

Mosaic of the Church Quarter in Setif during the 4th Century AD: Study and Analysis

فسيفساء الحي الكنسي في سطيف خلال القرن الرابع للميلاد: دراسة وتحليل

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Abstract

Mosaic art is one of the oldest forms of artistic expression, used by humans to convey their ideas in an elegant and lasting way. Christians, in particular, utilized mosaics to convey their Christian beliefs, relying on plant, geometric, or animal symbols. This was embodied in sacred Christian art after Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. This research paper focuses on the sample from the Church Quarter in Setif during the 4th century AD. Most of the mosaic panels discovered in the area, particularly the funerary mosaics found in churches A and B, are examined and analyzed to identify various cultural aspects, including religious, artistic, and economic elements.

Keywords: Funerary Mosaic, Christianity, Church, Cultural Aspects

ملخص

يعد فن الفسيفساء من الفنون القديمة التي عرفها الإنسان لتجسيد أفكاره في شكل فني راقى ودائم، وقد استخدمها المسيحيون للتعبير عن مسيحيتهم اعتماداً على الرمز النباتي أو الهندسي أو الحيواني، عبر عنه بالفن المقدس للمسيحية المنتصرة بعدما أصبحت ديانة رسمية. ومن خلال هذه الورقة البحثية كانت العينة من حي الكنائس بمدينة سطيف خلال القرن الرابع ميلادي، الذي تميزت جل لوحاته الفسيفسائية في الفسيفساء الجنائزية الموجودة على مستوى الكنيسة "أ" و"ب" دراسة وتحليلاً لبعض الرموز استنتاجاً مختلف المظاهر الحضارية الدينية، فنية، اقتصادية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: فسيفساء جنائزية، المسيحية، الكنيسة، مظاهر حضارية.

Introduction

Mosaic art is considered one of the most significant art forms of the ancient world, appreciated for its distinctive and enduring aesthetic values. It is also an archaeological material, a historical document, and a valuable source of information for archaeologists and historians seeking to uncover facts, as it serves as a primary source for the period under study. This study aims to explore the archaeological site in the northwest of Setif, focusing on the important discoveries made during excavations in

1960, specifically two churches that hold significant archaeological material, including funerary mosaics. The study sample derives from this neighborhood, which reflects the wealth and prosperity of ancient North Africa, an area as historically significant as other archaeological sites such as Carthage, Mauritania Caesariensis, Timgad, and others.

This art form gained widespread popularity, especially after the Roman Empire officially adopted Christianity as its state religion, which led to the decoration of churches with various types of mosaic tiling, particularly funerary mosaics. Thus, the central questions arise: What impact did funerary mosaics have on the historical context of the region? What distinguishes these mosaics? What are the symbolic interpretations of these mosaics? And what are their cultural reflections on society?

The study employed a descriptive statistical method to catalog the mosaics in the two churches and translated some of them. It also applied an analytical and deductive method to examine and analyze various symbols, drawing conclusions about the cultural aspects of the mosaics.

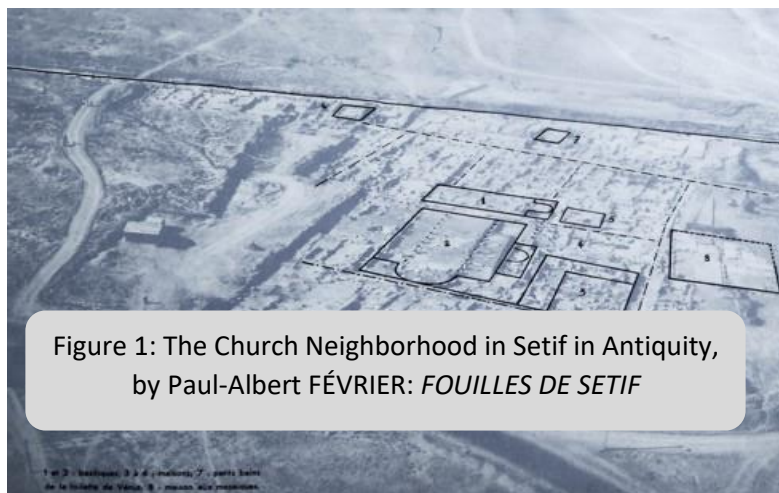
1. The Archaeological Site of the Church Quarter – Setif

The discovery of ancient Setif (Stifis)¹ is attributed to the civil engineer André Gaspar, who was planning the construction of a new district in the city. During this project, he uncovered ancient tombs, prompting him to focus on the site and initiate excavations. Soon, a Christian church was discovered, followed by another, both adorned with funerary mosaics and adjacent to an increasing number of inscriptions. The cartographer Paul-Albert Février intervened and conducted extensive² excavations, which he later detailed in his book *Excavations at Setif*.

