

Mosaic from the Roman period in the Catalan Lands. An overview

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ABSTRACT

This is a historical sketch of the presence and evolution of different types of mosaics in the territorial sphere of the Catalan-speaking lands from the earliest known expressions to the end of the ancient world through a selection of archaeological sites and the most paradigmatic examples. All types of sites, both urban and rural, and occasionally funerary sites, are taken into consideration.

KEYWORDS: *opus signinum*, *opus tessellatum*, *opus uermiculaum*, *opera sectilia*

PROLEGOMENA

Mosaic is a covering that chiefly uses variable-sized pieces of minerals held together with mortar. However, it can also use cubes of pottery or glass paste, sometimes with a gold coating or gilding, along with a wide array of other possibilities. It was mainly used on floors with outstanding results (it is impermeable, durable, neat and elegant) yet also to cover walls, vaults, domes and ceilings, especially after the Late Roman Empire.¹ Scholars have divided mosaics into three types: those that use pebbles, those with tesserae (the *opus tessellatum* of the ancients) and *uermiculatum*, which uses such tiny, high-quality tesserae that the work actually resembles a painting. The name of the latter is modern, created to distinguish it from the other types of mosaics. For the ancients, *uermiculatum* was simply a noticeably finer form of *tessellatum*.

If we set aside similar Sumerian creations from the early third millennium BC, which hardly spread beyond Mesopotamia, mosaic as we know it should be considered another contribution from Hellenic talent. The earliest kind, the pebble mosaic, appeared in the late fifth century BC in northern Greece and Macedonia, with a few striking figurative pieces of incredible beauty. The *opus tessellatum* which paved the way for the success and the brilliant, vast expansion of this technique came from the Greek world or the Hellenised world on Sicily and Magna Graecia. *Uermiculatum* appeared immediately in its wake, rendering it even more feasible to create pieces of incredible beauty. Mosaics spread quickly and widely. In

the third century BC, they were a common way to pave floors that both was effective and ennobled the most representative rooms in private houses, and occasionally public buildings. Rome's expansion throughout the Mediterranean and the consolidation of its empire helped to spread it far and wide. Mosaic soon became yet another hallmark of Greco-Roman *koiné* culture.

The territory we shall discuss, the geographic area of the Catalan lands, was part of the *provincia Hispania citerior* for a long time and the *Tarraconensis* and *Carthaginiensis* provinces after that. After the fall of the western part of the empire, it became part of the *regnum gothorum*, with the exception of the Balearic Islands, which went to first the Vandals and later the Byzantines, and the southernmost area of what is today the region of Valencia, which was not occupied by the Visigoths until the late first third of the seventh century.

This is a territory that opens onto the Mediterranean and had fluid contacts with Italy, the Balearic Islands, North Africa and the East. They were, in fact, the first lands that entered into contact with the Roman republic (218 BC, Empúries), and they remained associated with the empire until its final dissolution (AD 476). These political and geographic circumstances explain its early, long-term and deeply rooted Romanisation.

The study of mosaic in this territory has a long history and was traditionally grounded primarily on an interest in notable, exceptional pieces. Some of those examples first found have been conserved, while others have unfortunately disappeared. Later on, with the systematisation of research and a renewed appreciation of archaeological vestiges, they became part of the global body of knowledge on the ancient world. However, we should note that the literature on this topic is dispersed and of-

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ten atomised, which proves to be a stumbling block for studies that seek to be more encompassing. Only the mosaics known to date in the province of Lleida and some pieces conserved at the Museo Arqueológico Nacional have been compiled into the volumes of the *Corpus de mosaicos romanos de España* (fascicles VIII and IX, respectively), an extremely useful collection that is being published with exasperating slowness under the auspices of the Spanish National Research Council (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, CSIC). Much direr is the fact that more than 100 years after the start of the official excavations, there is not a single monograph (much less several) that compiles, organises and presents this type of floor discovered in Empúries. And that would not be gratuitous; it is justified by the incalculable value of the collection from that site. Indeed, the date and historical characteristics of the establishment make it a privileged place to learn about the expansion of styles early in the onset of that way of embellishing and ennobling large single-family dwellings, especially those of the wealthy class, and more occasionally some community buildings. The number of pieces and their chronology make this site in the Alt Empordà essential for understanding and resolving issues that have been suggested yet are difficult to untangle.

Crafting mosaics was a specialised artisan job in which several experts and labourers worked together. When they signed their work (*infra*) they referred to the team, or the crew, which they called the *officina* plus the name of the team leader (so-and-so's workshop). It is highly likely that some if not all the members of the crew were *serui* and/or freedmen, with a hierarchy determined by skill and seniority. We know of the existence of 'creators', those who drew the design of each work, both geometric and plant themes, which could achieve incredible complexity, such as the figurative ones where a considerable number of human figures sometimes appear. There are *cartrons* (designs) of all kinds that circulated somewhat quickly around the different territories. It goes without saying that these nomadic crews moved from place to place according to the jobs they found, working in cities or villages that could be quite distant from anywhere else and far inland. There is often talk of workshops from abroad, first Italian and later African. With just a few rare exceptions, these are difficult to prove and not easy to defend. Generally speaking, these crews were 'local', and the designs, the *cartrons*, and occasionally some venturesome soul from abroad, circulated more than the *officinae*.

The leader had to be a man of many talents. He negotiated with the customers to agree to specific themes, and he had to have the capacity to adapt them to a given room and predict the number and kinds of tesserae needed, most of which would be carved in situ. The design was drawn over the floor preparation; after the underlayer of mortar was laid, they had to work to inlay the tesserae as quickly as possible before the mortar dried. And there

was a wide array of workshops: courtly ones with extraordinary skill and offices whose talents were, shall we say, more modest.

The emblems made of *opus uermiculatum* were an entirely different matter. They tended to be smaller rectangular or square pieces which used thin, tiny tesserae to achieve the look of a painting. They came from specific workshops in Alexandria, Syria or the Tyrrhenian region of Italy, where extraordinarily skilled experts worked within a restricted range of themes. They must have been extremely expensive, and because of their size and weight, they were easy to transport from one part of the Mediterranean to another. Given the history and location of Empúries, it should come as no surprise that most of these pieces are located there.

