

# Holy Land Mosaics



Osama Hamdan, Carla Benelli

A bridge of tesserae  
across the Mediterranean

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## A bridge of Tesserae across the Mediterranean

Texts by: Osama Hamdan, Carla Benelli. Hani Nur Al-Din participated in writing the text of the catalogue of the first project

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© Mosaic Centre Jericho, Al Quds Street, Jericho Palestine

Tel/Fax + 970 2 2326342

Email: [mosaiccentre@yahoo.com](mailto:mosaiccentre@yahoo.com)

[www.mosaiccentre-jericho.com](http://www.mosaiccentre-jericho.com)



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This exhibition confirms how much is difficult to work in this field, starting from the effort to reach the originals or archives and get the necessary documentation to perform our task . One of the piece that we wanted to reproduce was a Roman mosaic on display in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. We asked the museum administration to get a photo of the mosaic, and they answered us to contact the Staff Officer for Archaeology of the Civil Administration of Judea and Samaria to get the permission. All our following attempts for this purpose were useless. Finally, they have the original piece and we cannot even have a picture of it.

In conclusion, I want to thank the Palestinian - Italian team who has accomplished this great task despite all adversities.

Arch. Osama Hamdan, Mosaic Centre- Jericho Director



ATS pro Terra Sancta is the non-profit Organization of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land. ATS promotes and coordinates activities all over the Middle East – Palestine, Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Cyprus, and Rhodes. The mission of ATS pro Terra Sancta is to protect the living stones (people in need) and the stones of memory (cultural heritage).

Palestine has a huge heritage to be preserved. We are also persuaded that enhancing archeological sites, restoring archeological finds and implementing local museums on site is a way to foster the economy of Palestine. Moreover, this is a way to educate people (both locals and internationals) to BEAUTY. The Beauty is the splendour of the Truth said Plato (the Greek philosopher). The Beauty is Good and it is the way to pursue love and peace. We believe it is important to spend time and all our energy to bring Palestinian Beauties to Palestinians first and to bring the Beauty of Palestine around the world.

Fr. Michele Piccirillo, the supporter of many of our projects who passed away three years ago, used to recall the importance of bringing Palestinian people closer to their archeological and artistic beauties. He always promoted cultural heritage programs that also had a social and economic value for the local community, without ever making any distinction in terms of race, culture or religion. This exhibition is also an occasion to remember him and make known his precious work to support Palestinian cultural heritage and Palestinian people.

Tommaso Saltini, ATS pro Terra Sancta





## The project and the exhibition

This project is a supplement of a previous project that was carried out in 2009 in the framework of the celebration of “Jerusalem – Capital of Arab Culture”. The projects were both funded by the European Union. This project was carried out with the support of ATS Pro Terra Sancta. Through the project “The Dome of the Rock Come Closer”, full scale copies of the Dome of the Rock mosaics were produced, using the same colours, sizes and materials (glass, gold and mother of pearl tesserae).

The present project produced full scale copy of mosaics referring to the different historical periods that Palestine has passed through. The team of artists has realized part of a Roman mosaic floor and a 4th century and a 6th century Byzantine floor. The mosaics were chosen not only for their historical importance, but also for their meanings and values.

The two projects “Holy Land Mosaics” and “The Dome of the Rock Come Closer” were carried out by experts and technicians from Mosaic Centre – Jericho and Italian mosaicists. The team has worked hardy and carefully to accomplish the commitment, which resulted in sharing experience between East and West in order to enhance Palestinian cultural heritage.

Besides the enhancement of Palestinian cultural heritage and the importance of its preservation, the project also looked for a common language of dialogue among the different cultures of Mediterranean countries, thanks to a joint venture between Palestinian and Italian mosaicists.

In addition, through the studies and researches about the Palestinian mosaic heritage, the project was an opportunity for the team to deepen their knowledge about the history, techniques and mosaic materials.