¹ Claude LEPELLEY, *LES CITÉS DE L'AFRIQUE ROMAINE AU BAS-EMPIRE*, Volume II, *ÉTUDES AUGUSTINIENNE*, Paris, 1981, p. 497.

² Paul-Albert FÉVRIER, *FOUILLES DE SETIF, LES BASILIQUES CHRÉTIENNES DU QUARTIER NORD-OUEST*, Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris, 1965, pp. 7-8.

The first excavations were carried out in October 1960 after the accidental discovery of tombs in a piece of land to the west of the military zone. Two churches, A and B, were found. Church B runs from north to south, while Church A runs from east to west. During the second half of the 4th century AD, a regular street grid was established.¹



The 4th century is considered a golden age for the church, as lands came under its control, and it witnessed significant expansion due to the donations it received from wealthy believers, legacies, or the involvement of some wealthy individuals who entered the clergy and donated their properties and wealth to the churches.² The Christian system gradually began to take over the imperial system, as evidenced by Christian architectural structures, such as church complexes, which gained a significant place in the cities.³

1.1 Church A

Located at the northernmost point, Church A is in a very poor condition. The northern wall's foundations are partially submerged in water, and in some areas, entirely submerged. Only the first layers of the apse remain.

The church consists of a three-aisled room. The interior length of the central aisle is 19.45 meters, and its width is 5.20 meters, with the lower right side measuring 2.05 meters and the left side 2.15 meters. The depth of the apse is 3.95 meters, with a diameter of 4.75 meters. In the four corners of the church, large, regularly placed blocks with

¹ Claude LEPELLEY, *OP CIT*, p. 497.

² Rabah Ben Issa Aoualmi, *The Donatist-Catholic Conflict in Ancient North Africa: A Study of Origins and Effects (311–411 AD)*, 2nd Edition, Dar Al-Ihsan for Publishing and Distribution, Batna, 2022, p. 54.

³ Mohamed Al-Bashir Shniti, *Economic and Social Changes in Morocco During Roman Occupation*, National Book Foundation, Algeria, 1984, p. 228.

sharp edges serve as foundations, a technique also found in Church B. The wall separating the nave from the altar is poorly constructed, with irregular cement, suggesting it did not play a significant structural role. No evidence of the entrance was found, though the only possible location for the entrance is the southwestern facade, where two walls are constructed in a way that suggests the presence of a door, along the same street that contains the entrance to Church B.

The floor is almost entirely covered with funerary mosaics, most of which have partially disappeared. However, along the southern wall, a series of successive decorative motifs were found.

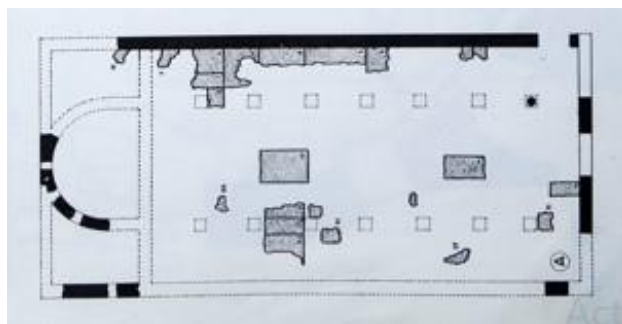
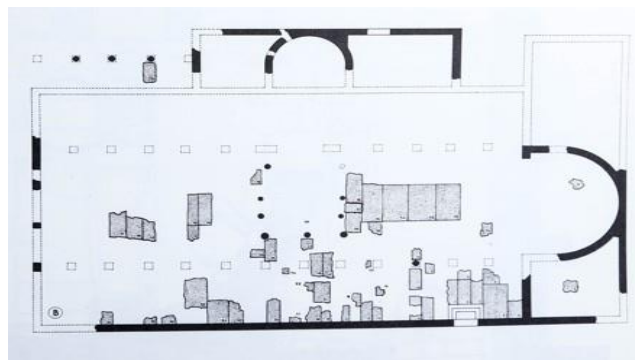


Figure 2 : Noël DUVAL, *Basilicas Chrétiennes d'Afrique du Nord I. Inventaire de l'Algérie*, Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, Paris, 1992, p. 62.