THE FORERUNNERS

The Romans did not introduce mosaic flooring into Catalonia. Prior to 218 BC, it did exist, but only occasionally and quite extraordinarily. *Emporion*, the *polis* with Phocaean roots, was aware of this art form, as attested to by a room that is partially known and heavily affected by the strikingly impressive *stoa* which defined the northern side of the agora in the second century BC. It is a room with an *opus tessellatum* floor which must have been part of the city's old public *balaneion* that was destroyed by the major urban reforms in the second century BC and ended up being replaced by another one located just 50 metres eastward, which conserves an interesting *opus segmentatum* floor created with smaller, irregular white marble *crustae*, although it is still a mosaic floor. It was an excellent way to ensure a good result in buildings where water was the main element.² This mosaic is quite small, yet it does prove the knowledge and use of what would become the norm in the central (and eastern) Mediterranean world. It must not be a unique piece. We should recall that we still know very little about Empúries prior to the second century BC.

Yet the large and heavily Hellenised *oppidum* in the acropolis of Puig de Sant Andreu in Ullastret (Baix Empordà). The storehouses there conserve fragments of an *opus figlinum* floor from the Punic tradition whose provenance is unknown. The notable vestiges of black and white *opus tessellatum*, which might have been part of the floor of a temple cell that continued to exist long after the *oppidum* was abandoned, in the early second century BC at the latest, date from much later. We cannot doubt that there are similar floors in other territories further south which were more heavily influenced by the Carthaginians.³

In peripheral geographic regions like ours, the few examples with such early dates identified so far are related to public buildings, as is absolutely reasonable.

THE LATE REPUBLIC. *OPUS SIGNINUM* AND OTHER KINDS OF MOSAIC

After 197 BC, Rome's desire to keep and expand its domain over *Hispania* became clear. The entire span of these first two centuries (second to first centuries BC) is an ever-changing and enormously attractive period which culminated with the founding of a web of *ciuitates* that organised the territory and facilitated the integration of the locals, who were on their way to becoming provincial Romans. In almost two centuries of upheaval, constant contact with the Romans and Italians gradually led to new ways of doing things and new styles, some of which we can trace, particularly the tangible ones that were able to survive the passage of time. Simple mosaic floors that were easy to make and yielded outstanding results in all senses, which were well known and had been used in Tyrrhenian Italy since late in the third century BC, were introduced and spread during this period. *Opus signinum* mosaic is nothing other than a floor made with lime mortar mixed with ceramic shards that give it its characteristic brighter or duller red colour laid over a solid, thick *rudus* made of river rocks and pebbles or tiny rubble. White, black or coloured tesserae, *crustae* and/or shapeless fragments of stone had to be inlaid on the surface before the mortar solidified; sometimes they formed a simple geometric pattern whilst other times they were laid down in no particular order, and yet other times they illustrated highly simplified animal figures. It is not uncommon to find inscriptions, often messages of welcome; when they do exist, they help us interpret the purpose of the room they paved.⁴

This kind of floor, as noted above, began to be made in Italy near the Tyrrhenian Sea in the late third century BC and was documented in the territory we are analysing soon thereafter in the second century BC. The simplicity and sound results of those floors explain their success and long, continued use until well into the first century AD. It goes without saying that there was a certain formal and technical evolution that enables us to date the most sophisticated floors from after the reign of Augustus at around the change of era.

At that time, we find that the wealthy elites and public customers wanted to embellish certain rooms in the *domus* to highlight their function and heighten the prestige of the owner and his family, while also displaying their culture, their contacts and their ability to keep abreast of new trends. This explains why the vast majority of known examples of this kind of floor tend to be in private spaces. Obviously, they were only used to pave the main rooms, the ones used to interact with the outside world (atria, peristyles, *triclinia* and, in the Greek context, those used for the *symposion*). When the model of the Mediterranean-style *domus* designed with the peristyle at the centre started to gain popularity throughout the first century BC, the rooms with mosaic flooring were primarily arranged around it.

The Hellenistic (or late Republican) single-family dwellings in the Neapolis of Empúries, most of which date from the middle or second half of the second century BC, are not very large, as at that time the available space was an unsolvable problem, although it did not affect the formal richness of the whole. One example is house no. 34, which measures around 300 m² and has 10 rooms built around a tetrastyle atrium. Half of its rooms (and more than half the total surface area) displayed luxurious flooring with *opus signinum* mosaic that occupied the central part of the room, prime spaces for self-representation.⁵

Many examples are found around the territory we are analysing. What stands out for the sheer number of examples is the Neapolis of Empúries, the heart of *Emporion*, an independent *polis* loyally allied with Rome, with dates that span this entire historical period. We shall highlight some of the pieces with inscriptions bearing messages of welcome or directly related to the *symposion*.

They are also found in the older phases of the founding *domus* of the regular city, with occasional survivals after Augustus' era and beyond.

Within this context, especially in the first century BC (and even later), we should note the existence of an *opus signinum* floor with tesserae that create geometric patterns in certain particularly important rooms in a house, which set off the central part of the room where a small stone (or clay) slab was placed. This element could be installed and removed, and it served as the base of an *opus uermiculatum* mosaic of minuscule tesserae made of a wide array of high-quality materials that reproduced a figurative theme which resembled a panel painting (emblem). It often boasted extraordinary quality and drew the visitor's attention in the midst of a simple *opus signinum* floor with inlaid tesserae. It should come as no surprise that Empúries has yielded up to four magnificent pieces, three of which are genre scenes (the thieving magpie, the cat and birds, fish from the sea). Nevertheless, we should highlight the emblem that reproduces a theatrical performance of Euripides' tragedy presented after the author's death in 405 BC, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, which was found *in situ* in the nineteenth century in a *domus* which had not yet been explored in the central sector of the regular city.⁶ It was clearly the product of the international trade in luxury goods. Not everyone could afford these pieces. It used to be attributed to a factory in Alexandria or at least the East, but more recently the experts tend to think it came from a closer by, a workshop in central Italy. However, it is not easy to determine its exact provenance. These pieces were called emblems, a word with Greek roots that precisely means inserted piece. This form continued for years, as revealed by the movable emblem of a mosaic from the second half of the second century in Tarragona bearing the head of Medusa (*infra*). During an archaeological excavation, it is not unusual to find a room with a mosaic floor whose emblem has not been conserved, as it may have been removed before the building was abandoned. They were pieces designed to be easily moved and integrated.