“Holy Land Mosaics” project is also an opportunity for the Palestinian team to provide the Italian volunteers with the knowledge about the history of Palestine and to know the local customs and habits, all through visits to the archaeological and historical sites in West Bank. Basically, this experience is an opportunity for the participants in the project to exchange practise in the field of mosaic and a chance to know the culture of one another.

One of the aims of the project was to strengthen the relations between local communities and their cultural heritage, especially in the first project, when the original mosaics were located at the top of the monument, at a great height and visitors fail to distinguish and appreciate them. The great distance does not allow the perception of the beauty of the mosaics, and the ability of their execution. From ground level it is not possible to note the details that show the high creative capacity and the skill in the combination of colours, which have been used to create the geometric and floral decorations. The nuances of blues, greens, yellows, reds, mother of pearl and gold are too far to be visible. Making reliable copies led the mosaics to the same level of the eyes of the elders and the children and thus everyone was able to see and touch them.



Pieces chosen by the project allow the local and international communities to know the destiny of some of the Palestinian cultural heritage. The Roman mosaic floor found in Nablus city is now exhibited in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, and the Shellal mosaic floor is displayed in the Australian capital city Canberra in the War Memorial and are not easy for the Palestinians to be seen.

Concerning the displaying of the Nativity Church mosaic together with mosaics from the Dome of the Rock, our aim was to create an opportunity of spiritual understanding, showing how this kind of art has been shared in the past among religions. Designs and patterns that have been used in certain periods in mosaic floors of holy places by the three major monotheist religions of the area are common and shared.

The project takes into consideration, at the same time, the political situation of the area, especially after the building of the Apartheid Wall that separates Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank. The wall prevents the inhabitants of the West Bank to access Jerusalem. As a result, the majority of Palestinian children and youth have never visited the town because of the closures. The aim of the project was therefore to give the possibility to maintain a link among Palestinians and Jerusalem and keep its memory alive.

The “Dome of the Rock Come Closer” exhibition travelled among many towns in the area. The first exhibition took place in Ramallah, then in Nablus and Bethlehem, in order to bring Jerusalem into the heart of the West Bank, covering its southern, central and northern areas. Later the exhibition was transferred to Nazareth and Kufr Yaseef. To introduce Palestinian cultural heritage also to the international community, especially the Arabic one, the exhibition was moved also to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and it was displayed in many Jordanian cities and universities.

After joining the production of both projects, the mosaic pieces will be displayed in two exhibitions in the West Bank, first in the Al Quds University in Abu Dis and after in Hebron. Then, it will be transferred to Italy, hoping that it will visit as many European countries as possible.





## Achilles in the dining room Mosaic floor of a Roman villa in Nablus

One of the most beautiful Roman mosaics discovered in the Palestinian Territories was uncovered in the course of building activity in the centre of Nablus in May 1973. A rescue excavation, conducted by Z. Yeivin, then Israeli Archaeological Staff Officer for Judea and Samaria, uncovered the mosaic floor, lifted and cast it on a concrete base. It is now on display in the Israeli Museum of Jerusalem.

The mosaic consists of a rectangular panel, surrounding on three sides by crude, white tesserae, and on the south-eastern sector by three small panels depicting mythological scenes. The rectangular panel is composed of a geometric border, an acanthus scroll border (a system of circles made of acanthus leaves) and a central emblema almost disappeared.

The acanthus scroll border with heads at the four corners and in the centre of each side, has round volutes filled with hunting scenes, a motif quite common in the Roman period. Six volutes are preserved on each of east and west sides, and four on the north side. The south side is badly damaged.







We have reproduced the east side of the geometric and acanthus scroll border, and the two heads in the corners. The head in the south-east corner is a bearded “Oceanus” type, capped by acanthus leaves. In the first volute there is a hunting putto (naked winged child), in the second a boar attacked by a barking dog, in the third small volute is a hare. In the middle of the border there is a young and beardless head. The wounded leopard in the fourth volute is looking north to the young hunter in volute fifth, who is ready to spear another leopard in volute sixth. The head in the north-east corner is also bearded “Oceanus” type, crowned by acanthus leaves. The geometric external border is a polychrome unrolled ribbon, forming spaced circles.

