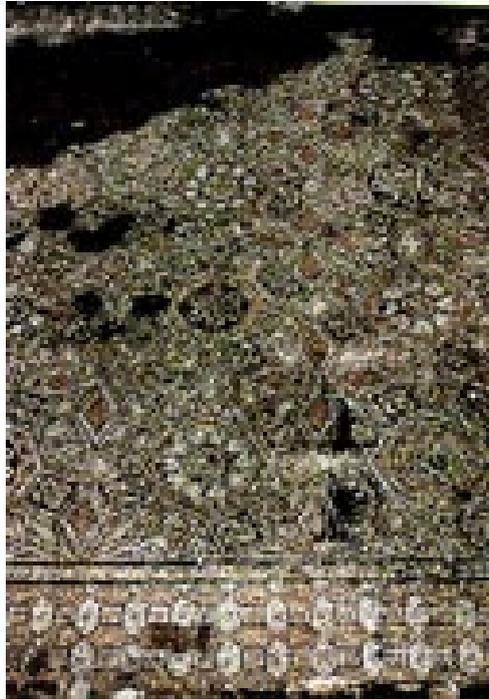


Fig. 5. Thessaloniki, Palace of Galerius north peristyle, east corridor mosaic, after Atzaka

Сл. 5. Солун, северни перистил Галеријусове палате, мозаик у источном делу трема, према Ацаки

different in style. Their tesserae are slightly smaller, precisely cut and carefully laid into more complex and varied designs. While mosaics from all three sites use a limited number of colors, their chromatic effects are rather different. In the Thessaloniki mosaics color is used to create shading and effects of spatial recession as in the egg-and-dart motif seen in several floors (Figure 7). The fact that many of the filling motifs are set on dark grounds adds variety. Such techniques create an impression different from the flat dark-on-light linear patterns at Split and Sirmium.

In addition to his enormous imperial palace in Thessaloniki, Galerius also constructed a monumental palace/fortress with nearby mausolea, evidently intended as a retirement villa and a memorial to his mother and himself near his birthplace in eastern Serbia.<sup>9</sup> The palace complex at Gamzigrad, now securely identified with Felix Romuliana, had lavish decoration including elaborate floor mosaics

that show close connections with those of Thessaloniki. Located in an edifice in the northwest quadrant of the site, they were laid during the second phase of construction at Romuliana, between 303-306 and Galerius's death in 311<sup>10</sup> (Figures 4, 6, 8-10, 12-13). The distribution of mosaics within the Romuliana complex is similar to that in Galerius's Palace in Thessaloniki, both feature vast hallways paved with repeated geometric patterns, as well as richly decorated apsidal rooms.<sup>11</sup> Both sites have floors in both mosaic and *opus sectile*. While

<sup>9</sup> D. Srejšović, *Felix Romuliana: Galerius's Ideological Testament*, in *Roman Imperial Towns*, 31-53; D. Srejšović and C. Vasić, *Imperial Mausolea and Consecration Memorials in Felix Romuliana (Gamzigrad, East Serbia)*, Belgrade 1994. This paper uses the room numbering found in Srejšović and Vasić, here Figure 4.

<sup>10</sup> For the historical explanation of the dating, *Roman Imperial Palaces*, 51; Srejšović and Vasić, 151. A coin of Licinius dating from 309-311 was found in the bedding of the mosaic of Room 4 (the hall with the hunting mosaics), D. Srejšović, A. Lalović and Đ. Janković, *Гамзиград Касноантички царски дворца*, Belgrade 1983, 57, 197.

<sup>11</sup> Parallels between the architecture of the complexes at Thessaloniki and Romuliana have also been noted. М. Чанак-Медић, *Гамзиград: Касноантичка палата, архитектура и просторски склоп*, Саопштења 11 (Београд 1978) 119.

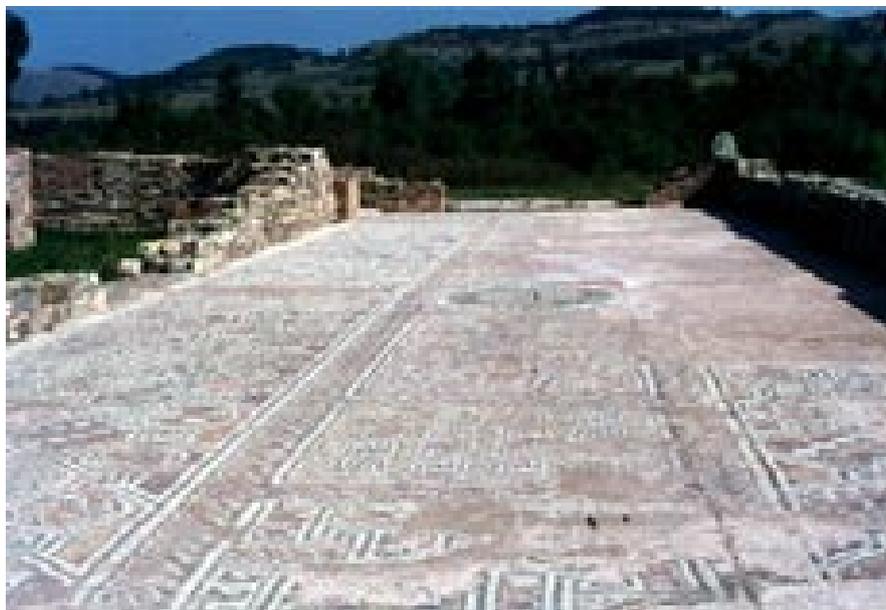


Fig. 6. Romuliana, overall of hall mosaic, photo author  
 Сл. 6. Ромулијана, мозаик у сали, фотографија аутора