If we once again focus on *opus signinum* mosaics, we find that they are always found in sites that date clearly from the last third or quarter of the second century BC and are difficult to ascribe but could be related to control over the territory and/or to the Roman army. Sometimes, as in Can Massot (Montmeló), it is a single building laid out like an atrium *domus* with sophisticated and clearly Italian architectural features, including *signinum* mosaics.⁷ Can Tacó (Montmeló and Montornès del Vallès), located around 800 from Can Massot, is a notably larger site with Italian architecture and constructive vestiges which are hard to define yet seemed to serve the purpose of keeping watch over the territory and its roads. Once again there are rooms with *signinum* floors with inlaid tesserae.⁸ Puig Castellar de Biosca in Segarra is a square fortification, some of whose rooms have this kind of flooring.⁹

We can find examples of this kind of flooring in the private domain in many of the urban nuclei in this territory, such as in the extraordinarily high-quality *domus dels dofins* in Iluro (Mataró),¹⁰ *Baetulo* (Carrer Lladó),¹¹ *Iesso* (Guissona),¹² Sagunt (Plaça d'Armes del Castell),¹³ *Valentia* (Carrer Roc Chavàs),¹⁴ *Lucentum* (Tossal de Manises)¹⁵ and *Ilici* (L'Alcúdia d'Elx),¹⁶ with a broad range of dates spanning from around 100 BC to well into the first century AD. They are also well represented in the *ager* in different villas like Pla de l'Horta (Sarrià de Ter), Sant Menna church (Vilablareix),¹⁷ Sant Martí de Samalús¹⁸ and L'Horta Seca (Vall d'Uixó).¹⁹

In parallel, we should highlight the use of this kind of flooring in public buildings, such as one room in the extraordinarily complex leisure building located in the parking area of Empúries, with a welcome inscription in Greek,²⁰ the *aedes* in Sant Aniol de Finestres (Garrotxa);²¹ and the large building in Can Benet (in Ca l'Arnau, Cabrera de Mar) from the third quarter of the second century BC. We have only explored part of Can Benet (eight rooms so far), which has often been interpreted as a *domus*, an opinion we do not share. Seven of the eight rooms only have *signinum* with tesserae in a geometric pattern and occasionally with a central motif serving as a false emblem. White and black or navy blue stone cubes were used. What is particularly striking is a large room where the hydraulic mortar floor was a beautiful black colour achieved by adding iron ferules, over which the geometric decoration made of white tesserae stands out vividly.²² The Capitolium temple in *Tarraco* offers another excellent example of an outstanding floor of this kind.²³

At times, more or less regular pebbles or cuttings from different stones replaced the conventional tesserae. A floor in the villa of Ca l'Alemanys, in the *ager* of *Baetulo*, is a good example of this.²⁴

However, we should note the occasional existence of other floors from the late Republican era which reveal other traditions and ways of building that depart from the main style. We should first recall what is known as the 'Hellenistic mosaic' in Alcúdia d'Elx (*Ilici*), part of a *domus* with other rooms paved in *opus signinum* mosaic,

which the experts date from around 100 BC. It was different because of both its technique, with a combination of stone and ceramic tesserae and tiny coloured pebbles, and the details of the decoration, which was based on a central rosette of secant circles surrounded by different borders with a variety of motifs, including fluting and a crenelated wall reinforced with towers, common in the repertoire of some Hellenistic mosaics from the third and second centuries BC. There was a prominent presence of Iberian names written in Latin letters, a detail of incalculable historical value.²⁵

Secondly, we should mention the floors made of small ceramic slabs in the shape of fish scales found in the changing room, tepidarium and caldarium of Republican baths in Almoína (Valencia), which boast outstanding aesthetics and technical efficiency. These pieces were imported directly from central Italy when the *balneum* was built.²⁶

Only in late stages of this period do we find the first *opus tessellatum* floors, which became the main flooring in the public rooms in patrician homes and other public and private buildings in those *ciuitates* after Augustus' reign. One example is the set that decorated the floor in the late Republican baths in Clos de la Torre (Badalona), with the likely inscription SALUTARITER DELECTO (I provide healthful pleasure) in the corridor connecting the tepidarium and the caldarium.²⁷

LATE IMPERIAL MOSAIC

This long period consolidated a process that, as discussed above, had begun with considerable momentum in the previous years. The old tradition—*opus signinum* mosaic—did not entirely disappear; instead, it moved aside to make room for *opus tessellatum*, which was more successful from all vantage points and unquestionably more technically demanding and therefore more costly.

Likewise, *opus sectile* also started appearing in the last third/last quarter of the first century BC. Made of geometric-shaped *crustae* combined with high-quality stones in different colours, it was a deluxe floor that was highly prized by the ancients, and it became as extraordinarily successful as mosaic made with tesserae. Using *opus signinum* and *sectile* mosaic in the same room was not at all uncommon. There was no reason why same building—either public (such as baths) or private (urban *domus* or rural villas)—could not pave alternating rooms with both kinds of flooring, and even have rooms with floors made of tesserae. Because of their cost, beauty and especially their *grauitas*, *sectilia* were particularly used for the floors of public buildings.

In the early days, stone cube mosaics virtually exclusively used white and black or dark blue pieces. As a general rule, the background was white, but occasionally it was the opposite. The predominant theme until mid-century was geometric or plant-based, sometimes boasting

an extraordinarily creative capacity. Soon thereafter, paralleling what happened with some *opus signinum* floors, we occasionally find figurations of animals (dolphins, horses, birds, felines, dogs, etc.), fantastical beings (centaurs, seahorses, etc.) or human beings occupying clearly defined spaces, most of them at the corners of the central emblem in the design. In fact, tradition often dictated placing a false emblem in the centre following the old Hellenistic tradition. Particularly after the second half of the second century, the central part was occupied by mythological figurative themes using smaller coloured pieces with outstanding aesthetic results.

Because of the features of the site, the large *domus* in the regular city of Empúries from the late Republican period are themselves a magnificent laboratory for tracing the evolution of those buildings (Roman atrium houses with *hortus*) compared to the large ‘Pompeian’ style mansions with an atrium and peristyle, where the overall decoration of the rooms (in which flooring played a prime role) was crucially important in the owners’ desire for self-representation. The large public chambers (*tablina*, *oeci*) multiplied, and the overall luxury exploded. *Domus* 1, 2A and 2B in Empúries are wonderful examples, but not the only ones. We can find others around the same region which confirm this overall uniform trend.²⁸ However, the fact that the findings are partial and not always well dated highlights the value of sites like Empúries, Alcúdia d’Elx and *Pollentia* (Alcúdia, Mallorca), which were abandoned at a given moment and never again occupied.

The situation was not too different in the countryside. After the reign of Augustus, at the start of the *Pax Romana*, which was supposed to lead to a long, unprecedented period of tranquillity and balance, not only did the villas become consolidated, but many new ones were added to the older ones and spread around the entire territory. Some but not all of them have a more or less complex residential space. What was called the *pars urbana* more or less accurately reproduced the luxuries and comforts of the urban *domus* (*urbs in rure*). They needed a small *balneum*, beautifully finished public rooms and marble statues and/or reliefs. Mosaics were common and in no way exclusive to the large suburban establishments; even villas far from any nucleus were designed similarly. Therefore, we can deduce that the *dominus* and his family spent seasons in the countryside without sacrificing any of the pleasures of urban life. This is worth bearing in mind: villas were simultaneously *otium* and *negotium*.