Scholars tentatively date the mosaic, on the bases of epigraphic and technical evidence, supported by comparative stylistic analysis, to the middle or third quarter of the third century, after that Flavia Neapolis (Nablus), which was founded by Vespasian in 72 AD, was raised to the status of Roman colonia in 244 during the time of Emperor Philip the Arab.







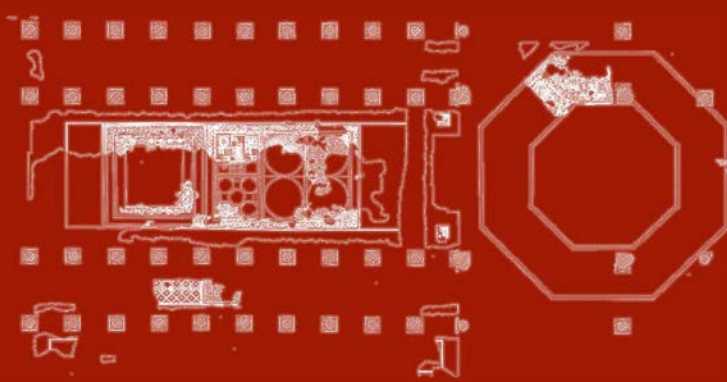
# Church of the Nativity / Bethlehem

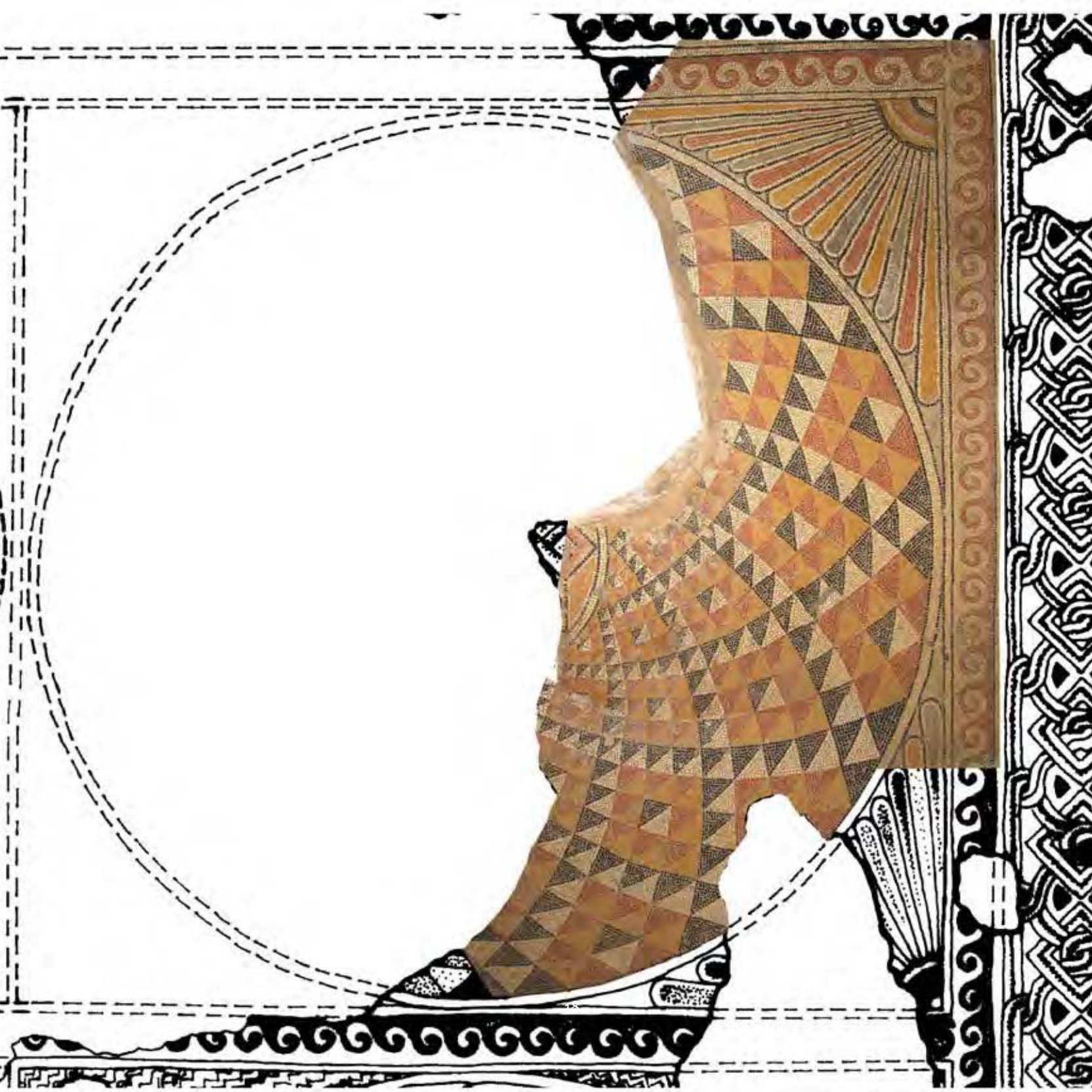
The Church of the Nativity in the heart of Bethlehem marks one of Christianity's most sacred sites - the birthplace of Christ.