2.1 Church B

Church B is a building consisting of three aisles, with some differences in details compared to Church A, such as the floor plan, dimensions, and design of the apse. It also features a portico and a second apse opening onto the left aisle. Church B is located vertically in relation to Church A, with a narrow passageway about 2.25 meters wide separating the two. The building is distinguished by its narrow facade to the north and the altar to the south. From north to south, the church extends approximately 41.50 meters. The distance from the front wall to the apse is 38.60 meters, and the width is 16



meters, with the apse's depth approximately 6.50 meters and its diameter 4.15 meters.¹

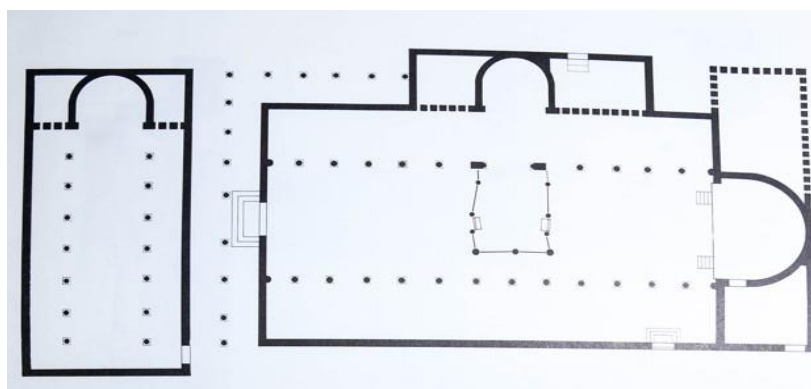
¹ Paul-Albert FÉVRIER, OP CIT P -P 25 -27

Figure 3 : Noël DUVAL, *Ibid*, p. 62

Thus, the two churches in Setif are made up of structures consisting of three aisles separated by simple columns, with the central aisle being wider than the other two. Church A follows a common design in North Africa, featuring an apse flanked by two annexes that conceal it. The precise layout of Church B is more difficult to reconstruct due to the presence of only one annex, which is believed to have been a wardrobe, a feature also found in Africa, such as in Timgad.

An interesting feature of Church A is the arrangement of its entrance beneath the nave at the corner. This opening, which is no more than 1.70 meters wide, is located at the end of the passageway between the two buildings, as if this church were merely an annex to Church B.¹

Both churches were built in the mid-4th century AD. The plan contains two axes: the first runs from north to south, and it is aligned with the central nave. The east and west directions are determined by the orientation of the apse and the large portico that



cuts across the eastern aisle, which plays a crucial role in determining the prayer direction toward the sunrise.²

Figure 4: Noël DUVAL, *Ibid*, p. 63

3.1 Burial

The researcher Lasos proposed a hypothesis to understand the widespread use of funerary mosaics in North Africa. He suggested that "it became common and natural to bury the dead inside churches once permission was granted for that purpose." This led to the practice of digging graves in the church floors.³

¹ Paul-Albert FÉVRIER, OP CIT P P 44 45

² IBID ,P 54

³ Hamza Mohamed Charef: *Mosaics of Mauritania Caesariensis – Funerary Mosaics* – Doctoral Thesis, Institute of Archaeology, University of Algiers 2, 2012, p. 330.

Graves were dug into the floors of both churches and were covered with mosaics. The graves are numerous and closely packed, with narrow spaces between the tombs used for building children's graves under the flooring. The tombs were mostly made from limestone basins, with rounded corners at the head and wider at the feet. Often, the cover was made from a simple, flat stone slab.

The bodies were placed with their heads facing west. Burial did not occur solely within the churches; a tiled grave was found in the northern part of the portico, and mosaics were visible in the eastern aisle. Further graves were discovered in the room located to the west of the southern apse, behind the passageway, with additional tombs later found to the east of the church.

The only evidence for dating the churches comes from the inscriptions on the mosaics. In Church A, three graves are dated between 378 AD and 429 AD, near the apse. In Church B, the earliest dated mosaic is from 389 AD. The graves in the central nave are dated between 389 AD and 401 AD, those in the right aisle range from 394 AD to 410 AD, with one grave dated to 471 AD. This suggests that the graves in the right aisle are immediately after the mosaics in the central nave, which is not the case in the eastern passage, where it is difficult to determine their age relative to those in the central nave.¹

2. Mosaic of the Church Quarter

The funerary mosaics of Setif date back² to the 4th century AD, a period during which the city underwent significant development, becoming the capital of the newly established province of Mauritania Sitifensis.³ As a result, the city is rich in local decorations, as well as a wide range of colors, which offer evidence of the region's vibrancy. Christian themes are clearly visible, linked to the preceding period and borrowing from pagan themes, a reflection of the continuity of cultural traditions inherited from earlier times.⁴

¹ Paul-Albert FÉVRIER : *OP CIT*, pp. 38-40.

² Mosaic: Refers to the process of joining or assembling pieces of solid materials such as marble or glass, which vary in color and size.