the mosaics of the palace in Thessaloniki are exclusively geometric; however, Romuliana features splendid figural mosaics in addition to its extensive ornamental floors.<sup>12</sup>

The huge south hallway (Room 1 on Figure 4) at Romuliana is paved with a geometric carpet comparable to the mosaics of the Thessaloniki palace in scale<sup>13</sup> (Figures 6, 8, 9). Here, however, the design of the floor is not a single unified carpet, but is divided lengthwise into three carpets by braid borders. The lateral carpets are identical and have continuous patterns of meanders and octagons with inscribed circles decorated with knots, interlace, and wave patterns similar to the decoration used in Thessaloniki. They also include a wide variety of filling motifs: checkerboards, complex knots, a vessel, and rosettes--some slightly shaded, not seen at Thessaloniki. The central carpet contains varied smaller panels of geometric decoration. The patterns range from designs identical to those from Thessaloniki--intersecting dodecagons forming squares and triangles around hexagons and stars of eight diamonds connected with squares (compare Figures 7 and 8)--to a labyrinth surrounded by a crenellated wall. The filling elements include illusionistic motifs like twisted ribbon and

<sup>12</sup> For a complete listing of the motifs, Kolarik, *Tetrarchic Mosaics*, 176-177.

<sup>13</sup> The halls at Thessaloniki are approximately the same width, 8-9 m. as compared to 7.5 (Room 1) and 10.93 (Room 4) at Romuliana. The corridor mosaics at Thessaloniki range from 29 to 65 m. long, while those at Gamzigrad are 42.7 long, Room 1 and 36 m. long, Room 4. Atzaka, 189; Srejović and Vasić, 129-131.

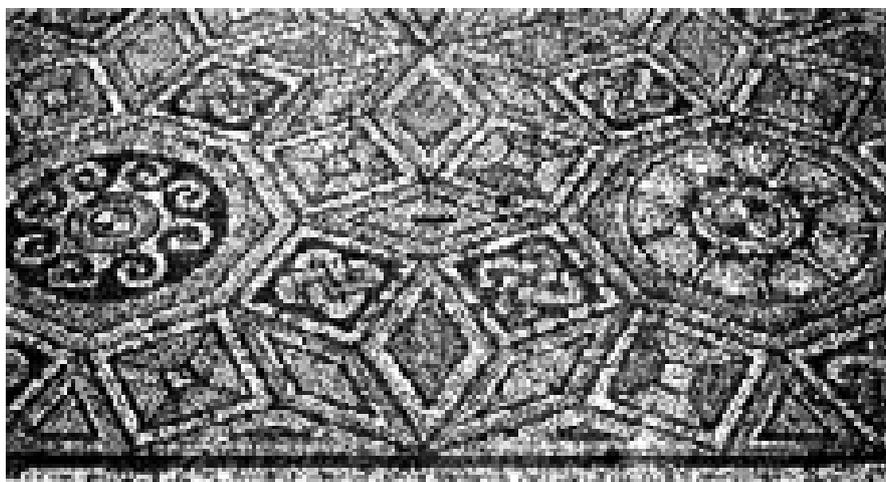


Fig. 7. Thessaloniki, Palace of Galerius, north peristyle, detail of south corridor mosaic, photo author

Сл. 7. Солун, Галеријусова палата, северни перистил, детаљ мозаика из јужног дела трема, фотографија аутора



Fig. 8. Romuliana, detail of mosaic in Room 1, photo author

Сл. 8. Ромулијана, детаљ са мозаика из Собе 1, фотографија аутора

„rainbow cable“<sup>14</sup> (Figure 9). Although the patterns are simply colored and the white ground is somewhat more prominent than in the corridor mosaics from Thessaloniki, shading and three dimensionality are carried further. Such illusionism as well as the use of the „rainbow style“ are characteristic of geometric

<sup>14</sup> K. Dunbabin, *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World*, Cambridge 1999, 163; D. Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*, Princeton 1947, 405-407.