The first church to stand over the cave was constructed under the patronage of the Roman Emperor Constantine and consecrated in 339 AD. It was a five aisled basilica preceded by an atrium and had an octagon at the head of the nave, enclosing the cave. It seems that a circular hole made in the roof of the cave enabled the faithful to look into it. The first basilica suffered an extensive fire and during the rule of Emperor Justinian (527 – 65 AD.) was rebuilt in its present larger shape. The form of the new church differed from the previous one: the nave was extended to the west and was preceded by a narthex and a new atrium; the octagon was demolished and replaced by a trefoil arrangement of apses and transepts; two entrances were made to enter the cave, the hole in the roof was closed and the floor raised over it.

Justinian's church escaped all destructions and is the only church building to have survived intact in Palestine up to the present day.

During the Crusader period new structures were erected around the church. Structural changes to the church itself seem to have been minimal but an extensive program of decoration was carried out. A bilingual Greek and Latin inscription in the apse, witness of a short but significant period of harmonic relations between the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem and the Byzantine Empire, records the completion of the restoration of the wall mosaics under the joint patronage of King Amalric and emperor Manuel I Comnenus.





## Church of Nativity mosaic floor - Bethlehem



Excavations carried out by the British Mandatory Government in 1934-1935 brought to light the remains of a Byzantine floor, some 60 cm lower than the rough stone floor of the present building, which is dated to 1842 AD. The aisles and the nave of the Byzantine church were all paved in mosaics, and part of the floor of the nave, and of the octagon, have been best preserved. The entire area of the nave pavement was divided into two main carpets (one 5.8 m long, the other 9.2 m long). However the level of this floor is higher than the level of the original bases that supported the columns of the Constantinian church. According to some scholars this would indicate that the mosaic, although rooted in the tradition of the characteristic geometric floors of the fourth century, does not belong to the first Costantine basilica, but was laid during the period between the building of the two churches, sometime in the fifth century.

We have reproduced only one panel of the nave, which has an outer wave pattern border, a frame depicting a strapwork of circles interloped tangentially and interlaced with tangent poised squares, in symmetrically striped bands, and a central panel composed by a polychrome shield of triangles, appearing as intersecting ogives.