³ The province of Sitifis was separated from Mauritania Caesariensis during the reign of Emperor Diocletian, who reorganized the administrative structure of the African colony. It was divided into two parts: Mauritania Caesariensis, with its capital at Caesarea (modern-day Cherchell), and Mauritania Sitifensis, with its capital at Sitif (Setif) in 293 AD. Archaeological evidence shows that Christianity was present in the region from an early period (for more details, see: Abdelhamid Amrane, *Romanization and Christianity in North Africa*, Dirasat Al-Matbouat Al-Jami'ia, 2018, pp. 199-200).

⁴ Lorande ANDRE - *The Mosaics of Ancient Africa - Proceedings of the Sessions of the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres*, p. 546

The mosaics of the Church Quarter in Setif are characterized by several common features, both in terms of technique and decoration. All mosaics are made of cubes, each side measuring approximately 1 cm. The tomb decorations at the site are simple, yet diverse, and some decorative motifs have been found to be identical or treated in different ways in various tombs. The borders are simple, consisting of lines in different colors to isolate the design, and in some cases, the borders are enriched with plant motifs.¹

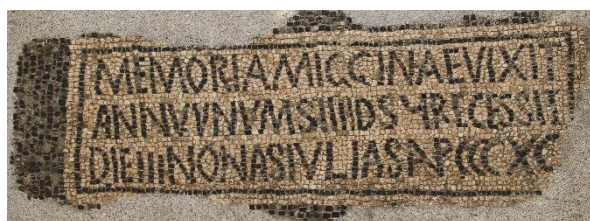
Funerary Mosaic from Church B

*"Galica, the infant, departed in peace (of God) after living for four months. Her mother built this tomb for her."
End of the 4th century, beginning of the 5th century AD.*

The image is from the National Public Museum of Setif.



In addition to the textual field above and below, the inscriptions are framed by black bands, occasionally surrounded by black and white lines. In some cases, one of the lines features alternating white and black teeth, or these white and black cubes are mixed with red or yellow lines. More complex designs are found where concentric circles are engraved within a square, with the entire composition outlined in adjacent colored lines within the mosaic.



Funerary Mosaic from Church A

*The tomb of Magina, who lived for four months and six days. She departed on the third day of the first ten days of July in the year of the province (390 AD) (July 3, 429 AD).
The image is from the National Public Museum of Setif.*



Funerary Mosaic from Church A

*"Corsonia, the faithful Christian, who lived in peace (of God). She passed away at the age of six on the night of late June, in the year of the province 339 AD (June 378 AD)."
The image is from the National Public Museum of Setif.*

The artist used both geometric and plant-based decorations, either on one side of the tomb or on all its corners. The three-line interlacements emphasize each line on a slanted background, and there are overlaps made of cubes in green, white, brown, and yellow, which are believed to have been produced by the same workshop.

¹ Paul-Albert FÉVRIER, *OP CIT*, p. 64



Funerary Mosaic from Church B

The tomb of Maria Equitola, known as Selica, who lived for 29 years. She departed in peace (of God) on the night of mid-March, in the year of the province 354 (March 14, 393 AD).

The image is from the National Public Museum of Setif.



Funerary Mosaic from Church A

The tomb of...Anous, end of the 4th century AD, beginning of the 5th century AD.

The image is from the National Public Museum of Setif.

The band takes on various shapes, sometimes resembling a strip seen from the front, while in other cases, it spirals around itself in a helix. The plant motifs on the borders are wreaths of leaves, possibly laurel leaves¹. Flowers in the shape of lotuses are depicted in the corners, and among the distinctive elements of the panels are zigzag shapes, adjacent color squares, triangles, and diamonds integrated with circles. Some of the designs are more intricate, featuring intersecting circles adorned with flowers. These circles, made from concentric networks, are surrounded by different colors and geometric or floral patterns, forming a flowerpot-like design. Some tombs were decorated with extremely simple lines resembling kantharos ²(a type of ancient Greek drinking cup) on the branches, while birds and fish are also present.³

It is difficult to confirm that all these mosaics come from the same workshop, although the colors are similar, especially since all the decorations stand out against a black background. However, some mosaics can likely be attributed to the same workshop.

The basic motifs reveal that the mosaics of Setif are distinguished by the harmony between plant and geometric decorations, with a notable absence of Christian symbols.