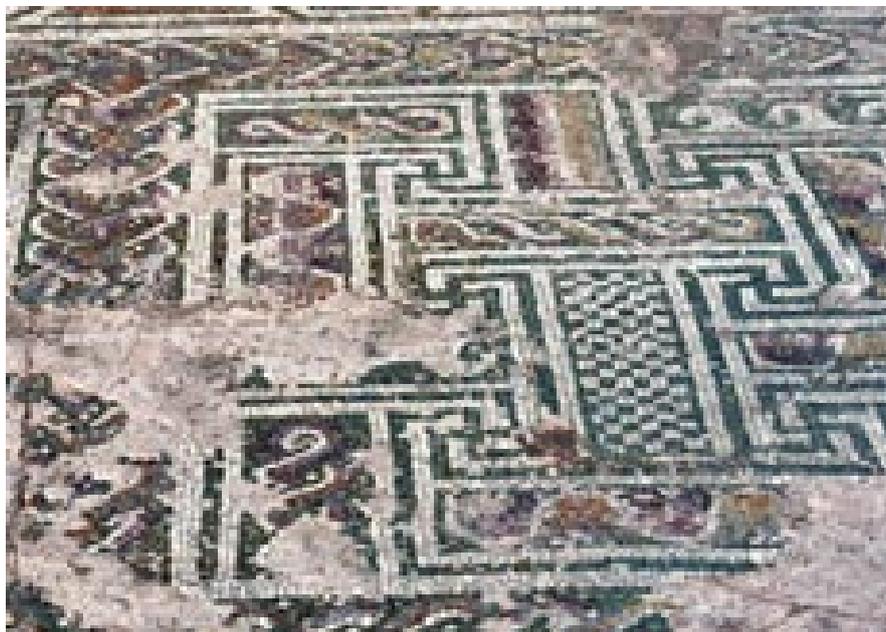


Fig. 9. Romuliana, detail of mosaic in Room 1, photo author

Сл. 9. Ромулијана, детаљ са мозаика из Собе 1, фотографија аутора

floor mosaics from the eastern half of the Empire. Nevertheless, the overall effects of the geometric mosaics in the halls of Thessaloniki and Romuliana as well as the repertoire of motifs are generally similar. Both feature variations on meanders, patterns with tangent squares, diamonds, hexagons and octagons variously arranged. Simple braids, geometricized vine scrolls and intersecting octagons form borders.

Two apsidal rooms at Romuliana have figured panels combined with geometric mosaics and in one case *opus sectile*. The mosaics of a monumental apsed hall (Room 4), had a series of variously oriented figural panels with hunting scenes, of which three survive in part (Figure 12). Two faced south towards the entrance of an octagonal chamber. The hunting scenes were individually framed with braid, the group of figural scenes surrounded by a meander in perspective (Figure 10) and flanked by long panels of a geometric design of intersecting circles. The mosaics of this hall were finer than the geometric carpet of Room 1.<sup>15</sup>

The meanders in perspective at Romuliana have rich illusionistic effects created with glass tesserae, blue-green and dark blue as well as several other colors. A variation of this common pattern was also seen in Thessaloniki--in

<sup>15</sup> M. Čanak- Medić quotes the conservator M. Medić who found the mosaics of Room 4 different from those of Room 1, Čanak- Medić, 119, note 298.



Fig. 10. Romuliana, meander frame in Room 4, photo author

Сл. 10. Ромулијана, бордура у облику меандера у Соби 4, фотографија аутора

several rooms and as an overall pattern in the north corridor of the peristyle (compare Figures 10 and 11). While the Thessaloniki pattern is slightly more intricate, it is laid exclusively with stone tesserae in muted colors.

An apsidal reception room (Room 7) at Romuliana had an impressive figural panel depicting Dionysus seated in front of a leopard (Figure 13). The picture was set just inside the door facing a viewer entering the room, while the rest of the room had geometric mosaics generally comparable to those of Room 1; the center of the room was evidently paved with *opus sectile*, which does not survive. There are differences of quality among the mosaics of Romuliana. The geometric floors of Room 1 are somewhat coarser than those of Room 4 with their bright glass tesserae and finely laid hunting scenes. The mosaics of the reception room combine ornamental mosaics comparable to Room 1 with finer figural mosaics. Since archaeological and historical evidence suggests that the complex was built and decorated within a relatively short time, differences among the mosaics are not chronologically significant, but are more likely explained by the status of the various rooms. The palace was entered from the east through Room 1, then the visitor made his way through Room 2 and finally into the richly decorated Room 4 with its hunting scenes arranged to be seen from an octagonal room on its south, possibly a throne room. There may also have been differences in technique. Sikimić who conserved the mosaics of Room 4, suggested that its mosaics may even have been brought ready-made to the site.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Р. Сикимић, *О технике Гамзиградских мозаика*, Зборник заштите споменика културе 12 1961, 139-145. No one to my knowledge has followed up on this sugges-



Fig. 11. Thessaloniki, Palace of Galerius, north peristyle, meanders from north corridor, after Atzaka

Сл. 11. Солун, Галеријусова палата, северни перистил, меандри из северног трема, према Ацаки

The figural mosaics of Romuliana are of very high quality (Figures 12 and 13). Each panel has a single or very few figures isolated against a white ground. Their setting is minimal, a summary indication of earth or spare vegetation. The figures of Dionysus and the hunters are executed with fine, subtly differentiated tesserae; although badly damaged, they compare with the finest fourth-century mosaics. The outlines, drawn in flowing curves, vary in color and thickness. Faces have a slight three-quarter angle; shadows beneath the chins and eyes are delicately indicated with slightly darker tones of tesserae. The hair falls freely in graceful wisps. Some details, like the ribbon so gracefully looped around Dionysus's thyrus, are extraordinarily refined. The interior modeling of the figures is conveyed by subtly-varied areas of color. Despite the emulation of classical modeling; however, the color patches read as flat patterns rather than three-dimensional volumes.

