

# WHAT COMES TO MIND WHEN YOU HEAR MOSAIC?

## Conserving mosaics from ancient to modern.

### Butrint as an education and training school for future generation of conservators

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The core of Butrint and its surroundings, with its cultural and natural diversity, offers a reach environment for learning and qualification in the field of archaeology, conservation, management of culture heritage, interpretation of the habitat, study of flora and fauna, application of innovative technologies such as 3d recordings of the monuments, geophysics and other fields.

After the collapse of communism political system in the 1990's, Albania, as many other post-communist countries, faced serious problems, including its scientific and academic sectors. This included archaeology, conservation and even the previous achievements in cultural heritage were threatened by the changes of the time. Alongside these practical challenges the new involvement with foreign projects and exchange programs between universities from Western Europe and America, brought new and challenging philosophies to assist in the integration of contemporary archaeological thought and debate instead of only material cultural studies. Integration of young archaeologist and students in different foreign projects all over Albania brought a new experience and a new inspiration for the future years. Butrint played a great role in this process.

In 2000 the Butrint Training School was created as an attempt to provide a modern educational experience for Albanian university students. Since 2000 until 2012 the training school was part of the Butrint project funded by Packard Humanities Institution and Butrint Foundation. It was linked in its origins with junior year abroad schemes and considerable investments in postgraduate training funded from the same sources, but in essence it was intended to be a basic undergraduate introduction to fieldwork.

For some time the Butrint Training School has intended to expand the types of courses offered to Albanian students in order to provide them with a greater range of opportunities. As in previous years the on-site conservation was directed towards monument and mosaic conservation, many students have participate in mosaics conservation projects held in Vrina Plain basilica and in roman villa. Thus, in the summer season of 2010 a pilot program was organized in parallel with the excavation program to deal with basic conservation issues and cultural heritage management in Butrint.

In 2010 a direct intervention on the monuments was realized on the Vrina Plain. A part of the apse of the basilica, which has survived for centuries, was being damaged by inclement winter weather. In 2011 students were involved together with the specialists on the conservation project of Ali Pasha castle and in 2012 in the city walls of Butrint.

The students of conservation program were selected on the bases of their previous participation in the excavation program of Butrint Training school. The goal was to prepare an Albanian group of students trained with the techniques of excavation and conservation but also a group who will be aware for the archaeological and conservation problems of Butrint since in their genesis as the future professionals. So, during the conservation of Triconch Palace mosaics the participant had the opportunity to learn basic work of mosaics conservation technique.

On the same bases the Butrint Training School has involved workmen from local communities, mainly from the new village of Shën Dëlli in order to give them an educational background about ancient sites and to help them understanding the importance of the World Heritage site of Butrint, in short, to make them stakeholders in the whole process. Previous training programs of conservation for some community workmen was undertaken by the Butrint Foundation inside Butrint but also were sent in Rumania to a parallel project.

In October 2007 the International Centre for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments (ICCROM) held its annual South East Europe conservation course at Butrint for the first time. The course was organized by the Butrint National Park and the Butrint Foundation. It was attended by 20 students from Serbia, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia and Georgia, as well as two specialists from Butrint, and conducted by Valerie Magar from the Rome office of ICCROM. As well as site visits and hands-on conservation the students attended seminars and lectures by Italian, Albanian and British experts. The targets were the improvement of the methods and techniques used to diagnose the specifics of stones and the binding materials in archaeological sites. In addition, the elements required conservation training which are based on ethical and practical considerations were examined.

Butrint National Park has made a significant contribution to Albanian archaeology and conservation. For many years excavations have been undertaken inside and outside Butrint with the aim of enriching archaeological evidence and making Butrint into an exemplary model of sustainable tourist development. Over twelve years more than 500 Albanian students have been involved in the training process in different excavations and conservation. Thanks to their work and contributions as well as the other Albanian and a foreign initiative, Butrint is now the best example of a managed heritage site in Albania.



The mosaic pavement of the roman villa in the Vrina Plain



ICCROM Course 2007



Cleaning of the mosaic pavement of the roman bath adjacent to the theater



The cleaning of mosaics at the Triconch Palace from trained workers

