



## MUSEUM OF MOSAICS IN DEVNYA

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The Museum of Mosaics in Devnya displays early-Byzantine mosaics<sup>1</sup> from Marcianopolis. The idea for its organization was born within the process of archeological research that started in 1976 and continued for five seasons with interruptions<sup>2</sup>. In the process of research, a large late-Roman building decorated with mosaics was found (The House of Antiope).

The Museum was built by project of Architect Kamen Goranov standing partly on the ancient foundations of the building with the mosaics<sup>3</sup>. This ancient building was erected at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> – the beginning of 4<sup>th</sup> c (the time of Constantine The Great) on the location of earlier building/s that had been destroyed during the Gottis invasions of 250–251. This building existed with repairs and reconstructions until the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> c.

The building occupies a whole quarter (insula) of length 37,15 m (north-south) and width 37,75 m (east-west). The building's plan follows the traditions of the Greek-Roman atrium-peristil residential place. Twenty one residential-, processing- and storage rooms of total area 1 402 square meters are arranged around a closed yard (atrium) (5,87 x 11,11 m), paved with stone slabs and brickwork water well in its middle, surrounded on three sides by covered colonnade (cryptoporticus) (92,63 m<sup>2</sup>). The walls of the residential rooms were covered by coloured paint and murals of plaster. Five of the building's rooms and porticoes are covered with multi-coloured floor mosaics, one of the best examples of the Roman mosaic art of that period found in Bulgaria.

Three of these mosaics are displayed in the rooms where they have been found (in situ) and the rest were transferred to a new carrying base following their conservation and partial restoration.

The mosaics were made in the classical techniques *opus tessellatum* and *opus vermiculatum* out of small cube-shaped stones (tesseras) of marble, limestone, baked clay and coloured glass (smalta), in 16 colours. The mosaics depict mainly personages and scenes of the Greek and Roman mythology, exotic animals and birds, floral- and geometric shapes.

The museum halls display diverse exhibits related to the architecture of the building and domestic life of its residents.

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<sup>1</sup> The mosaics are floor or wall coverings of room in residential, public and cult buildings or tombs. They are made of small square tiles of stone (tesseras) or other material, of various colour and size, thus imitating multi-coloured carpets.

The earliest mosaic – tiling of columns with baked clay cones, planted in the clay while it was still wet, (of visible fringes coloured in black, red and white) has been found in the ancient Sumer town of Uruk/Warka and dates back to the forth millennium B.C. (Cf. Doro Levi. *Mosaico. Enciclopedia dell'Arte Antica*. Vol. V, Roma, p. 209–241). The mosaic found in the Phrygian city of Gordion/Yassihüyük situated at 95 km to the south-west of Ankara is considered the first floor mosaic. (Cf. Rodney S. Young. *The Gordon Campaign of 1957. Preliminary Report*. – American Journal of Archeology, 1958, 62, p. 142). It features various geometrical ornaments and dates back to 8<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> Century B.C. The oldest mosaic work in Ancient Greece is that from the town of Olynthos in Chalkidiki – the end of 5<sup>th</sup> Century (420–410 B.C.). It is made of white and black pebbles (as big as a human fist, separated by brown mortar joints) depicting geometric and figured images and was used as a decoration in private houses. Cf. P. Fischer. *Mosaics. History and Technique*. New York & Toronto, McGraw-Hill, 1971).

There are two techniques to make mosaics – *opus tessellatum* and *opus vermiculatum*. The first one employs larger terra-cotta or mineral stones tesseras (in size above 1 square centimeter) used for mosaics of ornamental type. The second one is applied basically in figured compositions – the tesseras used are smaller in size. The *opus sectile* technique is rarely applied. It uses large tiles of multi-coloured marble or other stone of various shapes, which form complex geometrical compositions. More often it is the case of *opus tessellatum* and *opus vermiculatum* applied in combination.

The mosaics laid on a sound basis – drainage of large broken stones. Two layers of mortar paste mixed with finely crushed bricks were poured onto it, of 6 to 8 cm thick each. Since 2<sup>nd</sup> – 1<sup>st</sup> Century B.C. the tesseras have been made of multi-coloured marbles and other stones, broken ceramics or pieces of broken coloured glass (smalta – made out by melting of sand and mineral oxides). The tesseras were arranged on a wet fine mortar layer, which was 0,5–0,8 cm thick, on the contours of a preliminary sketched drawing. When applying this techniques the work had to be done quickly while the mortar was still soft. In some cases the central panel, called *emblem* was made separately and laid in a groove prepared in advance. The gaps between the tesseras were filled with mortar and the mosaic surface was sand-polished.