Although the Palace of Galerius has no figural mosaics, mosaics from a house found in a salvage excavation on Socrates Street in Thessaloniki are quite close to the Romuliana figure panels<sup>17</sup> (Figure 14). Both these mosaics and the

tion. Since the mosaics have been conserved and the figural panels moved to museums, it is impossible to confirm or refute his theory. A seam is, however, clearly visible on Figure 11.

<sup>17</sup> This mosaic was mentioned as a comparison to the Gamzigrad mosaics by Srejšović, in Srejšović, Lalović and Janković, *Гамзиград*, 69. At the time, however, these mosaics were thought to date to the second and third centuries, and thus interesting, but not particularly

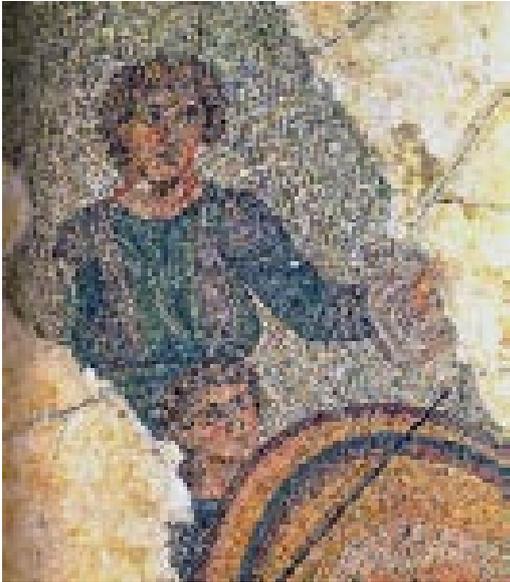


Fig. 12. Romuliana, detail of hunters from Room 4, after Srejšović, Lalović and Janković, Гамзиград

Сл. 12. Ромулијана, детаљ са ловцима из Собе 4, према Срејовићу, Лаловићу и Јанковићу, Гамзиград

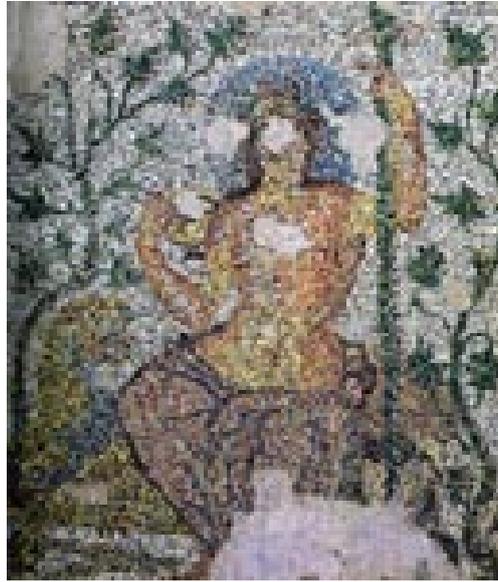


Figure 13. Romuliana, Dionysus from Room 7, after Srejšović, Lalović and Janković, Гамзиград

Сл. 13. Ромулијана, Дионизије из Собе 7, према Срејовићу, Лаловићу и Јанковићу, Гамзиград

hunting mosaics from Romuliana have a series of fields varying in orientation with white grounds framed in braid although the Thessaloniki mosaics are from a smaller room in a domestic setting. The depiction of individual figures is quite comparable as well with forms modeled in patches of color. There is a common preference for linear pattern, particularly in the drapery and a general flattening of space. The combination of such modeling and rather spare compositions on a prominent white ground occurs at both sites.

Thessaloniki may well be the source for the Romuliana mosaicists. There are parallels not only in the figural mosaics, but also the patterns and filling motifs of the geometric mosaics. Since Galerius was the moving force behind the building and decoration of Romuliana, it would seem plausible that he brought artists from Thessaloniki, the city where his imperial palace was located, to the remote province of his birth where he built a complex to commemorate himself and his mother. Significantly the mosaics of Romuliana with their figural scenes are more lavish than those of the official palace in Thessaloniki.

close, Kolarik, *Tetrarchic Mosaics*, 178-179. In the last few years, however, they have been redated by both Dunbabin, who sees them as early fourth century, and also Atzaka-Asimakopoulou who assigns them to the Tetrarchy. Dunbabin, 214; Atzaka, 353-354, pls. 298-300; color plate LXIV.