¹ IBID, P 66

² Kantharos: It is a two-handled cup with a wide neck, used in pagan religious rituals dedicated to the god Bacchus, the god of wine, which symbolized the bliss of the afterlife. (For more details, see: Hamza Mohamed Charef, *op. cit.*, p. 263)

³ Paul-Albert FÉVRIER, *OP CIT*, p. 68

The mosaics of the tombs are characterized by dark tones, with a tendency toward brown, red, black, and white, and occasionally yellow. The absence of Christian symbols follows an objective standard, which was influenced by laws prohibiting the depiction of the Christian symbol of the Savior on marble placed on the ground.¹

Excavations at the site have uncovered small baths, and one of the rooms contained a beautiful mosaic known as the "Venus Bath," framed by square borders with engravings of triangles in the shape of crosses and diamonds. This design and color scheme was found to be identical to a tomb in Church B. The arrangement of the cubes is similar in both cases, making it a valuable reference for dating the mosaics.²

These decorations are rare and of unique technical and artistic quality, and it is



likely they came from the same workshop that produced the tomb, dating the mosaics to the late 4th century AD or the early 5th century AD.³

*Frame of the Venus Bath Mosaic
The image is from the National Public
Museum of Setif.*

*The tomb located in Church B.
The matching shapes between the frame of the mosaic and the
tomb.
Image from the reference: Paul-Albert FÉVRIER: FOUILLES
DE SETIF*

1.2 Count of Funerary Mosaics in the Church Quarter:

Location	Church A	Church B
Number of Funerary Mosaics	24	58

Table Showing the Number of Funerary Mosaics in the Northwestern Quarter – Setif

3. Symbolism of the Funerary Mosaics:

Funerary mosaics were used as a type of tomb cover by ancient peoples from the pagan period until the spread of Christianity. These mosaics often feature funerary

¹ IBID, p. 70

² Paul-Albert FÉVRIER, *Les basiliques chrétiennes de Sétif et leurs mosaïques*, *Bulletin de la Société Nationale des Antiquaires*, p. 85

³ Paul-Albert FÉVRIER, *FOUILLES DE SETIF*, p. 72

inscriptions that indicate the burial place of an individual, including the deceased's name, profession, and the date of death. Additionally, mosaics sometimes serve as dedications to deceased bishops or include inscriptions related to Christian martyrs.¹

The funerary mosaics include a range of plant and geometric decorations, as well as a variety of symbols that allude to Christianity. Among these symbols are:

1.3 The Kantharos (Double-handled Cup):

The kantharos symbolizes the fulfillment of the promise of eternal life and the eternal resurrection as mentioned by early Christians in their inscriptions and literary writings. In North African funerary art, the kantharos is commonly depicted as a vessel for banquets, often filled with grapes or flowers, or accompanied by birds or goats. It is also sometimes portrayed as a fountain, with water flowing from it. The term *kantharos* in Latin refers to a "source" or "spring."²

Frame of the Mosaic Panel

Mosaic with curved leaves emanating from a large two-handled cup.

The image is from the National Public Museum of Setif.



2.3 The Fish:

The fish was one of the most important symbols adopted by early Christians to express their faith. The fish, or sometimes its parts like the scales³, became an iconic sign of Christian identity. Saint Augustine,⁴ in his book *The City of God* (Chapter 18), noted that the fish symbolically refers to the name of Christ. The fish image allowed early Christians to recognize one another, especially during periods of persecution. Tertullian wrote: "The fish, in itself, is an implicit confession that Jesus Christ is the

¹ Mohamed Hamza Charef, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 261-263.

³ Fousali Hasina - *Mosaics of the Dawn of Christianity: An Analytical, Iconographic, Symbolic, and Technical Study, Models from Ancient Algeria, Tunisia, and Rome* - Master's in Archaeology, University of Algiers 2, 2012, p. 134.

⁴ Saint Augustine was born in Tagaste on November 13, 354 AD. He was the eldest son of his mother Monica and his father Patricius, who was a pagan. He studied philosophy, rhetoric, and the art of persuasion. He initially followed the Manichean faith but later abandoned it and turned to Neoplatonism, a pagan religion. He then decided to embrace Christianity in order to serve it. One of his most famous works is *Confessions*. He was ordained as a priest in the city of Hippo (modern-day Annaba), and later became its bishop. (For more details, see: Abdelhamid Amrane, *Christianity in Ancient Morocco: Origins and Development (180-430 AD)*, Doctoral Thesis, University of Constantine, 2011, p. 75.)

expected Savior and the Son of God incarnate. The fish in the sea represents the faithful swimming in the temporal world."

The use of the fish symbol declined after the triumph of Christianity, transforming into a purely decorative element.¹ The early Church Fathers affirmed that the fish represents the Messiah, and both the Torah and the Gospels reference this idea: "The sea represents humanity; water represents life. Humanity is the water, and the people are the fish. This is God's will to grant the shape of humanity. The fish is the best representation," symbolizing both the baptism of Christ and the purification through water and spirit.²

Funerary Mosaic

Depicting fish scales.

The image is from the National Public Museum of Setif.