<sup>2</sup> A study by Alexander Minchev, Petko Georgiev (1976–1977) and Anastas Angelov (1978–1986).

<sup>3</sup> Арх. К. Горанов. Защитна сграда и музей на мозайките в Девня. – Архитектура, XXX, 1983, № 4, 33–34; Ал. Минчев. Музеят на мозайките в Девня. – МПК, XXVI, 1986, № 4, 33–36; Ан. Ангелов. Марцианопол – история и археология. Варна, 1999, 19–20; А. Minchev. The “House of Antiope” – A Late Roman Residential House With Mosaics at Marcianopolis (Devnya, Bulgaria). – In: *The Roman and Late Roman City. The International Conference (Veliko Turnovo 26–30 July 2000)*. Sofia, Prof. Marin Drinov Academic Publishing House, 2002, p. 245–254.

### THE GORGON MEDUSA MOSAIC

The mosaic covers the living-room cum dining room (triclinium) floor (8,00 x 8,00 m) and represent the shield of the goddess Pallas Athena decorated with the decapitated head of Gorgon Medusa. It was intended to ward the evil away and to petrify ill-wishers with terrifying appearance and freezing gaze (apotropaion).

According to Greek mythology **Gorgon-Medusa** (Gr. „the Horrible”) was the most horrible and only mortal of the three daughters of the sea deities Phorcys and Ceto, granddaughters of the earth Gaea and the sea Pontus. Initially she was first among beauties of beautiful hair, which Minerva turned into snakes when Gorgon was raped by Neptune in her temple. Gorgon’s face petrified everyone who looked at her.

According another version of this myth she lived in the endmost West with her sisters Stheno and Euryale. The Gorgons were notorious for their horrible appearance: female creatures of wings covered with steel scales, snakes instead of hair, wolf’s fangs and eyes and touch that turned all living creatures in stone.

The hero Perseus (the shower-of gold born son of Zeus and Danae, daughter of King Acrisius of Argos) decapitated the sleeping Gorgon-Medusa stepping forward with his back to her and looking at her reflection in his copper shield (presented to him by Athena Pallas) and cut her head with his curved sword (a present from Hephestus). Perseus escaped the Gorgons chasing after him on the winged sandals (presented to him by Hermes or Mercury). Perseus presented the head of Gorgon-Medusa to Athena Pallas who attached it to her shield (or aegis) to scare her enemies.

### THE SATYR AND ANTIOPE MOSAIC

The floor of the building bedroom (cubiculum) (5,60 x 4,40 m) is covered with mosaic, depicting one of the numerous love affairs of Zeus, the supreme Greek god. It is an extremely rare plot among the preserved mosaics dating back that far.

According to Homer, the nymph Antiope was the beautiful daughter of the river-god Asopus, or according to others, daughter of king Nycteus of Thebes. She was seduced by Zeus, who had changed into the looks of a young satyr (mythical creatures followers of Dionysus, the god of wine, personifying the unleashed animal fertility). Fearing her father’s wrath, she fled from Thebes to Epopeus, the King of Sicyon (in Peloponnesus, South Greece) who married her. Nycteus, upon his deathbed, charged his brother Lycus (heir to the throne) with the task to get Antiope back to Thebes. Lycus killed Epopeus. He took Antiope with him to Thebes. On the way back, on Mt. Cithaeron she gave birth to the twins Amphion and Zethus, but she was forced to abandon her infants. For years on end Lycus and his wife Dirce mistreated Antiope severely. When her sons, Amphion and Zethus, grew up (raised by a shepherd), they exacted a terrible vengeance upon Dirce by tying her to the horns of a ferocious bull.

### THE GANYMEDE AND THE EAGLE MOSAIC

The reception hall (oecus) (5,60 x 13,40 m) is the largest room of the building with mosaic flooring. One of the central panels (emblems) displays the ancient Greek legend of Ganymede and the eagle. It is the only mosaic of this plot found in Bulgaria so far.

In Greek Mythology Ganymede, the son of the Trojan king Tros and the nymph Caliroe, was the most handsome of all mortals. Zeus, assuming the shape of an eagle, abducted him and took him to Olzmpus to be the mortal cup-bearer for the gods. Tros, Ganymede’s father, was given magnificent horses (or a golden vine, made by Hephestus)

### THE SEASONS MOSAIC

The Seasons Mosaic covered the floor of the women’s apartments (gynaece) (8.60 x 7.80 m). During one of the remodeling of the building, the better part of the mosaic has been destroyed.

