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AUTHORS: Olcay Aydemir,Emine Sibel Hattap

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## Discovery Process of the Zeytinburnu Mosaics Outside the City Walls

Olcay AYDEMİR <sup>1\*</sup> , E. Sibel HATTAP <sup>2</sup> 

ORCID 1: 0000-0002-7293-8335

ORCID 2: 0000-0003-3616-4421

<sup>1</sup> Zeytinburnu Municipality, İstanbul, Türkiye.

<sup>2</sup> Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, Vocational School, Department of Architecture and Urban Planning, Architectural Restoration Pr. İstanbul, Türkiye.

\* e-mail: [olcay.aydemir@zeytinburnu.bel.tr](mailto:olcay.aydemir@zeytinburnu.bel.tr)

### Abstract

The Zeytinburnu Mosaics outside the City Walls were revealed between 2017 and 2020 on a lot belonging to the Kazlıçeşme Art Center which has been serving since 2019 in the Kazlıçeşme District of Zeytinburnu Region of İstanbul. The oldest documented data belonging to the Art Center goes back to the year 1828. At that time, the building was used as a military hospital of the Ottoman Era while later on during the Republic Era, it served as a dormitory, and military office and in 1956 was converted into a public bazaar hall. The building was transferred to Zeytinburnu Municipality property in 1984. During the restoration works of the 'Mayor Building' in 2015, Zeytinburnu Mosaics were discovered in the foundation blocks of the main part of the municipality building and around the area used as a carpark. The revealed findings are important for enabling additional data on historical-archeological features of İstanbul outside the City Walls.

**Keywords:** Zeytinburnu mosaics, conservation, protection.

## Sur Dışındaki Zeytinburnu Mozaiklerinin Ortaya Çıkarılma Süreci

### Öz

Sur dışında yer alan Zeytinburnu Mozaikleri; İstanbul ili, Zeytinburnu İlçesi, Kazlıçeşme Mahallesi, 2019 yılında Kazlıçeşme Sanat Merkezi olarak faaliyete geçen binaya ait parselde 2017-2020 yılları arasında yapılan kazı çalışmaları sonucunda ortaya çıkarılmıştır. Günümüzde Kazlıçeşme Sanat Merkezi olarak kullanılan yapıya ait en eski kayıt, 1828 yılına aittir. Belirtilen tarihte Osmanlı Devleti Dönemi'nde askeri hastane olarak kullanılan yapı, Cumhuriyet Dönemi'nde ise sırasıyla yurt, askerlik şubesi ve tanzim satış yeri olarak 1956 yılında yeniden işlevlendirilmiştir. 1984 yılında Zeytinburnu Belediyesi bünyesinde kullanılan yapının, 2015 yılında gerçekleştirilen restorasyonu sırasında 'Başkanlık Binası' olarak işlev gören ana kısmının temellerinde ve yapıya bitişik alanda yer alan otoparkta, 'Zeytinburnu Mozaikleri' ortaya çıkarılmıştır. Ortaya çıkarılan buluntular, İstanbul'un sur dışı tarihi-arkeolojik özellikleri hakkındaki literatüre katkı sağlamak bakımından önemlidir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Zeytinburnu mozaikleri, konservasyon, koruma.

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## 1. Introduction

Protection of the collections in cultural heritage buildings is as important as protection of cultural heritage itself (Tarım & Ünal, 2022). Buildings are architectural values that constitute cultural identity and urban memory. Buildings and other cultural values shape the historical fabric and constitute cultural heritage (Temur & Kurak Açıcı, 2022). The subject of this study, Zeytinburnu Mosaics, are the floor mosaics that were revealed during the excavations between 2017 and 2020 in the vicinity of the former Municipality Building of Zeytinburnu. The mentioned mosaic patterns were discovered in the foundation blocks of the main part of the municipality building so-named 'Mayor Building' and around the area used as carpark. The discovery was made during the restoration implementations of the municipality building in 2015. The patterns were located very close to the Via Egnatia (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** The Via Egnatia beside the Adriatic Sea, reaching Durras from Istanbul (Viaeurasia, 2023)

The Via Egnatia (Greek: Ἑγνατία Ὁδός) is a road of approximately 1120 km long which was constructed by the Roman Empire in the 2nd century BC. The traces of the road, which used to pass through Iliria, Macedonia, and Thracian regions of the Roman Empire, might be currently seen in Albania, Macedonia, Greece, and Turkey lands. The road was constructed for the purpose of linking the Roman colonies starting from the Adriatic Sea and reaching the Bosphorus. The last part of the Via Egnatia is in Istanbul, starting from Durras of Albania and passing Thessaloniki. In this context, the revealed Zeytinburnu Mosaics has significance due to being located outside the City Walls of Istanbul yet being located very close to the last part of the Via Egnatia.