3.3 Plant Decorations:

Flowers and Roses:

Flowers and roses are prevalent in most mosaic designs and carry two meanings:

1. **Decorative Meaning:** They are used in forming borders, and Christians decorated their tombs with images of flowers and branches, similar to pagans who used them as symbols of fertility, happiness, and wealth. Egyptian gods like Osiris, Isis, and Horus were often depicted wearing crowns of flowers.³
2. **Symbolic Meaning:** They represent the blooming gardens of paradise and the happiness found after life on earth.⁴

¹ Mohamed Hamza Charef, *op. cit.*, pp. 268-269

² Fousali Hasina, *op. cit.*, pp. 197-198

³ IBID., pp. 179-180

⁴ Mohamed Hamza Charef, *op. cit.*, p. 271

4.3 Geometric Decorations:

The Circle: The circle is a symbol in Christianity representing eternity, as it has no beginning or end. It is most often used to signify immortality. The circle also symbolizes the cycle of the seasons, serving as a solar symbol that points to the heavenly realm.¹

The Diamond and Triangle: The diamond shape is particularly prominent in funerary mosaics and represents the baptismal font, a central Christian ritual. Christians used this shape to express the mystery of Christ's transfiguration.²

The triangle symbolizes the mystery of the equality of divine persons and is represented by the Latin letter Δ (Delta), which stands for the word "God" (*Deus* in Latin).

4. Civilizational Aspects of Funerary Mosaic Art:

Mosaic art is considered one of the most important archaeological and historical documents, helping us to date events and reflect various aspects of the civilization of the society under study.

1.4 Religious Aspect:

The people of North Africa, in their intellectual and religious development, coexisted with other ancient peoples. They revered and sanctified mountains that fascinated them with their height and majesty, and caves were places of worship and reverence since prehistoric times. The significance of certain caves remained prominent until the Roman period, and the belief in the sanctity of caves continued during the Christian period. This is evident in Saint Augustine's letter to Christians who descended into the earth, believing that it brought them closer to God.³

Funerary mosaics illustrate the spiritual religious aspect of the people of Setif during the 4th century AD, specifically their adoption of Christianity. This is reflected in the decoration of tombs with various forms and symbols associated with this faith.

Christianity had a presence in Setif from an early time, as sources mention two bishops: the first, "Jubainus," bishop of Novarisia (modern-day Bni Foda), and the second, "Quintus," bishop of Sitifis in 256 AD. Many martyrs fell during periods of persecution in various parts of the region, and archaeological sources have

¹ IBID, p. 261

² Fousali Hasina, *op. cit.*, pp. 204-205

³ Abdelhamid Amrane, *op. cit.*, p. 15

commemorated them, such as the martyr "Mensa" and martyrs "Donnatus," "Felix," and "Baricus."¹

In addition to the numerous churches and Christian monuments in the city dating back to the 3rd and 4th centuries AD, such as the church at Mons, tombs were constructed for persecuted Christian martyrs. Their memory was honored to reflect the extent of their suffering, especially during the 4th century AD, when churches were built at their tombs. As Christianity became the official religion, the number of churches² increased in Mauritania Sitifensis, with many churches constructed in the region, including the two churches in the northwestern quarter of Setif, dating from the mid-4th century AD.

During this century, the church institution emerged not only as a religious organization but also as a social and political entity, based on religious doctrine and ideological principles. It became a parallel power to the civil authority, with the emperor attempting to co-opt its leaders for political purposes. The close relationship between the church and imperial power was driven by shared interests, ensuring mutual benefits.³

2.4 Artistic and Architectural Aspect:

After Rome officially recognized Christianity under Emperor Constantine I⁴, Christianity became a unifying force in the social order. Magnificent churches were built across North Africa, and prominent figures competed for ecclesiastical positions to enhance their social status and gain proximity to the emperor, the protector of Christianity. Archaeological evidence has preserved the cities represented by church complexes⁵, which were carefully attended to, particularly in terms of artistic aspects, such as funerary mosaics.

Mosaic artists incorporated various decorative elements, including plant, geometric, and animal motifs. Special mention should be made of the significant role played by mosaic workshops, particularly the African workshop, which stood out for its originality after a process of mutual influence between Mediterranean regions. This also

¹ Op. cit., pp. 200-201

² IBID, pp. 204-205

³ Mohamed Al-Bashir Shniti, *Rome the Empire and the Maghreb (Military Struggle and Civilizational Interaction)*, Moufem for Publishing, 2019, pp. 258-259

⁴ Constantine (274–337 AD), son of Constantius Chlorus, ascended to the imperial throne between 306–324 AD. He established principles of tolerance towards Christianity and played a prominent role in convening the Council of Arles in 312 AD. He defeated his opponents, restored balance to the empire, and founded the city of Constantinople, which became the capital of the Byzantine Empire. (For more details, see: Abdelhamid Amrane, *Christianity in Ancient Morocco*, p. 131.)