The large peristyle villa at Mediana near Niš, while impressive, is not as monumental as Split, Thessaloniki and Romuliana.<sup>18</sup> It has floor mosaics preserved in the corridors of the peristyle court, in an apsidal room, and in a triclinium (termed a nymphaeum in earlier publications) just east of the apsidal room and north of the peristyle<sup>19</sup> (Figures 15,17,19). Recent investigations suggest that the mosaics of the triclinium may date from an earlier phase, than the mosaics of the peristyle and apsidal room.<sup>20</sup> The mosaic in the triclinium's central hexagonal space is framed by a twisted ribbon with lotus blossoms on either side (Figure 15). Compared to the twisted ribbon seen at Romuliana where small groups of tesserae on either side of the center line only suggested flower-like forms (Figure 9), here the pattern is quite organic. Within the hexagon are squares filled alternately with ribbon and braid and centered with square or rosette designs. *Peltae* decorated with florets extend from the corners of the squares. A mosaic from the Large Bath at Sirmium is so similar to the floor of the Mediana triclinium that it may be a near contemporary product of the same workshop, one with connections in Sirmium<sup>21</sup>

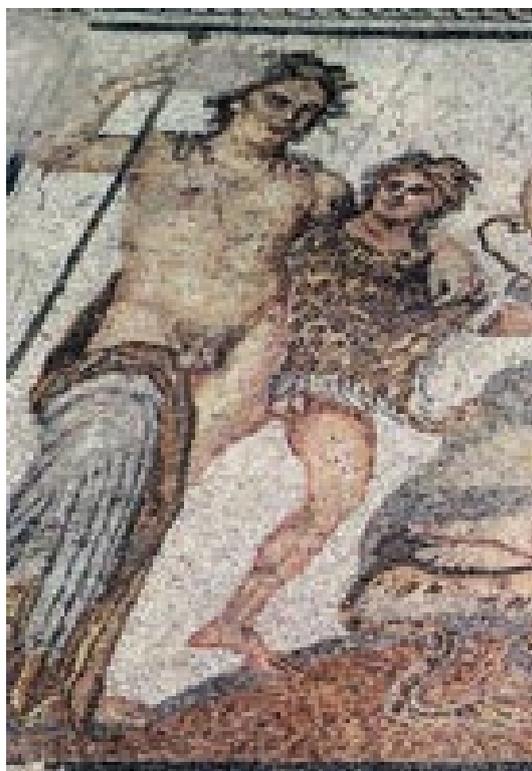


Fig. 14. Thessaloniki, House on Socrates Street, detail of mosaic of Dionysus and Ariadne, after Atzaka

Сл. 14. Солун, Кућа у Сократовој улици, детаљ мозаика са Дионизијем и Аријадном, према Ацаки

<sup>18</sup> The north-south peristyle corridors are 65 m. long, but considerably narrower than those at the previously discussed palaces. At 18.6 x 11.6, the dimensions of its apsed hall are very close to those of Room 7 at Romuliana which measures 18.5 x 11.1 m. Recent investigations of the villa have exposed a monumental entryway on the south. M. Vasić, *Хроника ископавања Медијане 2000 – 2002 године*, Старица 53-54 2003-2004, 288-294.

<sup>19</sup> Publications mention the mosaics briefly. P. Petrović, *Naissus: A Foundation of Emperor Constantine*, in *Roman Imperial Towns*, 69-74, 78; 170-173, 268-271; P. Petrović, *Mediana, Residence of Roman Emperors*, Belgrade 1994, 29-34, 82-84 and S. Drča, *Naissus*, in D. Davidov, ed. *Археолошко благо Ниша од неолита до средњег века*, Belgrade 2004, 52, 92. The villa and its mosaics are now being reinvestigated so all analysis must remain tentative; M. Vasić, *Хроника*, 288-294; Idem, *Bronze Railing from Mediana*, Старица 53-54 2003-2004, 104. Also see the article by Gordana Jeremić in this volume.

<sup>20</sup> M. Vasić, *Bronze Railing*, 104.

<sup>21</sup> A comparison suggested already by Vasilić, who noted that the Sirmium mosaics were not inferior to the mosaics from Mediana in quality, color and in the combination of geometric and organic motifs. B. Vasilić, *Топографска испитивања Сирмијума*, Зборник Матице Српске, Novi Sad 1952, 165-168.



Figure 15. Mediana, villa with peristyle, triclinium, after postcard

Сл. 15. Медијана, вила са перистилом, триклинијум, са разгледнице

(compare Figures 15 and 16). This bath is probably to be identified with the Baths of Licinius at Sirmium, known from an inscription found in the quarries at Brač.<sup>22</sup>

The mosaics from the apsidal room and the peristyle at Mediana are coarser in workmanship than the triclinium mosaics. They apparently go with a second phase of decoration in the villa, which Vasić believes could be as late as 340.<sup>23</sup> The mosaics of the apsidal room are badly damaged; a winged head of Medusa set into a geometric pattern survives.<sup>24</sup> Three sides of the peristyle have exclusively geometric patterns extended to cover long hallways as in the other complexes discussed here, while in the center of the north corridor opposite the apsidal room panels of geometric mosaics flank a central figural composition (Figure 17). Raised up a few centimeters above the floor of the corridor it matches the level of the apsidal room and marks its entryway. The figure panel depicts a mythological scene, probably Leda and the swan,<sup>25</sup> but only parts of a large white bird on the left and the feet of a central figure among water plants are preserved. A reclining river god from the lower right corner of

<sup>22</sup> The inscription mentions capitals carved for the Baths of Licinius in Sirmium. Mirković, *Sirmium*, 37; R. Kolarik, *Tetrarchic Mosaics*, 181, note 62.

