



Episcopal Basilica of Philippopolis (Plovdiv, Bulgaria) Conservation of the Mosaic Floor

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The site during archaeological excavations 1982-1986



Aerial view of the site in 2015



Aerial view of the site in 2017



Uncovering the mosaic from the sand cover and the polyethylene sheet - May 2015



The condition of the mosaic after it was uncovered in 2015



Mosaic in the southern isle before surface stabilization and cleaning



Mosaic in the southern isle after surface stabilization and cleaning

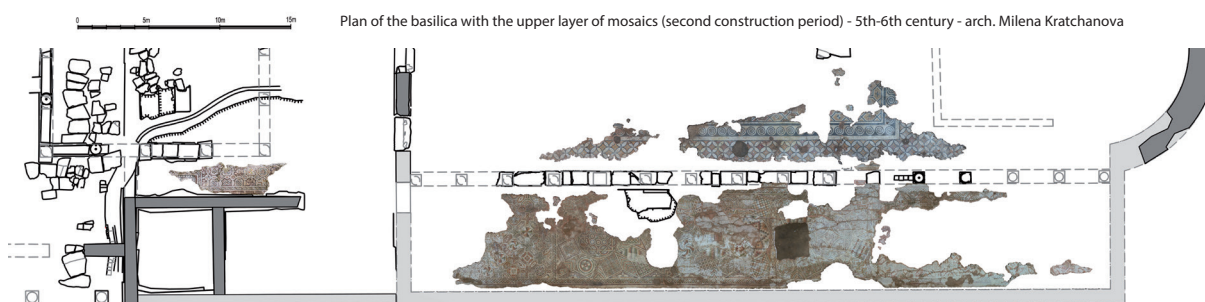
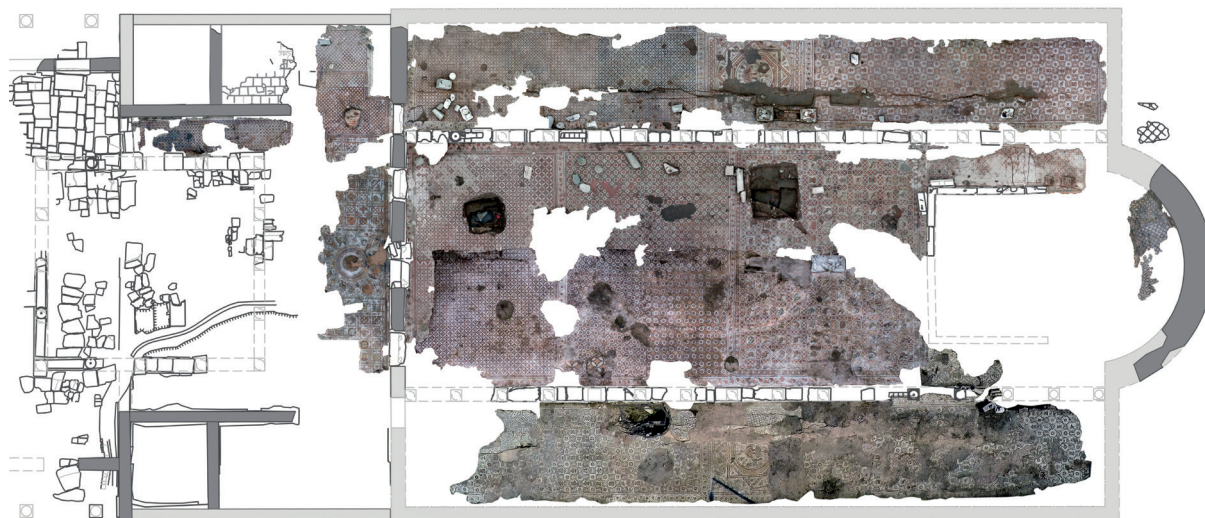


Detachment of the upper mosaic layer in 2015

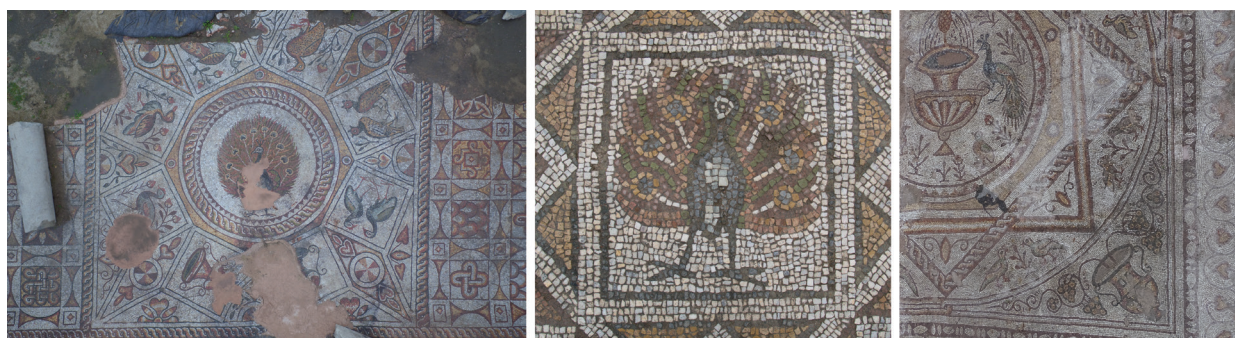
An Early-Christian basilica dating from the 4th-6th centuries A.D. was discovered in 1983-85. It is the most significant archaeological site with mosaic floors excavated in Plovdiv and according to its location and dimensions is considered to be an Episcopal basilica. The site was preserved *in situ* to the east of the Forum Complex. It is a richly decorated, three-nave, one-apse building with narthex and an atrium surrounded by porticos measuring 86.30 m x 38.50 m. All of the rooms discovered have polychrome mosaic floors; altogether more than 2000 square meters. In the three naves and one of the porticos there are two mosaic floors lying one above the other that are preserved *in situ*.

Over the years various conservation efforts have been made, temporary shelters have been set up, the last of which collapsed in 1999. The mosaic has been left in the open air, covered by a thin layer of sand with low fence and no special security. In the period after 1990, due to economic changes in Bulgaria and serious cuts in conservation and maintenance budgets, the condition of the mosaics has worsened considerably.

In 2015 a project for the sheltering, conservation and display of the Episcopal basilica archaeological site started upon the initiative and with the financial support of the America for Bulgaria Foundation and the Municipality of Plovdiv. A team of architects, conservators and archaeologists was formed. The conservation of the mosaics began with removal of vegetation and reburial materials, cleaning, surface and structural stabilization. The two mosaic floors in the southern and half of the central nave were separated by detaching the upper layer. The lower mosaic layer will be displayed *in situ* on the ground floor of the cover building and the upper one will be transferred on new supports and displayed on the next floor.



Plan of the basilica with the lower layer of mosaics (first construction period) - 4th-5th century - arch. Milena Kratchanova



Upper layer of mosaics (second construction period) 5th-6th century



Lower layer of mosaics (first construction period) 4th-5th century



Before conservation



During surface stabilization



After stabilization and reintegration



Detachment of the upper mosaic layer in 2015



Uncovering the lower mosaic layer



Mosaic during removal of incrustations



Mosaic after removing the incrustations



Uncovering the lower mosaic layer



Uncovering the lower mosaic layer



The two mosaic layers exhibited in situ



Consolidation of deteriorated tesserae