⁵ Op. cit., p. 58

included borrowing from previous eras and adopting pagan themes, reflecting the continuity of inherited cultural traditions.¹

Local workshops played an important role in enriching this art. The variety of colored stones further enhanced and diversified mosaics in the region. Colors such as white, black, red, brown, and yellow were used to increase the beauty and distinction of the mosaics. Over time, these workshops developed, and their craftsmen gained technical expertise, allowing them to achieve independence from external influences, ultimately reflecting the local character of the region and later the cities.²

For example, when comparing the funerary mosaics of the northwestern quarter of Setif with those found at the site of Kelibia in Tunisia, a significant stylistic difference is evident. According to Noël Duval, two distinct types of funerary mosaics can be identified based on stylistic criteria. The first type, found in Setif, often features a black line with teeth along with plant, geometric, and animal motifs. The second type, found in Kelibia, is distinguished by a sacred touch, with the cross symbol prominently featured—something absent in Setif. This difference highlights the variation between the two sites³, and no doubt similar contrasts exist when comparing other Algerian cities, such as Tipasa, Annaba, and Tebessa.

The African artist showcased his mastery in creating mosaics, especially funerary mosaics, in the mid-4th century. The churches in the city stand as a testament to this achievement.

3.4 Economic Aspect:

The economic aspect is one of the most important historical features that provide valuable knowledge, as it is a powerful driver of human history and plays a significant role in the dynamics of historical events.⁴

Mosaic art is a significant craft that requires skilled artisans and is overseen by creative specialists in the field. Due to its importance and high cost, dedicated workshops had to be established. A person wishing to have a tomb decorated with mosaics had to go to the workshop, select a design from a special register, and purchase it, necessitating a large number of craftsmen involved in the production process.⁵

¹ Lorande ANDRE, *op. cit.*, pp. 546-547

² Mohamed Hamza Charef, *op. cit.*, p. 10

³ Paul-Albert FÉVRIER, *FOUILLES DE SETIF*, pp. 96-70

⁴ Mohamed Arabi Aqqoun, *Economy and Society in Ancient North Africa*, Dar Al-Huda, Ain M'Lila, Algeria, 2008, pp. 9-10

⁵ Mohamed Hamza Charef, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21

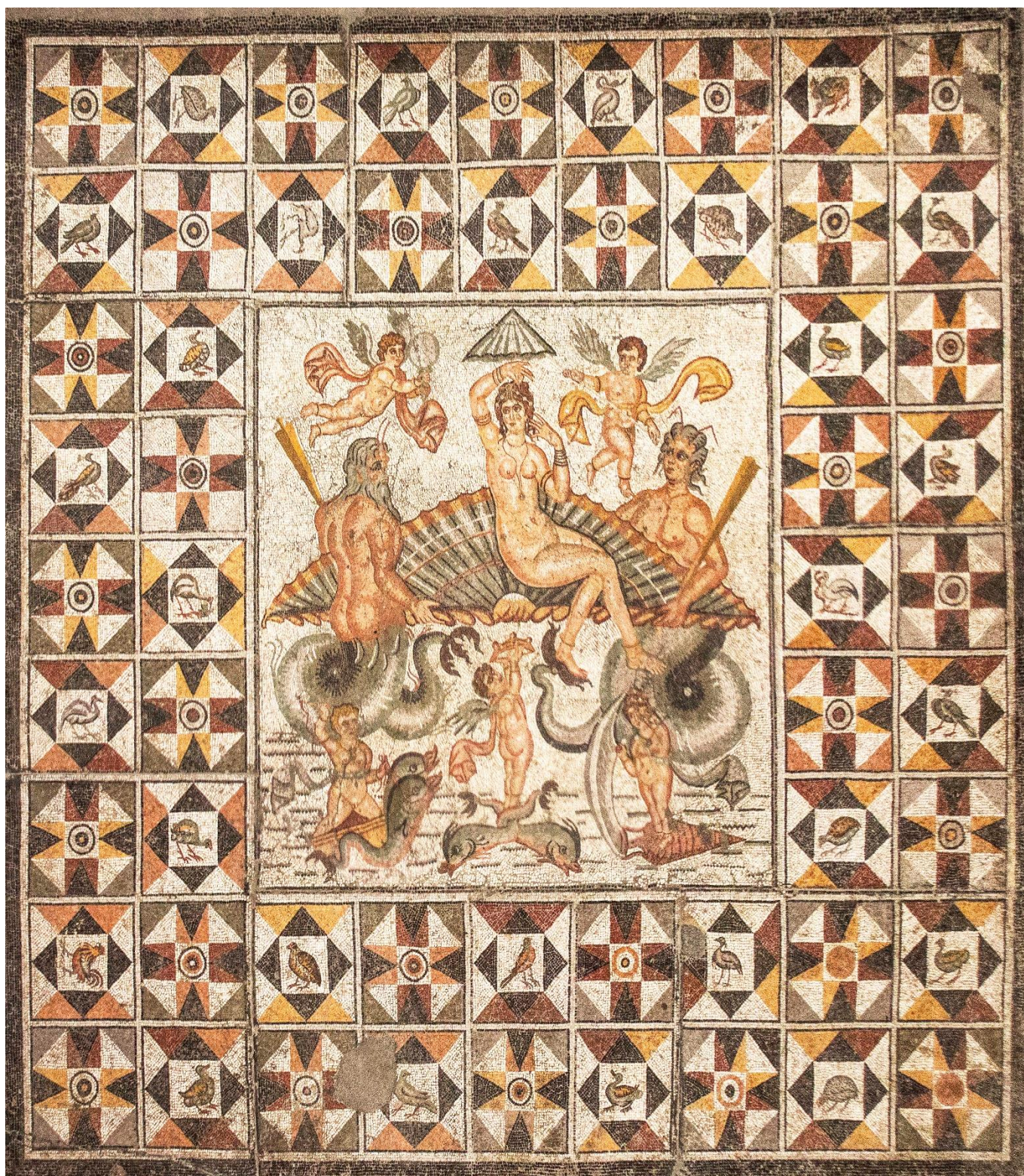
In his study of the northwestern quarter of Setif, the researcher Février concluded two possible scenarios for the creation of these funerary mosaics. The first is that the mosaics were made within a workshop, while the second suggests that the designs were created on-site. This conclusion is based on the lack of consistency in some tombs, such as the presence of a rectangle on the left side but its absence on the right, suggesting that the craftsman began working from the left and had no space to continue on the right. In other cases, the design extends beyond the border, which is a clear transgression of the separation between the inscription and the rest of the mosaic.¹