A circular emblem of figured type is inscribed into a rectangular frame of geometric ornaments, surrounded by intertwining geometrical ornaments. A rooster picking at grapes, birds and a pair of Roman sandals are depicted in the empty spaces.

The corners of the ornamental frame display the allegories of the four seasons with their attributes. The Bust of Autumn is well preserved – personified by a young woman in a gold-woven gown.

### THE PANONIAN VOLUTES MOSAIC

The Panonian Volutes Mosaic was discovered during rescue excavation works in 1949 in the eastern part of Marcianopolis, in a building of unknown use (perhaps an old Christian basilica). The decoration of the mosaic consists of repeated geometric patterns in four colours (probably imitating sarcophagus decorations)<sup>5</sup>.

The technique applied in the making of the mosaic was the *opus tessellatum* where larger tesseras of marble and baked clay were used.

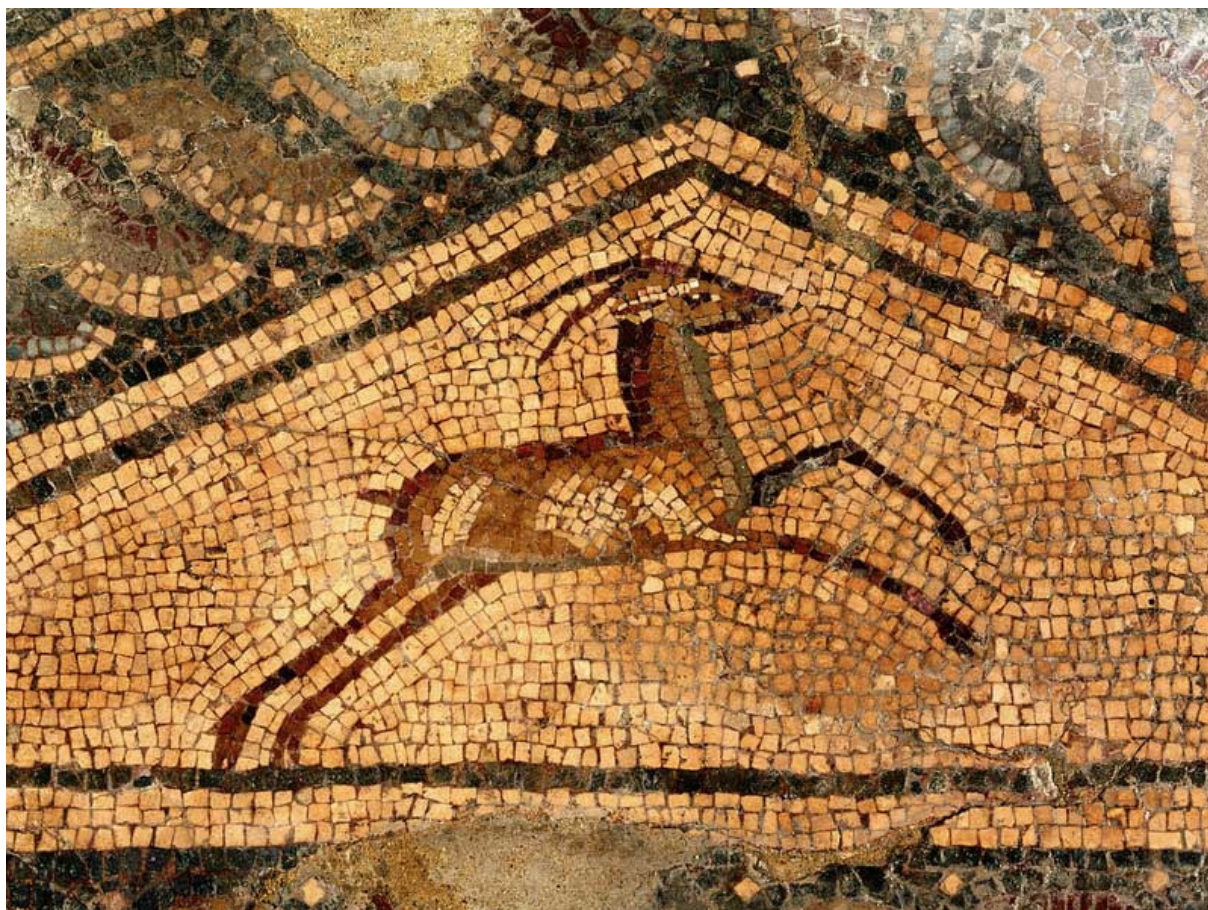
<sup>5</sup> М. Мирчев. Подова мозайка от с. Река Девня. – ИВАД, VIII, 1951, 119–121; В. Попова-Мороз. 24 древни мозайки от България. С., Български художник, 1987, с. 45 (15).

