

Mosaic Pavements in Byzantine Jerusalem

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Abstract:

This is an academic study and documentation of all byzantine mosaic pavements that were discovered in byzantine Jerusalem (4th to 7th century AD) and its inhabited vicinity (that includes Mount of Olives and the neighborhoods located to the north of the city).

The research presents the value of mosaic pavements as a rich historical source that provides deep understanding of Byzantine architecture in specific, and the history of Byzantine Jerusalem in general. It tries to uncover the cultural and human message of the artistic motifs on those pavements. Then, the study elaborates many examples that reflect the symbolism behind the various artistic motifs and depictions. After studying and documenting all the mosaic floors and their motifs, and trying to understand each one with its historical context; this research explore if this art was uniquely presented or addressed in the holiest city to Christianity.

Arabic literature lacks academic studies about this art and about byzantine Jerusalem. For that, the study aims to enrich knowledge in these main fields. Unfortunately, the targeted archeological excavations wave had removed numerous number of mosaic floors without least responsibility to document or even photograph them. For that, this study is concerned to include all the mosaic floors that were discovered (even with minimal information available) and to introduce an indexed and pictorial reference about mosaic pavements.

The study documented 72 different mosaic panels in the old city of Jerusalem and its vicinity. As it tries to provide a deep and developed historical understanding, it also provides detailed explanation of religious and cultural meanings and significance that these floors once provided. It also provides a detailed index and a map for the discovered historical sites that were once paved with mosaics, raises comparative discussion, defining resemblance or dissimilarity from other cities in the holy land.

This study can be considered a departure point for researching this field, using mosaic as a sample gives significant opportunities to understand Jerusalem in the Byzantine era. Generally, the theme can be generalized in studying other Palestinian cities, as well as cities of Bilad Al-Sham (Greater Syria). It can be a helpful reference to understand this art and its motifs from the most ancient pavement discovered till the Byzantine era in general. It minimizes time to reach out to information and references, and it provides detailed information about motifs that can be then compared to other pavements in different periods. It uncovers new historical information about architecture, art, culture, languages, religious rituals, the daily life, many names of normal and royal people and more. It also includes high resolution and professional photographs (and for the first time) to few samples of the most beautiful mosaic panels in Palestine. Some pavements are reflection of elegancy, sublime messages and professional craft in paving (for example the Birds mosaic in Musrara neighborhood, and mosaics of Russian Ascension church and Dominus Flevit pavements on mount of Olives).

It is highly recommended that mosaic floors (in general) are well studied, documented and preserved as an important and rich historical source. It is also recommended to provide a respectful documentation and photographs for the pavements so they can be easily accessed and studied. It is important to start further researching and studies for other periods of time or other cities. Further research might be comparative detailing the continuity of this art in the later Islamic periods; this field is full of potential for further studies and research .