In public buildings, mosaics were occasionally used on the floors of the cells of some temples (Empúries, Tarragona, etc.) but especially to embellish the most representative rooms in baths, where they worked perfectly because of their outstanding hydraulic properties. However, the constant reforms affecting these buildings often make it difficult for us to ascertain the oldest ornamental programmes.

Around the same time, in the first and second centuries, the different archaeological excavations conducted in Roman villas around the territory reveal an occasional

use of black and white *opus tessellatum* floors to decorate certain public rooms (no doubt the *triclinia*), and they have also been found in rooms in the *balneum*. Some of these mosaics and the rooms where they were located were conserved and used in extensive, in-depth reforms which organised the space differently. Given their importance, we should mention the major architectural interventions in many villas from the end of the second century and the first third of the third century, during the reign of Severus. There must be a good reason for such a widespread occurrence.

As examples, we could cite the villas of Ametllers (Tossa);²⁹ Torre Llauder (Mataró);³⁰ Granollers (probably *Semproniana*);³¹ Sant Boi de Llobregat,³² where *opus tessellatum* paved the rooms in a very well conserved private *balneum*; L’Espelt (Òdena), far from any urban nucleus and limited to just two geometric *triclinia* with a few figurative elements (bird);³³ Els Munts (Altafulla), with splendid examples;³⁴ Paret Delgada (La Selva del Camp), which has an extensive set;³⁵ Puig de Benicató (Nules);³⁶ Font de Mussa (Benifaió);³⁷ El Vilar del Puig (Horta Nord), also with an extensive set;³⁸ Punta de l’Arenal (Xàbia);³⁹ Banys de la Reina (Calp);⁴⁰ and the Roman villa in Petrer (Alicante).⁴¹

Polychrome became common after the second half of the second century and especially during the African dynasty of Severus. A recurring, serious problem when studying mosaics is the difficulty of stratigraphically determining their chronology with accuracy. Stylistic and comparative datings have often been shown to be misleading and erroneous, and to make matters worse, a structure’s date may not match the date of a layer over it. What is more, many floors were uncovered long before precise excavation methods became the norm. Nonetheless, the huge explosion during Severus’ reign is confirmed more or less everywhere with complete certainty. At first it was only a touch of colour, a few tesserae in the middle of a two-toned design. Suddenly, the use of different coloured tesserae became a constant feature decorating first the (false) central emblem and later the entire floor. The geometric and floral-geometric decoration became richer and more complicated, with surprising results and enormously sophisticated creations. In parallel, figures of people, animals and landscapes begin to colonise these floors. We should bear in mind that figurative mosaic was rare compared to geometric and/or plant motifs. In this case, the themes are essentially mythological, as they mostly were in other provinces in the empire. Only occasionally do we find scenes that depict private real life or that come from observing the world.

The themes are diverse, and they generally resemble those at other sites in the other western provinces. Here, we shall set aside an unresolved and recurring debate on the meaning of a given customer’s choice of theme. However, we should recall that it must have only been important initially; after death or the cession or sale of the property, a decoration solely had aesthetic value.

What were some of the stories chosen? It is commonly accepted that for a variety of reasons that are not always easy to discern and understand, the different provinces in the Roman empire, and even certain territories within them, apparently tended to prefer a given theme within the vast Greco-Roman mythological repertoire or to explore certain aspects of everyday life and the contemplation of the *orbis*. Yet we also find reasonable changes and the mutability of that repertoire. Nonetheless, these are often impressions, given that we would have to be familiar with all the mosaics in a given space to prove or disprove it, and we are simply not poised to determine what is there and what is missing. But let us take a look at the most representative pieces to get an idea of the customers' aspirations and tastes, focusing on the polychrome floors dated more or less precisely between Augustus and the tetrarchy. For some time now we have been aware of mosaics from Saguntum decorated with the story of Dirce's punishment and, in parallel, the seasons, with figurative scenes within octagons and coloured tesserae standing out over a geometric black and white background pattern.⁴² The Three Graces, in Barcelona, defines the central space in a geometric black and white pattern of questionable aesthetic quality.⁴³ The Medusa Gorgon, which played a recognised apotropaic role, is the 'false emblem' found on Carrer del Rellotge Vell in Valencia, complemented by several *kantharoi* on the corners of the frame.⁴⁴ In Tarragona, there is an exceptional piece in which Medusa occupies the centre of a design which tells the story of Perseus and Andromeda in four frames.⁴⁵ The mortal head of the Gorgon is a true emblem crafted on an independent slab of extraordinary quality *opus uermiculatum*; A. Balil, a famous illustrator in the world of mosaics, hinted that it had Eastern origins.⁴⁶ We know of Bacchus' entourage, often found in *Hispania*, through a lost piece from Saguntum.⁴⁷ Finally, we shall cite an excellent-quality floor uncovered in the preventive excavations conducted in the parliament of Valencia building with an image of the muse Terpsichore and the dance and songs that accompanied her. That building was initially interpreted as an urban *domus*, but now we should consider the possibility that it was the site of a *collegium*, in which case the choice of the theme would have a different explanation.⁴⁸

In suburban settings, we should mention the huge floor depicting the labours of Heracles narrated in 12 frames around a (false) emblem illustrating the story of Omphale and the son of Alcmena cross-dressing. As often happens, the physical qualities of the mosaic (sizes, colours, layouts, etc.) have nothing to do with its aesthetic quality, which is rather modest. The area with the figurative decoration was preceded by a rather large black and white geometric design. We can assume that this duo signalled the room's main purpose,⁴⁹ and we seem to witness a display of the customer's erudite irony by placing the representation of the lamentable cross-dressing story, where Heracles' prestige was undermined, in the preeminent position, in the midst of outsized gestures by the fabled main



FIGURE 1. Omphale and Heracles and the 12 labours. *Edeta* (Llíria, Valencia). Third century BC. (Photo: Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid).