## Church of Shellal mosaic floor - South of Gaza

The Shellal Mosaic was discovered on April 1917, during the First World War. It was located about 21 kilometres south of Gaza, close to Wadi al-Ghuzza, a few miles north of a line drawn from Khan Yunus to Beer-sheba, in southern Palestine, at a place called Shellal, a crossing of the Wadi and spring of water, on the main road from Jerusalem to Egypt. The small hill commanding the crossing was used by the Turks to control the area. In constructing their position the Turks had partially uncovered and damaged the mosaic floor.



After a battle with the Turks, the Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division (Anzac) discovered the find and reported it to W. Maitland Woods, a chaplain attached to the Anzac forces in Egypt. He was known to be interested in archaeology. General Harry Chauvel, senior officer of the Australian Imperial Force, authorised the removal of the mosaic and asked Chaplain Woods to go to Cairo to obtain advice from the archaeological authorities there. On his return Australian and New Zealand engineers of the division performed the lifting and removal of the mosaic floor.

By the 20th of June the work of packing the mosaic has been completed and the cases removed to Cairo. A meeting of the War Trophies Committee in London first asked the mosaic to be brought to England for examination and then, after a strong representations by Australians, permission was given for the mosaic to be handed over to the Australian Government. On 26th of December 1918 the mosaic was shipped and arrived in Australia two months later. The mosaic was on show at exhibitions of war trophies in Melbourne and Sydney and finally reached its present display in the Australian War Memorial at Canberra.



The mosaic floor covered the floor of a sixth century church. A Greek inscriptions found in the eastern section of the floor relates that the church was decorated with mosaics in the year 622, according to the era of Gaza, which is 561-2 AD. (Trendall A.D., 1973: 13).

Partly damaged, the mosaic floor seems to have originally measured 15 by 8 m. It consists of a single field within a border. The outer surround is white with a black line of vertical diamonds. The border of the mosaic consists of a continuous band of swastika-meander with a square in each space, filled by various objects and animals. The field is divided into forty-five circular medallions arranged in nine horizontal rows of five. These are formed by a vine-trellis rising from a central amphora. The design of the mosaic is known as ‘inhabited vine trellis’, one of the most popular figurative designs for floors in Palestine at the time of its creation.





We have reproduced only part of the field, the western two rows. The central medallion of the bottom row contains the two handled amphora from which springs the vine-trellis. It is flanked by two peacocks, each occupying the area of two medallions, with a small partridge in the empty space above the peacock's tails. The right-hand bird is damaged. Four of the five medallions of the second row are preserved and show, from left to right, a sheep, (the second is missing), a double-basket topped by two doves pecking the green and red fruits contained in it, a goat and a ram.






## The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem



The Dome of the Rock is located atop a platform that stands about 4 meters over the level of the Haram al Sharif. It is built approximately in the centre of the Haram, slightly shifted westwards. The platform can be reached from all directions by eight sets of stairs, each marked by a threshold of arcades at the top of the stairs based on marble columns. Four of the stairways face the four portals of the Dome.

The Dome was erected in six years during the Umayyad Caliphate of Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan, who started the work one year after reaching the power in 685 AD. Seven years of taxes from Egypt were dedicated to the building process.

The architectural plan of the Dome of the Rock is composed by an exterior octagon of huge walls that were decorated in the past with marble plaques on the lower part and with mosaics above. At the time of the Ottoman ruler Suleyman the Magnificent, the mosaic external decoration was replaced by faience tiles. The lower part of the interior face of the outer walls is decorated also with marble plaques.



The Dome of the Rock has four doors located on the north, south, east and west side and forty windows. Inside the shrine, an arched wall called the octagonal arcade formed by eight piers and sixteen columns is flanked by two ambulatories, whose ceilings are decorated on the internal side with painted wood and on the outside with copper sheets. In the middle there is an internal circular arcade of four piers and twelve columns that support the 20 m. diameter cupola which rises atop a tall cylinder to a height of 20 m. and encircles the sacred rock.

The cupola is built by two layers of wood and is decorated from the interior with painted gypsum and from the outside with sheets of gold plated brass.