<sup>23</sup> Vasić believes that this second phase may be as late as 340. M. Vasić, *Bronze Railing*, 104.

<sup>24</sup> Kolarik, pl. XCVII, 2.

<sup>25</sup> See article by Trovabene in this volume.

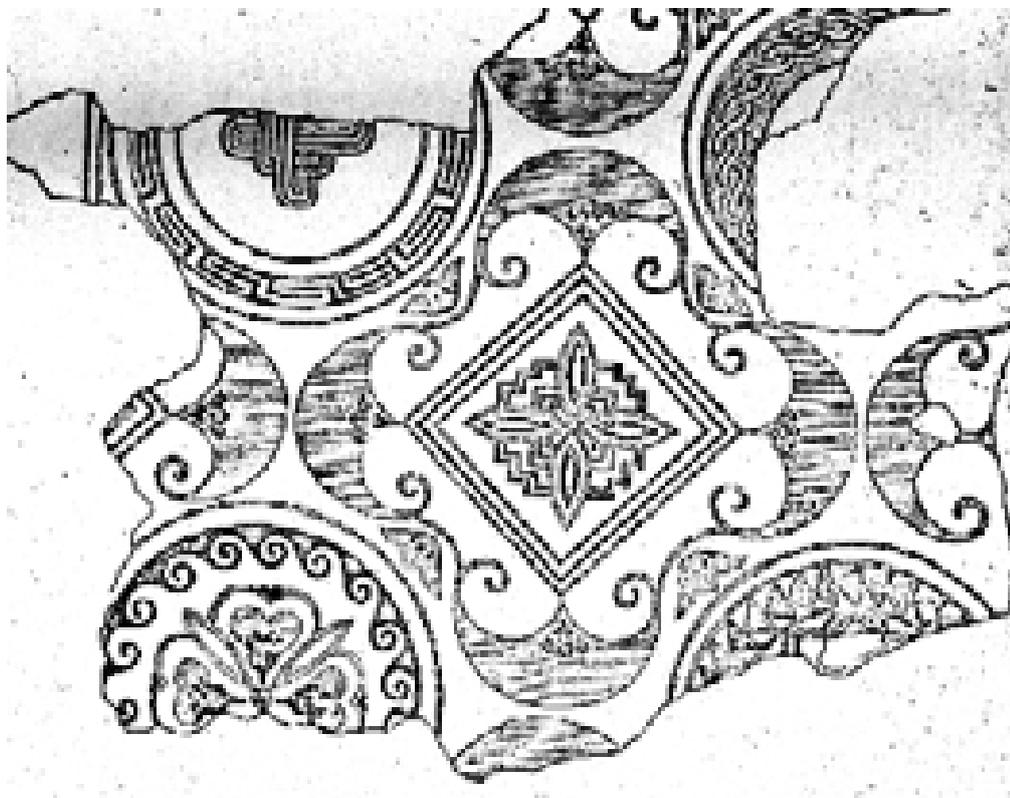


Fig. 16. Sirmium, mosaic of Imperial Bath, after Vasilic  
 Сл. 16. Сирмијум, мозаик у Царском купатилу, према Василићу

the panel survives in its entirety.<sup>26</sup> His body has the same curving patches of color that indicate modeling as the Romuliana Dionysus and the Dionysus from Thessaloniki (Figures 13 and 14). Likewise the river god is delineated with tesserae that follow the contours of the body; he appears against a plain white ground laid in coarser tesserae. While the technique emulates a classical style, features seem flattened and patterned such as repetitious folds of the drapery and the summarily indicated hands, for example. The similarities between the figural mosaics of Mediana and Romuliana make it unlikely that they are too far removed from each other in date.

Like the Romuliana figural mosaics, the mosaic from Mediana finds stylistic parallels in the eastern Mediterranean. One might compare a river god in a scene of Leda and the swan from one of the wall mosaics in the gymnasium at

<sup>26</sup> For a thorough discussion of the imagery of river gods, see G. Trovabene, *Divinità e personificazioni fluviali nei pavimenti musivi tardo antichi: aspetti iconografici e variazioni semantiche*, Ниш и Бизантиј III, Niš 2005, 119-130.