figure. This unquestionably reveals a sense of humour. It is from Can Porcar, a suburban *domus* in *Edeta* (Llíria). We should also mention a triumph of Neptune in Vilar del Puig (Horta Nord), which seems to be of questionable aesthetic value.⁵⁰ More notable, in that it deals with a theme that is not so hackneyed and very rare in all the western provinces, is the partly missing emblem of a design that decorated a large room in the villa of Font de Mussa (Benifaió), just near Via Augusta, around 20 km south of *Valentia*. It depicts the moment when Faustulus and his sister came upon the divine twins, Romulus and Remus, nursed by the she-wolf in a cave (*lupercalia*). It is an extraordinary piece with a well-defined image of the place and time, which is extensively depicted in other media as well.⁵¹

Mythology was not the only source of figuration in mosaic. The inspiration could occasionally come from observing the environment, in all senses. One exceptional piece due to its fine state of conservation and the technical and artistic quality of its workmanship is called the *mosaic dels peixos* (fish mosaic) made of *opus uermiculatum* from the villa of La Pineda (Vila-seca), very close to the urban nucleus of *Tarraco*, although it can nonetheless be considered suburban. It was part of a public room, apparently a *triclinium*, measuring around 6.25 m by 4.5 m with a figurative emblem 3.68 m by 2.68 m, a total of a little under 9 m². It depicts 47 figures of fish, marine mammals, cephalopods and crustaceans that have been duly identi-



FIGURE 2. Detail of the *mosaic dels peixos* (fish mosaic) (La Pineda, Vila-seca). Third century AD. (Photo: Museu de Tarragona, Tarragona).

fied. It has been dated from around AD 200, and its composition is calculated to contain around 280,000 small tesserae.⁵²

Torre Llauder (Mataró) is an outstanding example of how mosaic floors in a *domus* or a villa (in this case suburban), sometimes making use of materials from an earlier period and other complementary elements like murals, stucco and architectural pieces, were used to highlight certain places in the building that were open to the world and were to some extent 'semi-public' places where the patron received the clients' *salutatio matutina* or where they could talk, listen to lectures or hold banquets with friends; in short, a part of the house where the *dominus* displayed his wealth, power, taste and culture. Urban houses and villas, and especially suburban ones, became the prime spaces of representation. The entire central residential sector, where the most luxurious rooms of the *pars urbana* were concentrated, was located between two peristyles. The first one led to a Corinthian-style 'false atrium' with the walkways around it paved with mosaics. To the north, this led to area A1, which measures 54 m², whose door was set off with semi-columns inlaid in the walls and a marble step. The enormous circular emblem in the centre (5.45 m in diameter) was crafted with coloured tesserae in complex geometric shapes. This room has been identified as a *tablinum*. Even though this may not be the most appropriate name given its late date, it may have served as an office and receiving room. To the east of that 'atrium', there are two doors leading to two identically-sized rooms (52 m²) separated by a long corridor with a mosaic floor that led to the other immense peristyle, which in turn led to the building's rather large *balneum*. Area 2 has reasonably been considered a *triclinium* with a false emblem in the centre that was polychrome with geometric and plant themes. The other one (area 3) must have been a multipurpose room, perhaps a second *triclinium*, whose floor was made of black and white tesserae laid out in an elegant geometric theme.⁵³ In fact, this arrangement can be found many places. In an

urban setting and earlier in the first century AD, it is found in Casa Romana (or *domus* no. 1) in Empúries, and in many villas around the territory with minor changes. As with many other buildings, it is impressive to discover what ultimately became of those luxurious chambers, which during late antiquity became storage spaces with numerous *dolia defossa* embedded in the floors, blithely perforating those extraordinarily costly floors.⁵⁴ At that time, they likely had no value. Other times, as in Banyes de la Reina (Calp), the mosaics were not perforated with vessels but with graves.⁵⁵

Opus sectile flooring made its appearance and became widespread during this lengthy period lasting a little over 300 years. It was extraordinarily socially prestigious and considered an exquisite floor showing outsized good taste and luxury, which came at what we assume was an extremely high cost.

In the territory we are analysing, these floors became quite prominent and were widely found in public buildings (in the broad sense of the word), in many urban *domus* and in some villas in the last third of the first century BC. Especially at these early dates, it is not rare to find the *sectilia* alongside other luxurious floors, primarily *opus signinum* mosaic.

In Empúries, for example, *opus sectile* was used as flooring in some *tabernae*, public spaces measuring around 35 m² which were architecturally but not structurally part of the urban forum. The only two doors opened onto *cardo* C, which framed a large square on the west. Meeting rooms? *Collegium* sites? Rented public spaces? We have no signs to help us decipher them except for the luxurious flooring and the only openings to the street. The *crustae* trimmed into simple geometric figures were made of different coloured high-quality stones. We should recall that not all these *tabernae* had *opus sectile* floors, but instead it alternated with others that were totally identical, with beautiful *opus tessellatum* polychrome floors.⁵⁶ A reasonable chronology proposed for both the *sectilia* and the *tessellatum* is the Augustan period.



FIGURE 3. Detail of the mosaic of Centcelles (Banys de la Reina, Calp, Alicante). Third century AD.

A bit further northeast and from the Augustan period, the large *domus* no. 1 had several rooms with floors of *crustae* which were in use until the end.

Floors made of *opus sectile* have been documented in the *domus* on Carrer Avinyó in *Barcino* and the house on Carrer Lladó in *Baetulo*,⁵⁷ and especially in Saguntum, which must have been the most important in this region in the late empire. Up to four have been recovered there, at least two of which are part of the same building. One of them with floral decoration occupied a room measuring around 34 m². The others had geometric patterns.⁵⁸

In terms of the villas in the *suburbia*, we can cite those in Pla de l'Horta near *Gerunda*, which are well conserved and have a considerable repertoire of high-quality stones. They paved two rooms with *triclinia* and were, in fact, the emblem of the room that was finished with a somewhat sophisticated *opus signinum* mosaic. Here we can find something that is not unusual: in the late second century, when the building was given a major overhaul, an *opus tessellatum* floor was installed directly over the older one.⁵⁹ There is another one from the mid-second century in Tarragona, at number 9 Carrer Alger, outside the walls and therefore within the *suburbium*.⁶⁰ There are a few *opus sectile* floors a bit outside the boundaries of the *suburbium* in La Llosa (Cambrils).⁶¹ In a complex site in Banys de la Reina (Calp) in the Region of Valencia, which might be part of an *uicus*, one of the nine rooms paved with mosaic was *opus sectile*, as was one of the chambers in the extraordinary complex in Vilar del Puig (Horta Nord).⁶² In Els Alters (Xàtiva), from the early phase in the first century, an important chamber defined by the excavators as a bedroom was paved with different-coloured marble slabs that created an intriguing geometric and colour pattern.⁶³