Group work was necessary for this craft, and there were variations in ranks and wages. The highest-paid individual was the one who designed the scene on paper, followed by the painter who executed the design, then the one who placed the cubes in the main scenes, and the one who worked on the backgrounds and easier parts of the tiling. The lowest-paid person was responsible for preparing the mortar.

Mosaic artisans in North Africa enjoyed widespread fame. In fact, Emperor Valentinian I, in 374 AD, issued a decree to the governor of Africa exempting the masters of painting from taxes, as well as their families and slaves, and exempting them from paying duties on their artistic sales.² This shows the emperor's significant support for this art, ensuring its continuity and encouraging artists and craftsmen to create works that stand as a testament to the civilization, competing with other civilizations of the time.

¹ Paul-Albert FÉVRIER, *FOUILLES DE SETIF*, p. 65

² Mohamed Hamza Charef, *op. cit.*, p. 23



Mosaic Panel "Venus Bath"

The image is from the National Public Museum of Setif.

The panel was found in the small baths, 100 meters away from the Church Quarter site.

Conclusion

The northwestern quarter of Setif in the second half of the 4th century AD holds great significance in the history of African cities. It reflects the development of construction activities, with the establishment of official monuments such as churches. The cities expanded, adhering to and emphasizing exceptional artistic standards, particularly represented in the mosaics that characterized this area, especially the funerary mosaics. These mosaics showcase the chronological sequence through which we can infer the cultural development at the end of antiquity, leading to the establishment of dedicated workshops.

The funerary mosaics of Setif chronicle the history of Christianity in the region, as evidenced by the series of inscriptions found in Churches A and B, shedding light on the spiritual life of the time.

The design style used in both churches is marked by simplicity, with geometric, plant, and occasionally animal motifs. This simplicity reflects the humble nature of the Christians who did not distinguish themselves from others, as seen in the form of the inscriptions and the absence of the Christian cross symbol during the 4th century.

Mosaic work was either carried out in workshops before the tomb was dug, where inscriptions and symbols were selected to decorate the tiles, or the mosaics were directly created on-site above the tomb.

Funerary mosaics serve as historical archaeological documents, allowing us to interpret the history of the region through its various civilizational aspects: political, social, religious, economic, artistic, and architectural.

North Africa was home to an important local workshop that developed over time, reflecting the region's authenticity and distinguishing it from other areas in the world, while also incorporating influences from various schools, such as the Greek and Roman traditions.

Christian mosaics, while rooted in Christianity, were not without pagan influences. This demonstrates the process of mutual influence between different historical periods, and more significantly, the coexistence of pagan and Christian elements within a single society. This is confirmed by archaeological findings, such as the presence of small baths near the northwestern quarter, and the discovery of a mythological mosaic of "Venus' Bath," especially when the frame of the mosaic was found to be identical to a funerary mosaic belonging to one of the tombs in Church B.

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