Inside the cave which is under the rock, there are two mihrab, one in the eastern side and one in the western side. The eastern one dates back to the Umayyad period.

After the Umayyad period, many restoration and maintenance works were carried out by the Abbasid Caliphs Ma'mun (813-833 AD) and Al-Muqtadir (908 - 932), who restored the cupola and built four gilded wooden doors. Other restoration works were carried out during the Fatimid period by Caliph al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah, significantly after the damages caused by the earthquake that hit Palestine in 1016 AD. The restoration works in the cupola were completed by his son al-Zahir li-'Aziz Din Allah.

During the Crusader occupation of Jerusalem, the Dome of the Rock was converted into a church and an altar was put over the rock. After the conquest of Jerusalem, Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi re-consecrated it as a Muslim sanctuary and carried out restoration works in the cupola.

Also Mamluks carried out several restoration works. Al-Zahir Baibars in 1270 renovated the external mosaics and Muhammad ibn Qalawun in 1318 restored and gilded the cupola.



Ottomans carried out several maintenance and restoration works, among which the most noticeable was the replacement of the external mosaics by Turkish faience tiles and the change of the windows in the drum done under the rule of Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent in 1552.

Restoration works in the cupola, its internal and external decorations, were carried out in the period of Sultan Abdul Mejid I and Sultan Abdülaziz in 19th century. Moreover, during the time of Sultan Abd al Hamid, end of 19th/beginning of 20th century, the Koranic sura, “Ya-Seen” was inscribed across the top in the external tile decoration. A small wooden cabinet, that keeps some strands of the Prophet Muhammad’s hair, was located west to the access to the cave.

In the 20th century, especially between 1936 and 1948, several restoration works were carried out by the Higher Islamic Council. Restorations and maintenance have continued during the Jordan period and are on going to the present.





# The Mosaics of the Dome of the Rock

The art of the mosaicists who worked in the Dome of the Rock had attained a degree of perfection which has never been equalled.

In spite of the variety of their motifs, the mosaics of the Dome of the Rock form a scheme which is admirable in its unity, covering 1,200 square metres. Everything is well balanced and harmonious. The decoration is composed entirely of vegetal motives interspersed with vases, cornucopiae, and what have been called “jewels”, built with glass and gold tesserae enriched with gems and mother-of-pearl fragments. The motifs are extensible at will and are perfectly adapted to the surface. They are composed of very small cubes (tesserae) of glass, some covered with a thin layer of gold. At the summit of the inner and outer faces of the octagonal arcade runs an inscription in gold on a blue background. This inscription, which is about 240 metres and makes a complete circuit of the octagon, contains verses from the Holy Quran written in Kufic characters of very simple style. At the end of the Quranic verses, a sentence contains the date of the building and the name of the builder, but it has been tampered with and the name of the Caliph al-Ma’mun substituted at a later date for that of Abd al-Malik, the real builder of the Dome of the Rock. The date, however, was left intact.





# Mosaic distribution over the surfaces of the building

The mosaics cover the following surfaces:

- Octagonal arcade:  
all the upper zone of the arcade, on the outer and inner faces, including the upper part of the eight piers, the soffits of the twenty-four arches, and their spandrels up to the ceiling;
- Circular arcade:  
all the upper zone of the arcade, including the upper part of the four piers and the spandrels of the sixteen arches but on the outer face only;
- The two storeys of the drum;
- A little vault in the porch of the eastern entrance.