The mosaics, which are considered to belong to the Late Roman, and Early Byzantine Era, are differentiated from similar ones because of are located outside the City Walls of Istanbul. Most of the mosaic patterns inside the borders of the City Walls were revealed during the excavations and taken under protection after the 1935 Republic Era.

Even though there have been some clues about the existence of mosaics outside the City Walls depending on the ones revealed inside the Walls, there have been no detailed excavations outside the Walls. The reason for this might be the existence of historical Ottoman buildings under protection around the district.

This study handles the revealing process and features of the mosaic patterns that used to be placed on a lot of the Ottoman Era building -has been functioning as Kazlıçeşme Art Center since 2015- in Kazlıçeşme District of Zeytinburnu Region of Istanbul. The exact location is as 86 sheet number, 756 block number which is placed outside of the City Wall no 2.

The excavation process started with the discovery of some partial mosaics during the reinforcement of foundations of the corner room southwest of the Old Municipality Building from the Ottoman Era and was completed under the inspection of the Directorate of Archeological Museums of Istanbul

depending on the permission taken from the Directorate of Conservation Board by Zeytinburnu Municipality (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Revealed mosaics from excavations in Zeytinburnu, 2017-2019 (Zeytinburnu Municipalit Archives, 2019)

Mosaic means the arrangement of figurative, geometric, and herbal patterns in harmony consisting of hard materials such as colored stone, glass, terra cotta, and marble. It is an architectural element used for the cladding of floors, walls, and ceilings and has represented wealth in ancient history (Şahin, 2004).

Floor cladding mosaic patterns inside the City Walls of Istanbul have been discovered now and then which are similar especially to the ones in the Mosaics Museum of Byzantium Palace (Yücel, 2019).

## **2. Material and Method**

The Zeytinburnu mosaics, as the subject of the research survived till the present despite several reasons such as the building/s on top, ground movements, and layers of soil of different eras which caused the mosaics partial collapsing, cracking, material missing and destruction along certain axes during road infrastructure works.

The methodology of the research is the site research among the quantitative ways. Following this method, observation on-site and comprehensive historical research were carried out. Content analysis was preferred for the research in which the historical analysis method was used. Regarding the method; the steps of scanning, classification, analysis, critiques, and synthesis are followed accordingly.

As for the detailed examination of culturally, socially, and economically important mosaics of Zeytinburnu, a documentation analysis was made on the region including the Via Egnatia of which we have less information compared to the part inside the Walls and thus the scanning step was achieved.

During the second step of the research, the data collected was classified according to the space, time, and subject references.

During the third step of the research, the mosaics were observed in-situ to have a closer look at the revealing process. In this context; regarding the conservation steps of the mosaics, after stating the situation, simple cleaning and documentation practices took place step by step. Afterward, a deterioration legend was arranged.

Before the inspection of mortar and movement of the cut plates, a pre-reinforcement way of fixing the parts under risk with the help of cloth was carried out, avoiding any damage to the mosaics.

The conservation process of Zeytinburnu mosaics was completed following the steps of removing the soil on top (10-20 m depth of sand and gravel layers) (Çömlekçi & Kahraman, 2022), designing the grid system of the plates, implementing of facing, moving, conservation methods and re-placement of the mosaics to the original locations. All conservation steps were taken according to the critiques



of the conservation report of the Directorate Central and Regional Restoration and Conservation Laboratory of Istanbul (Figure 3, 4, 5).