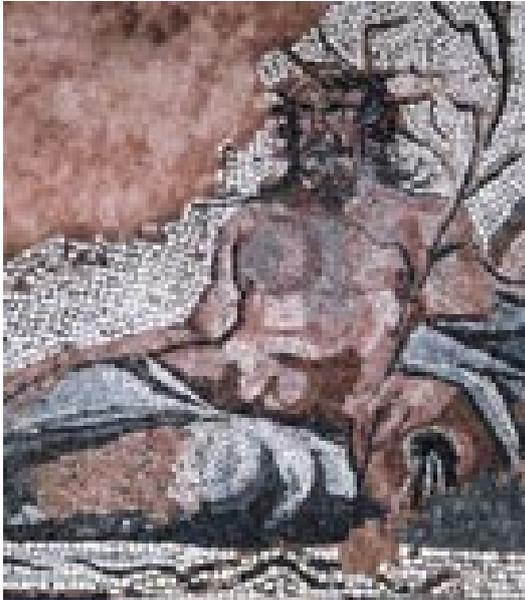


Fig. 17. Mediana, villa with peristyle, detail of river god, after Davidov

Сл. 17. Медијана, вила са перистилом, детаљ са речним божанством, према Давидову

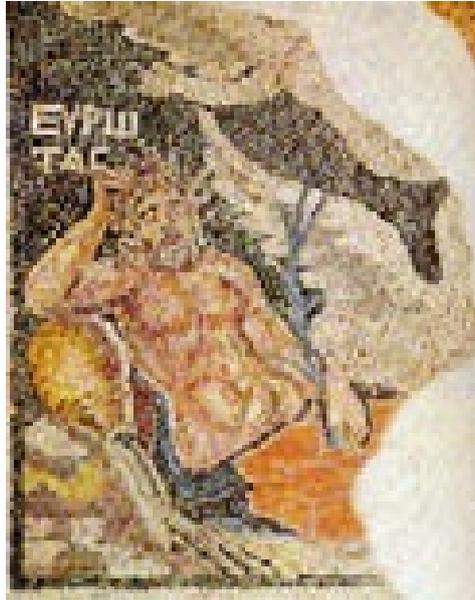


Fig. 18. Salamis, bath building, detail of river god from wall mosaic, after Karageorghis

Сл. 18. Саламис, зграда купатила, детаљ са речним божанством са зидног мозаика, према Карагеоргису

Salamis on Cyprus most likely dating to the late third century,<sup>27</sup> to the river god from Mediana (compare Figures 17 and 18). Their bodies show similarly subtle modeling and fluid outlines. The fine workmanship and use of glass tesserae relate the figure panels of both Romuliana and Mediana to wall mosaics.<sup>28</sup>

The geometric patterns of the Mediana corridors are executed rather coarsely, but color creates rich effects. The patterns are drawn with repeated lines of green and white on green grounds and filled in with red and yellow. The juxtaposition of color suggests three dimensionality rather than the linear effects of the Split mosaics. East of the figure panel is a pattern of a grid of diamonds with squares between their lateral points bordered by an organic vine scroll on one side (Figure 19). The outlines of the diamonds are repeated and laid in two

<sup>27</sup> V. Karageorghis, *Salamis in Cyprus: Homeric, Hellenistic and Roman*, London 1969, 187-189. J. Balty, *Les mosaïques des thermes du gymnase à Salamine de Chypre*, Report of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus 1988, 205-218. D. Michaelides, *Cypriot Mosaics*, Nicosia 1987, 25-28, no. 26, pl. XII. Dunbabin, 247. The mosaics have a terminus ante quem of the end of the third century since they were damaged in an earthquake dated to the fourth century. Balty dates the mosaics to the first half of the third century based on their style. Dunbabin accepts a third century date.

<sup>28</sup> Many wall mosaic tesserae were also found at Romuliana both in the ruins of the palace as well as the larger of two mausolea on a nearby hill, Srejović, Lalović and Janković, *Гамзуград*, 69; Srejović, *Roman Imperial Towns*, 47. Wall mosaic fragments also reported at Split in the dome of the mausoleum, Wilkes, 21 with earlier references.



Fig. 19. Mediana, villa with peristyle, mosaic from the north corridor, photo author

Сл. 19. Медијана, вила са перистилом, мозаик из северног трема, фотографија аутора

colors as if to suggest shading. The filling motifs in the diamonds include grids, inscribed circles with crosslets, and irregular curvilinear elements. The pattern is a common one seen also in the Palace of Galerius in Thessaloniki, although the filling motifs of Mediana are more complex (compare Figures 19 and 20). The series of geometric patterns of the Mediana corridors is generally comparable to Romuliana, but their extensive use of dark grounds relates them to the corridors in Thessaloniki as well.