In terms of public spaces, to our knowledge mosaic floors were reserved for baths, an essential urban facility which gradually became more luxurious. The popularity

of the *balnea* made it profitable for the wealthiest members of the community to invest in them. Examples include the two-toned mosaic in the baths in *insula 30* in Empúries, which must have been a repair of an older one, and the entrance hall of the baths in Can Xammar in *Iluro*, which is huge, geometric and two-toned.⁶⁴ It is interesting to note a characteristic feature of this piece which is often repeated: the central part of the design, where there used to be a high-quality movable emblem, is occupied by a 'false emblem' which highlights the importance of the place. It was initially crafted of tesserae that were identical to the ones used in the overall composition, creating a square with a circle inscribed within it or concentric circles. If there was a square, simple figurations were drawn on the corners. Later on, this 'false emblem' was made with smaller coloured tesserae with outstanding aesthetic results. Some polychrome *opus tessellatum* floors are conserved in the Sant Miquel baths in *Tarraco*, which may be the *Thermae Montanae* known through epigraphy, one of which interestingly has a geometrically rendered depiction of the Labyrinth of Crete. The proposed chronology, which is less precise than we wish, spans the second and third centuries.⁶⁵

Nor is it unusual for figures that are directly or indirectly related to water and the sea to be incorporated into the mosaics in baths. In the old *tessellatum* mosaics in the *balneum* of *Baetulo* (*supra*), we can see the figures of dolphins in the frame around the *labrum*. Mythological sea creatures decorate certain rooms in the bath building in Barcelona's Plaça de Sant Miquel, crafted by the *Minicii Natales* in around 125. They lasted a long time because they were reused when that space was turned into a Christian church during late antiquity.⁶⁶

Because of their rarity within the overall context of the Roman world, we should cite four pieces from this period that were uncovered in the excavations of the immense and extraordinary villa of Munts (Altafulla), located

north of the urban nucleus of *Tarraco* right next to Via Augusta, from which it was easy to travel by sea. They are four pieces crafted on clay slabs using the *opus uermiculatum* technique based on tiny coloured cubes which depict Euterpe, the muse of music and lyric poetry with musical accompaniment; Mnemosine, memory and the mother of the muses; and Thalia, the muse of comedy and bucolic poetry. They are accompanied by a lower-quality bust of a man, whom some have suggested, albeit without any proof, portrays the owner of the villa, *Caius Valerius Avitus*, at that time. Within the tradition of emblems, these pieces are assumed to have been used as paintings hanging from a wall. They date from the second century and boast extraordinary technical quality. They were found with signs of having suffered from the effects of a fire clearly within the late third century, yet despite the fact that three generations had gone by, they were still esteemed by the different owners of the complex.⁶⁷

And this is not the only case. The excavator of the suburban villa of Algorós in the *suburbium* of *Ilici* called Ibarra mentions finding transportable mosaic-paintings hanging on the walls (one with a centaur and the god Apollo, another in *uermiculatum*, and a female figure).⁶⁸

THE LATE EMPIRE

The effects of what is known as the crisis of the third century are not easy to trace, nor is it easy to make an overall assessment of them in this territory. Data from the urban nuclei are either non-existent or scarce, with the exception of *Ualentia*, and destruction and fire levels have been found virtually everywhere. In the *ager*, we do find the ‘peaceful’ abandonment of some establishments whose meaning we are not yet certain how to interpret. Nonetheless, the subsequent period stands out for its continuity, and from the standpoint of the floors of urban houses and villas, notable examples of varying value appear. New themes also appear (or gain ground), such as circus races and hunts (*uenationes*), and it is not unusual to find inscriptions, the best conserved of which are of incalculable value (*infra*).

With regard to urban contexts, we do not have much information on the reforms that affected the large *domus*, an issue which may be at least partly the consequence of the characteristics of urban archaeology. There was a notable find in Barcelona’s Palau Comtal Menor in 1860 that still lacks context, a polychrome piece on a white background which depicts a chariot race in the Circus Maximus of Rome with the monumental *spina* above and the chariots below. Around 8 m x 3.5 m of it is conserved, although it is mutilated in certain spots. A date within the first third or first half of the fourth century, 310–340, has been proposed.⁶⁹ It is interesting to compare it with the one in Pau Birol (Bell-lloc del Pla) in Girona, which is similar in date and theme, although they do have noticeable differences (*infra*).

Relatively recent urban excavations have identified two notable *domus* in Barcelona from the late empire, which lasted beyond the fall of the western empire. The house on Carrer Bisbe Caçador, which dates from the mid-fourth century and lasted for two centuries, is an outstanding example of a patrician *domus* from the end of the Roman Empire. With regard to the use of mosaic, the ambulatory of the peristyle arranging the home, around 2.8 m wide, was paved with coloured tesserae in geometric and occasionally figurative motifs. An enormous public room reasonably identified as an *oecus* conserved a floor made of *sectile* in a black and white checkerboard pattern. The frigidarium in the *balneum* had a polychrome tesserae floor with marine themes. Another spacious room conserved a black and white geometric mosaic surrounded by a polychrome border. Other rooms were effectively paved with *opus signinum* floors with inlaid tesserae, harking back to the floors from much earlier periods.⁷⁰

Another *domus* built in the fourth century was found at Carrer de Sant Honorat, 3. It was made from scratch and therefore without any prior structural constraints. It was arranged around a peristyle with an ambulatory paved with coloured tesserae which create a plant motif. One room conserved an *opus signinum* floor with inlaid tesserae. It is noteworthy that this is also found in two other private buildings from the same era in the same city. *Opus signinum* mosaic dated from the early republican period and the first three-quarters of the first century and was found in specific places. It was revived in *Barcino* at least after the mid-fourth century. We should be attentive to determine whether it was just a local phenomenon and spread no further.⁷¹

Relatively recently, a suburban *domus* arranged around a central courtyard with an associated bath has been explored near the Francolí River. It has been confidently dated as an *ex nouo* house from the mid-fourth century. The building was abandoned a little over three generations later. It was decorated with polychrome geometric mosaic (100 tesserae per dm²) with a strip, a band and four different geometric images in the central design to decorate the *caldarium*. Another similar floor, this one quite heavily damaged, decorated the sector where the *alveus* was located.⁷²

From the other side of the territory, in Santa Pola (*Portus Ilicitanus*), we can highlight an important *uicus* also from the fourth century that depended on *Ilici*, namely the Palmeral *domus*, which had an elegant geometric decoration with coloured tesserae around the peristyle. A room leading to it, which measured around 7.5 m by 5.5 m (41.25 m²), had a tesserae floor with a circular emblem in the centre. It seems to have been a luxurious *triclinium*. Another room conserved a geometric mosaic with octagons, Solomon’s knots and 12-petal rosettes. Overall, it is an aesthetically effective work.⁷³

