

Mosaics in Egypt Obstacles and Challenges

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Abstract

Egypt has a long history; it has unique monuments, Giza pyramids, temples of Karnak, Luxor. Egypt is rich in its civilization and monumental evidences still existing till now. All these monuments made Egypt as an open air museum. Besides that, it has a big collection of mosaics from different places such as: Alexandria, Themuis, and north Sinai. Not only from different places but also from different periods such as: the mosaic panel of transfiguration in Saint Catherine monastery, geometrical mosaic in Qaitbay Citadel in Alexandria from the Islamic period.

The mosaics in Egypt are preserved in many places:

- 1- Sites: original place "in situ"
- 2- Museums
- 3- Store rooms

All of these mosaics which are in different places need more study and conservation projects. It is a priority for the ministry of antiquities to establish a *Center of archaeological information and preservation of mosaics* for the whole of Egypt and to make a database to document all the mosaic pavements in Egypt which are dated to different ages, to benefit from them and to keep them for next generations.

Therefore, for the first time in Egypt, the Ministry of Antiquities established a Centre of archaeological information and mosaics preservation in Alexandria so as to be a platform for studying, and documenting all the mosaics in all over Egypt. But the works in the center stopped due to the economic state in Egypt. But now the author began to do the scientific archive for the mosaics in Egypt in order to define the priorities for saving the mosaics which are in bad conditions. This archive takes the Ptolemaic and Roman panels as a beginning with the intention to continue the pieces from other periods later.

Objectives

In addition to what has been discovered in Egypt of numerous and various monuments, Egypt has a big collection of mosaics from different places such as: Alexandria, al-Buhaira, Themuis near Mansoura, Ismailia, and north Sinai.



Those monuments are not only from different places but also from different periods, especially from Ptolemaic, Roman, Byzantine periods, the mosaic of transfiguration in Saint Catherine monastery represented one masterpiece of the later. The geometrical mosaic in Qaitbay Citadel in Alexandria is another example from Islamic period.



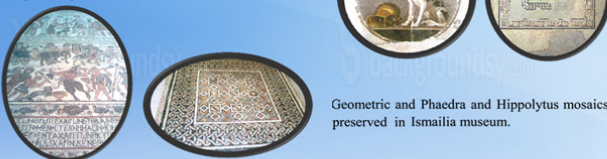
Egypt's mosaics are preserved in different places: sites, museums, and storerooms. The mosaics preserved in their original places are rare in Egypt; one of the examples is the mosaics of the villa of the birds in Kom El-Dikka in Alexandria which is well preserved in their original place. It dates back to the first half of the second century A.D; it is opened for the public. Those panels represent a small mosaics museum.



Another mosaic panel that is still preserved in site is the fish and dolphin panel in the temple of Karnak which dates back Hellenistic period.



Many of the mosaic floors are preserved in museums all over Egypt such as: The dog and Athlete mosaics preserved in the Museum of Antiquities in Bibliotheca Alexandrina; it was discovered in the site of the new library in Shatby-Alexandria.



Geometric and Phaedra and Hippolytus mosaics, preserved in Ismailia museum.

Conclusion

- 1- Roman mosaics in Egypt are more numerous than Ptolemaic mosaics with the ratio of 83:38.
- 2- Alexandria, having been the capital of Egypt during the Graeco-Roman periods, in the city that yielded the largest quantity of Graeco Roman mosaics.
- 3- Mosaics with designs are numerous than those with the figurative designs.
- 4- Kom el Dikka site in Alexandria is the richest site to provide mosaics especially from the Roman period.

Future works

Concentrating on mosaics from periods other than the graeco-roman such as the byzantine and Islamic periods.

The Medusa and Queen Bernice mosaics are preserved in Alexandria National Museum.



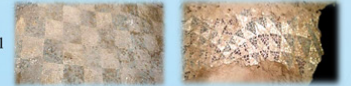
The Graco Roman Museum has a big collection of mosaic floors like the panels of fish, Klio, symplegma scene, Queen Bernice mosaics etc. but this museum has been closed in 2005, unfortunately, all of this mosaics now are preserved in storerooms.

Due to the importance of mosaics in Egypt, The Ministry of Antiquities established a Museum especially for display of the mosaics, only mosaics, but the building process stopped due to the economic crisis that Egypt witnessed since 2011, in spite of most of preparation for the founding of this museum has already been accomplished including the display scenario.



A lot of mosaics are stored, some of which are conserved and some not, such as: the important collection which once had been in display in the Graco Roman Museum of Alexandria, and now preserved in the storerooms without conservation after the closure of the museum. But some of them such as: the Nilotic pavement from Themuis and Rosetta from Shatby were restored by the team of (CEA)ex in cooperation with the Ministry of Antiquities.

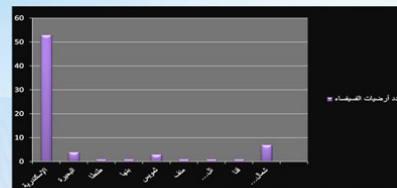
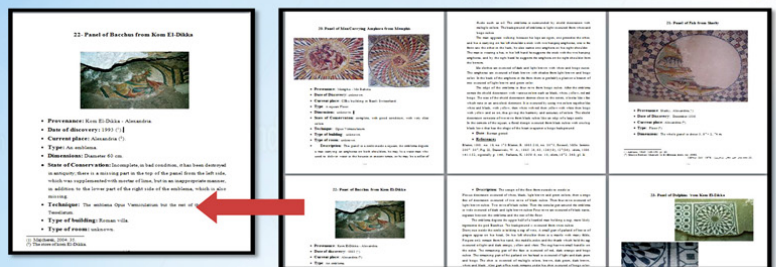
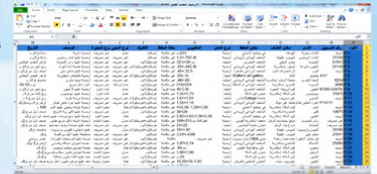
Some of the newly discovered mosaics pieces, either figurative or geometrical designs are restored and some others not.



All of these mosaics which are in different places need more study and conservation project. It is a priority for the Ministry of Antiquities to establish a *Center of archaeological information and preservation of mosaics* for the whole of Egypt so as to become a platform for preservation, studies, and to document all the mosaics in all over Egypt. But the founding process of such a centre has been stopped again due to the country's economic crisis. But now the author began to do the scientific archive for the mosaics in Egypt in order to define the priorities for saving mosaics which are in bad conditions. This archive takes the Ptolemaic and Roman panels as a beginning with the intention to continue the pieces from other periods later.

Methodology

- 1- Collecting data from the available information and photos and all previous studies about each and every piece.
- 2- Photographing the different views so as to build a photograph archive for each pavement of mosaics.
- 3- Designing a catalogue form for every pavement of mosaics which contains all the information about it, like date, provenance, date of discovery, type, technique, bibliography, description, etc., besides drawings for the pavement.
- 4- Put all the collection of mosaics in excel tables, with all the related information.
- 5- Define the priorities of conservation to save pieces that are in dangerous conditions.



Results

Case study for the mosaics which need help and rapid intervention as a priority.
*Pavement of black and white mosaic, geometric decoration, Roman period II century A.D, Re-laid in situ. But it passed through a wrong restoration that caused changing the iconography of the panel.

*Pavement shield from Gabbary- Alexandria, 50 B.C, preserved in Kom El- Shokafa site hanging on the wall of the inspector's room on the wall, without any maintenance or any conservation.

The previously mentioned examples are but two of so many other pieces that are in very bad condition that necessitates rapid intervention.

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