## IMAGES



A Gorgon Medusa Mosaic detail – opus vermiculatum, opus tessellatum. An antique building with mosaics, triclinum. In situ. The beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century.





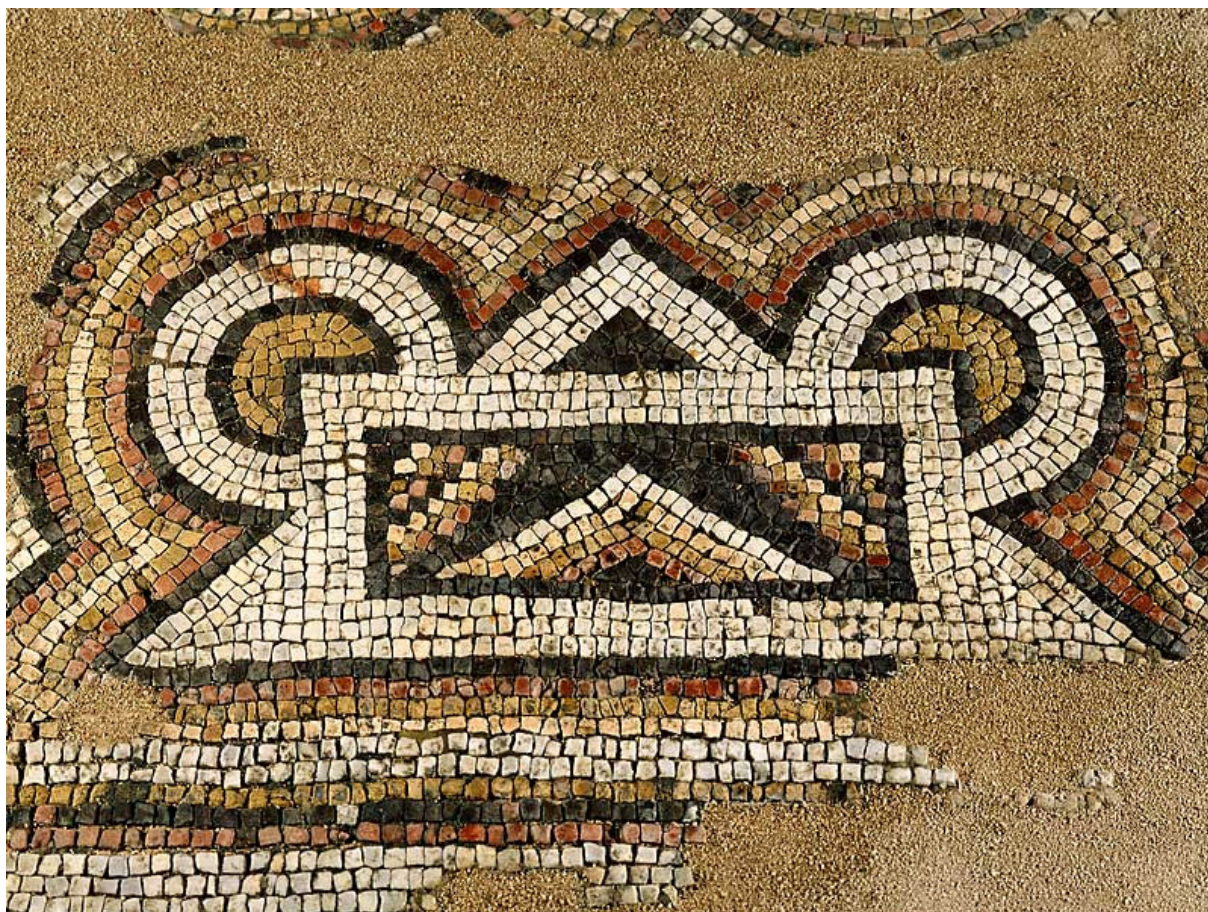
A triangular panel with an antelope (a Ganymede and the Eagle Mosaic detail) – opus vermiculatum, opus tessellatum. An antique building with mosaics, oecus. In situ. The beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century.





A geometrical ornament (a detail) – opus tessellatum. An antique building with mosaics, oecus. In situ. The beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century.





A Panonian Volute Mosaic detail – opus tessellatum. The second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century.