There is much more information in rural settings. However, before discussing this material we should recall that it is considerably different to the scene found espe-

cially but not exclusively in the central plateau of the Iberian Peninsula, where impressive villas in the *pars urbana* had become truly luxurious, extensive palaces during the late empire, such as Carranque (Toledo), Puras (Almenara de Adaja, Valladolid), La Olmeda (Pedrosa de la Vega, Palencia), Noheda (Cuenca) and many others, with countless mosaic floors, many of them figurative, in which mythological themes predominated. To our knowledge thus far, the villas in the geographic area we are studying were less showy and more focused on production than on *otium*. However, this changed in the lands of the Ponent region: the villa of Romeral d'Albesa, which may not have been fully completed when it was abandoned, reveals a substantial and well-planned remodelling in the late empire phase with a series of public rooms with polychrome mosaic floors (more than 500 m² in total), some of whose plant and figurative themes are among the most beautiful from this period. They pave reception halls, *triclinia* and the galleries running around the peristyle that arranged the complex's *pars urbana*.⁷⁴ In the little-known villa of El Vilet in Sant Martí de Riucorb, we are aware of three polychrome mosaics which have been dated from within the fourth century.⁷⁵ In Puigverd d'Agramunt, five polychrome mosaic floors have been found in the villa of El Reguer, one of which has figurative decoration (an *uenatio*), while the others have geometric themes which have been dated from the late empire (fourth to fifth centuries).⁷⁶ And there are other even lesser-known examples.⁷⁷

The suburban villa of Can Pau Birol (in Bell-lloc del Pla) near *Gerunda* shows an efficient use of mosaic for the early fourth century in the way it organises the entrance of the building: it distinguishes three separate sectors within a single extremely long hallway with different mosaics. The central part was occupied by the story of a chariot race in the Circus Maximus of Rome, perhaps depicting a real *ludus circensis*. It is a notable piece from all vantage points, and in our opinion it is aesthetically more accomplished than the one in Barcelona. And best of all, right before the depiction of the *puluinar* and the *editor ludi* is an inscription with the name of the customer: CECILIANVS FICET. On one side, in the centre of a design with an imposing and slightly distressful geometric decoration, a 'false emblem' depicting Bellerophon mounted on Pegasus, the winged horse, killing the Chimera is deliberately off-centre to mark the circulation flows. On the other side, Theseus has just received the ball of thread from Ariadne, with the image of the Cretan labyrinth a bit further on. Thus, mythological themes alternated with a symbolic intent, probably to commemorate an important event in the life of the *dominus*. The signature (*Cecilianus ficet*) may confirm this.⁷⁸

We must now mention an exceptional site due to the quality and characteristics of its mosaic and the enormous difficulty in reasonably interpreting its location. It is a princely work conserved in the villa of Centelles (*Centumcellae*) in Constantí, in the *suburbium* of *Tarraco*. This mosaic covers the hemispherical dome of a huge room,



FIGURE 4. The Circus mosaic. Fourth century AD. 7.98m x 3.53m. (Museu d'Arqueologia de Catalunya, Barcelona).

perhaps built in the late fourth century, which was part of an extensive rural building. The decoration consists in four superimposed bands. The first one, the lowest, shows a large deer hunt under the oversight and with the participation of the *dominus*, who is depicted several times. Notably, the letters 'L C', perhaps the owner's *praenomen* and *nomen*, appear repeatedly. The second band is occupied by scenes from the Old and New Testament, with Adam and Eve perhaps, Daniel in the Lion's Den, the sacrifice of Isaac, Rebekah being asked to marry Isaac (or Tobias and Raphael), Jonas under the calabash tree, Jonas in the belly of the sea monster, Jonas being spewed into the sea, the Good Shepherd, Noah's Ark, the Three Wise Men before Herod (with doubts), the resurrection of Lazarus and the three youths of Babylon in the furnace. The third one, which is significantly decayed, shows enthroned figures which alternate with the allegorical figuration of the seasons. Finally, the medallion at the top, which is in very poor condition, only shows two heads, although they boast outstanding workmanship.⁷⁹

This wall mosaic is extraordinary in all senses, yet its inherent features mean that it will inexorably disappear. It became extremely, gloriously popular after the late empire and well into the Byzantine period. This circumstance and the technical and aesthetic quality of the work explain why those who have studied it call it an aulic work. In this case, it is not gratuitous rhetoric but pure reality. It was the handiwork of an extraordinarily skilled workshop, and we must admit that right now it is an *unicum* that is quite difficult to interpret. There is not a single work of comparable quality in this entire territory.

For many years, it was considered an extraordinary mausoleum, a hypothesis that is clearly contested by a critical analysis of the work as a whole. Other ingenious proposals have been set forth, but we are far from having reached an opinion that is acceptable to the majority of scholars.

In other suburban villas in the provincial capital, such as the one on the Francolí River, at least two rooms in the private *balneum* were paved with geometric and floral floors made of polychrome *opus tessellatum*. The chronology of the complex is well established: it was founded in the mid-fourth century and was apparently peacefully abandoned a little over three generations later (*supra*).

Here and there, all over the territory, and oftentimes quite far from urban nuclei, different *uillae*, most of them medium-sized, have been identified with reforms—sometimes major ones—in the late empire which led to the addition of mosaic floors in different rooms. One example is the Sant Amanç establishment in Rajadell, which has an attractive mosaic of notable quality that effectively combines geometric-floral decoration with figurative elements (birds, a horse, a grapevine coming out of a *kantharos*),⁸⁰ as well as those in Romeral (*supra*) and Alters, near *Saitabis* (Xàtiva) (*supra*). The suburban villa of *Ilici* in Algorós has at least nine rooms with polychrome *opus tessellatum* floors, most of them geometric

but some bearing figurative mythological scenes (the nymph Galatea riding a seahorse, a bacchanalia, etc.), revealing the wealth and taste of the large landowners in the late empire.⁸¹