**Figure 3.** Conservation steps of Zeytinburnu Mosaics (Olca Aydemir Archives, 2019)



**Figure 4.** Moving the mosaics after reinforcement and numeration to store them under protection during the conservation implementations (Olca Aydemir Archives, 2019)



**Figure 5.** Conservation steps of Zeytinburnu Mosaics (Olca Aydemir Archives, 2019)



**Figure 6.** Interiors of Zeytinburnu Mosaics (Zeytinburnu Municipality Archives & Sketches of Celalettin Çelik, 2019)

### 3. Findings and Discussion

Zeytinburnu Mosaics are formed of geometric patterns on a mortar layer (of which analysis process is completed) which are an arrangement of triangles colored white, green, yellow, black, brown, orange, and red. Besides the assumption of the 5th-century date in terms of technical observation, it was understood that they belonged to the 5th-6th century during the excavations and depending on the coin of the 5th century found inside the foundation walls (Figure 7). In the following process, the floor mosaic plate was dated to the 4th century AD. The floor mosaics of Istanbul are dated from the 2nd century till the 6th century which are rarely discovered (Yalçın, 2022).

They were designed in the Opus tessellatum technique and as polychromed. An octagon main pattern is located in the center inside of a circle with borders of waves and braids. The composition is enriched with the surrounding node patterns of the main pattern, triangle and square combinations, and geometric patterns located inside the circles. Floral patterns are formed with green, orange, and purple triangles on a light background inside the circle in the octagon. Among the node patterns outside the main composition; patterns of cantharus, creeper, lotus, and clover are observed. Somolon's Node patterns are also observed (Çömlekçi & Kahraman, 2022).

Similar to those mosaics are the ones of Tivoli villa mosaics at the National Rome Museum and Dionysus villa mosaics in Knossos. Depending on this data, it can be considered that the Zeytinburnu Mosaics might belong to a villa as well. The mosaics were decided to be exhibited by in-situ protection method which was discovered during the restoration works of Kazlıçeşme Art Center (Kazlıçeşme Sanat, 2023).



**Figure 7.** View of vivid colored tessera modules after the cleaning (Zeytinburnu Municipality Archives, 2022)





**Figure 8.** The completed and exhibited part of the mosaics (Sibel Hattap Archives, 2022)



**Figure 9.** Exterior exhibition works of mosaics at Kazlıçeşme Art Center (Sibel Hattap Archives, 2022)

After completion of the excavations, the cleaning and conservation works were carried out and the mosaics were replaced for the exhibition and that part of the building was arranged as a museum (Figure 10, 11).



**Figure 10.** Current view of Kazlıçeşme Art Center (the exterior exhibition part) where the mosaics are exhibited (Sibel Hattap Archives, 2023)



**Figure 11.** Exhibition of the rest of the mosaics at semi-open part of the building (the exterior exhibition part) (Sibel Hattap Archives, 2023)





**Figure 12.** Exhibition of the circular forms of the mosaics at semi-open part of the building (the exterior exhibition part) (Sibel Hattap Archives, 2023)

#### **4. Conclusion and Suggestions**

The Zeytinburnu Mosaics are a collection of mosaics of approximately 400 m<sup>2</sup> which were revealed during the excavations inside a cultural heritage asset building. During the primary excavations, estimated data was revealed regarding the planning scheme, features, and construction date of the building whilst the following excavations gave more solid data regarding the entire building. The circular form of the building (Figure 12) and the design date of the mosaics depending on the coin were more likely to be estimated. The discovery of Zeytinburnu Mosaics helped to realize that there might be some serious heritage outside of the City Walls of Istanbul. These mosaics took their place in literature as physical evidence of inhabitation on the Via Egnatia. Hopefully, more urban areas are going to be discovered and documented outside the Walls in the future with the careful approach of local administrations and establishments.

Considering the mosaic samples all over the world, this important discovery succeeded in attracting locals of Zeytinburnu and Istanbul as well as local and foreign tourists. The discovery of mosaics in Zeytinburnu apart from the ones of the Great Palace Mosaics Museum, the magnificent mosaics of the Chora Mosque, and the mosaics of the Hagia Sophia has high importance in terms of the potential of cultural heritage assets and urban inhabitation. It is observed that the exhibited parts of Zeytinburnu Mosaics do not represent scenes of daily life or religious issues but mostly geometric patterns.

The rest part of the mosaics was also revealed and after the conservation steps, they were exhibited in a semi-open area. It is very precious and remarkable that some of the mosaics revealed in Zeytinburnu are exhibited in In-Situ at Kazlıçeşme Art Center which served as a military hospital and then as Zeytinburnu Municipality Building while the rest are exhibited under a semi-open structure outside the building as continuity of the interior ones.

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The article complies with national and international research and publication ethics. Ethics Committee approval was not required for the study.

### Author Contribution and Conflict of Interest Declaration Information

Both authors contributed equally to the article. There is no conflict of interest.

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