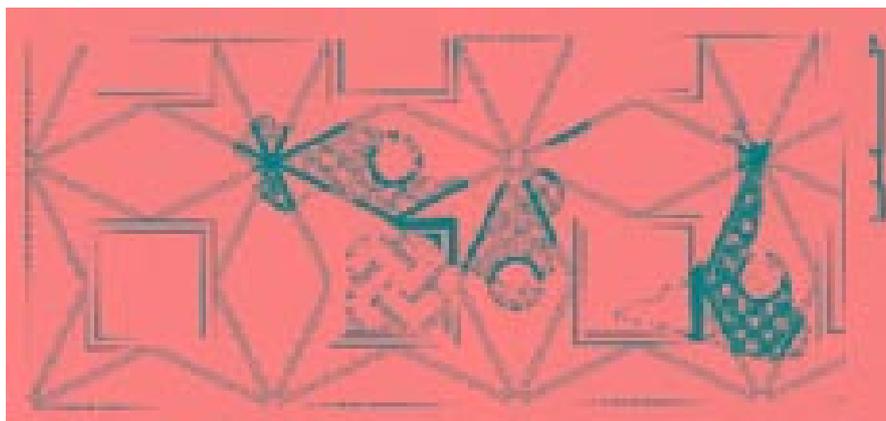


Fig. 20. Thessaloniki, Palace of Galerius, drawing of a pattern from the mosaic in a room near the south entrance, after Atzaka

Сл. 20. Солун, Галеријусова палата, цртеж шаре са мозаика из просторије у близини јужног улаза, према Ацаки

The mosaics of Mediana thus show a variety of influences. The triclinium mosaics may well have been laid by mosaicists who worked at Sirmium. The peristyle mosaics have coloristic effects comparable to the mosaics of Thessaloniki and Romuliana, but their execution is inferior. It appears that in the first half of the fourth century diverse mosaic workshops were active at Mediana.

Comparisons among the mosaics of Thessaloniki, Romuliana, and the Mediana peristyle are numerous. Geometric motifs from Galerius's Palace in Thessaloniki recur at both Romuliana and Mediana. The figural mosaics at Romuliana compare closely with examples from the elaborately decorated house on Socrates Street in Thessaloniki, not far from the Palace of Galerius. The river god from Mediana shows general similarities in style to the higher quality mosaics from Romuliana and Thessaloniki. These comparisons suggest that mosaic workshops based in Thessaloniki played an influential role in mosaics farther inland. The decoration of Romuliana in particular, built in a remote location on a lavish scale by the Emperor Galerius, must have involved craftsmen from that metropolitan center.

The mosaics of these Balkan sites are significant not only for their intrinsic qualities, but also for their role in the development late antique mosaic style. Under the patronage of late-third and early-fourth-century rulers and/or their officials, mosaics with geometric patterns were adapted to monumental spaces. The geometric carpets that resulted reinforce the concept of a mosaic floor as a two-dimensional surface, a mode of composition that would dominate floor mosaic design in the later fourth, fifth and sixth centuries.<sup>29</sup> The location of the Balkans on the dividing line between the eastern and western halves of the Roman empire also led to the influences of diverse regional styles. There is a distinction between the floors with a "western" approach seen at Split, Sirmium and in the triclinium at Mediana and the "eastern" approach in Thessaloniki, Romuliana and the peristyle at Mediana. The latter mosaics feature polychrome ornamental designs with occasional illusionistic effects. In the case of Romuliana and Mediana, figural mosaics in individually framed compositions continue the "eastern" manner of designing a floor around a picture. Nevertheless, the vast geometric carpets seen in all of these sites point the way to the future.

The quality of the mosaics from the first half of the fourth century at Split, Sirmium, Thessaloniki, Romuliana and Mediana reflects the wealth and importance of the region during the Tetrarchy and the following decades under Constantine and his dynasty. Mosaic workshops laid fine figural mosaics, but are known especially for the vast geometric carpets demanded by the monumental architecture built for imperial patrons.

---

<sup>29</sup> Dunbabin, 327-330; E. Kitzinger, *Stylistic Developments in Pavement Mosaics in the Greek East from the Age of Constantine to the Age of Justinian*, La Mosaïque gréco-romaine I, Paris 1965, 341-352.

*Рут Коларик*

#### КАСНО-АНТИЧКИ ПОДНИ МОЗАИЦИ НА БАЛКАНУ

Политички и војни значај Балканског полуострва на почетку четвртог века одражавао се у архитектури и уметности. Подни мозаици у Сплиту, „Палата“ у Сирмијуму, Галеријусова палата у Солуну, Ромулијана (Гамзиград) и вила са перистилом из Медијане, који потичу из прве половине четвртог века, представљају значајне примере касно-античког стила. Неки од ових мозаика сврстани су међу најлепше примере тога доба, а направљени су под директним покровитељством или утицајем владара. Главна црта мозаика су геометријске шаре којима су покривене велике површине; овакве форме, назване „геометријски теписи“, утрле су пут касно-античком стилу код подних мозаика. Фигурални мозаици из Ромулијане и Медијане су касно-римска верзија класичног стила и могу се упоредити са мозаицима из Солуна. Налазећи се на линији која раздваја источну и западну половину Римског царства, балканска археолошка налазишта садрже мозаике у којима су обједињени утицаји и истока и запада. Мозаици у Сплиту, Сирмијуму и триклинијуму на Медијани имају особине „западних“ мозаика. Они из Ромулијане и ходника перистила из Медијане више припадају „источним“ мозаицима, посебно онима у Солуну, чије су радионице вероватно утицале на налазишта у унутрашњости.