We have left for last the Ametllers complex in Tossa, which has outstanding connections by sea yet is virtually isolated by land. After the early-empire building was abandoned after a little over three generations, a new, more compact and smaller establishment with rooms paved in mosaic was built in the last quarter of the fourth century. Some of them were reused from earlier phases, and there were two new ones, one of which is geometric, with a central frame with winged angels, most likely four of them, comprising a rectangular emblem in the floor design. The other, which paved the modest reception room, is very widely known, an unparalleled and oft-cited piece bearing an allegorical representation of the *fundus* and the likeness of the elegantly dressed and bejewelled *domina* under an arcade. Above it is the inscription SALVO VITALE/FELIX TURISSA, a brief, concise text that exemplifies the world in that period: on his property, in his *fundus*, the *dominus* acted as the emperor in his capital. And yet, the reception hall where he welcomed guests was rather small and adapted from the early-empire *balneum* in a somewhat unsophisticated way. To top it all off and make the mosaic even more extraordinary, the signature of the author still survives: EX OF/FICINA FELICES. To contextualise it, we should recall that this is a work of deplorable quality from all vantage points, both technically and aesthetically, yet it is also an *unicum*, a piece that illustrates the late Roman world like no other.⁸²

Mosaics that decorated public spaces disappeared in this territory during this period, or perhaps more accurately they only appeared via new a set of customers who occupied the space left by the former Curiae: the Church. Some basilicas whose floors were embellished with *opus tessellatum* are documented after the fifth century, and not earlier to our knowledge, as are a few cathedrals. One good example is Santa Maria temple in the Episcopal See of Egara (380-420/430), with mostly varied geometric decoration divided into juxtaposed areas. Occasionally, we can find highly simplified yet effective figurative representations in well-defined frames (such as the minimalist illustration of the miracle of the bread and the fish from the New Testament). The contents are often harmed when tombs are opened. Some graves were marked by a rectangular polychrome mosaic with an epitaph and geometric and figurative decorations.⁸³

What is known as the basilica of *Ilici* with Greek inscriptions, considered by some to be a synagogue, has an elegant set of geometric mosaics with the vestiges of a few figurative scenes (Jonas again) from the Old Testament. After in-depth, complex studies, this building has now been dated from the sixth century, perhaps when *Ilici* was part of *Spania*, the westernmost province of Justinian's empire, with its capital in the neighbouring *Carthago Spartaria*, where a custom characteristic of the North Af-

rican provinces had taken root: paving temples with extraordinarily vivid mosaics.⁸⁴

Also from the sixth century are the polychrome tesserae floor of the numerous basilicas on Menorca and Mallorca. Santa Maria basilica (Mallorca) had a geometric decoration with inscriptions.⁸⁵ The flooring in Son Peretó on Menorca had geometric, floral and occasionally figurative decorations, with encircled birds, palm trees and octagons.⁸⁶ What stands out in the apse in Es Fornàs de Torelló is a *kantharos* with peacocks facing each other, recurring symbols of immortality and paradise; it is beautiful despite its simplicity and the size of the tesserae. Further on is a strip occupied by two lions facing each other with the tree of life between them. Towards the base of the basilica, the notable-quality decoration was geometric.⁸⁷ In Illeta del Rei (Mahon), birds, fish and peacocks facing each other were depicted on a *kantharos* from which the water of life bubbled, along with frames with little creatures, baskets of fruit and flowers and a few inscriptions.⁸⁸

Circumstances have often preserved sites that can be dated from the time when first the Vandals and later the Byzantines dominated the islands. The custom of using mosaic floors, quite common in North Africa, may help explain this concentration, with colours and models that also make a nod to *Carthago*.

And directly tied to the consolidation of Christianity during the late empire, we should mention a peculiar use of the *opus tessellatum* technique to highlight and embellish certain graves in a funerary context. This was one way of replacing the large slab with the epitaph and additional ornamental relief at a lower cost with fewer difficulties and an extraordinarily vivid, effective, beautiful and efficacious result.⁸⁹

It goes without saying that this way of covering some graves must have arisen in North Africa, where the custom is well documented from the fourth century onward. Here, we find examples scattered about, yet always in moderation. It must not have been an unfamiliar way of working, yet nor was it very widespread or common. Some of these grave laude boast notable quality, such as some pieces in the cemetery of the holy martyrs Fructuo-



FIGURE 5. Detail of the mosaic of the Basilica des Fornàs de Torelló (Menorca). Sixth century AD (Photo: Museu de Menorca, Mahon).

sus, Eulogius and Augurius in Tarragona near the Francolí River. The grave of Optimus, perhaps a bishop, is magnificent in its composition, arrangement and colours, with a depiction of the deceased wearing a toga against a floral background. The lauda of Ampelius shows a vivid image of the Mystic Lamb and a flowery *kantharos* as the backdrop to the fountain of eternal life framed by two strips of leaves, with blue gemstones inlaid in the centre. More damaged and with a slightly lower aesthetic quality is the lauda of the Good Shepherd wearing a short tunic with a Christogram on his head, framed on the outside with two facing columns and a lattice. They have been dated from the fifth century, perhaps the first half.⁹⁰

Others are conserved in Dénia,⁹¹ Barcelona,⁹² Egara,⁹³ Els Prats de Rei⁹⁴ and Empúries,⁹⁵ and they are generally somewhat simpler in terms of their colours and themes and always give pride of place to the epitaph. They can be dated from between the first quarter of the fourth century and the mid-fifth century. Vestiges of other possible laude have been conserved in dire condition in many other places around the territory.

EPILOGUE

Mosaic in no way disappeared at the end of late antiquity. In the Middle Ages and beyond, it continued to be used in a clean, elegant, beautiful and extremely effective way to decorate certain buildings, mostly those meant for worship, and occasionally palaces, as revealed by the vestiges conserved and different citations in the documentation. However, that is another story for another time.⁹⁶

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Josep Maria Nolla i Brufau (L'Albagés, 1949) earned his Bachelor's degree from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona with an extraordinary prize in 1973 and read his doctoral thesis on Roman Girona there in 1977. He served as a tenured professor of Archaeology in the Humanities Section of the Col·legi Universitari de Girona (UAB) between 1978 and 1992, and later at the Universitat de Girona, where he became chair in 1994. He has held several administrative posts, including the director of the Institut del Patrimoni Cultural (UdG) and the vice-rector of research. He was the conservator of the monumental complex in Empúries from 1983 to 1985. He has overseen numerous competitive research projects on a ministerial, regional and European level and has excavated at numerous archaeological sites in the Girona region, both urban and rural, which was his main site of study. In 1994 to 1996 he participated in the archaeological campaign at the Magna Mater temple in Ostia (Lazio). He has published in around 60 scientific monographs and other informative volumes, either alone or in collaboration with other scholars, along with numerous articles in journals or the proceedings from his participation in conferences, workshops and seminars. In 1979, he introduced the Harris matrix system into our country, and in 1992 he created the *Jornades d'Arqueologia de les Comarques de Girona*.