# Mosaic shapes and motifs



The mosaics are composed in various shapes and motifs, among which there are:

- Rectangular surfaces of the piers, with the classical scheme of an acanthus plant that gives birth to two branches which spread in two large volutes. A vertical stem surmounted by a floral crown springs between the two branches.
- Narrow and elongated surfaces in the flanks of piers, where a palm tree or an olive tree or other elongated motifs.
- Triangular surfaces: the spandrels, where the motifs derived from floral elements, the base is a swollen stem which develop two symmetrical branches that terminate at the summit in a fantastic flower
- Circular unbroken band in the lower storey of the drum, with vases and scrolls arranged in sixteen panels throughout the band.
- Narrow band of soffits, in the twenty-four soffits of the octagonal arcade. They are nearly all different. We see garlands of fruit and foliage springing from a basket at each extremity of the arch. There are vine scrolls, plants which run the whole length of the strip, superimposed elements such as acanthus, vases, cornucopiae, shells, and floral stems. Sometimes the same motif, a palmette, a rosette, or a field of scattered leaves is repeated again and again. Each composition is divided lengthways into three bands of unequal breadth. The widest band occupies the inner half, next to it comes a smaller band filled with rows of rosettes or vine-scrolls, and the third band is occupied by a motif, half of which overflows the surface of the spandrel. Two soffits instead of three bands, comprises only two.

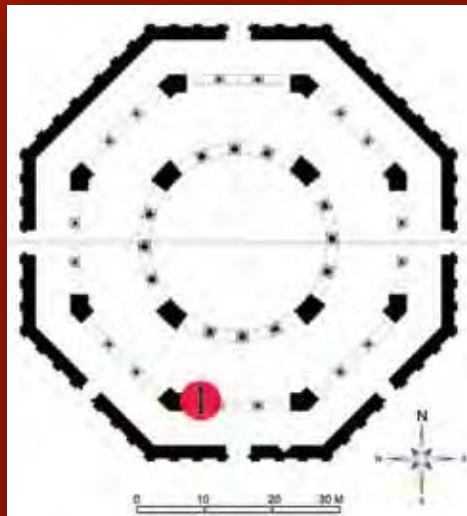


## Vegetal and fruit garlands

### Piece n. 1 – Soffit of Arch in the south octagonal arcade

The piece reproduces the soffit of the arch in the west part of the south arcade. It represents a garland. As all the garlands of the Dome of the Rock, it is solely composed by fruit, set in foliage of graduated tints, whilst in antique garlands flowers are usually mixed with fruit. It springs from each side of the soffit from a blue basket. A dark indigo background of foliage is relieved by green leaves of several shades, and numbers of fruit add a gay note: green and red pomegranates, grapes of various kinds, figs, pears, and limes alternate with their cheerful bright and contrasted tones, yellow, red, blue, green, grey or rose.

In the apex the garland passes through blue and silver rings, like collars, which compress it and which are perhaps meant to hide the point of ligature of two natural garlands.





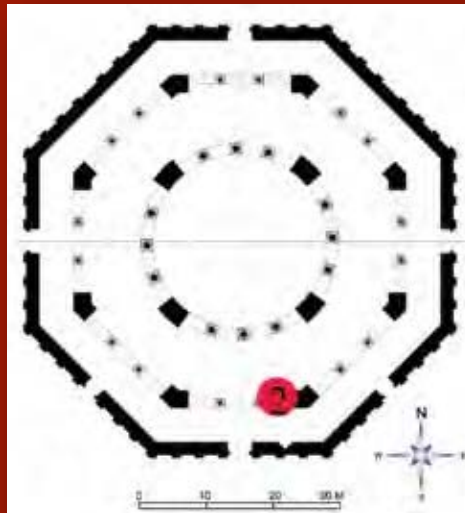
## A golden star and a silver crescent and the effect of the Sasanian art

### Piece n. 2 – Soffit of Arch in the south octagonal arcade

The piece reproduces the soffit of the arch in the east part of the south arcade. It represents a garland composed by fruit set in foliage.

In the apex there is a silver crescent accompanied by a six-pointed golden star. The decoration stands out on a blue background of concentric tints, like those of the blue globes or disks of many Christian mosaics.

The motif of the silver crescent is frequently repeated in the jewellery of the decorative scheme of the Dome of the Rock, like a reminiscence of the royal Sasanian insignia. It is curious to find it here, long before the time when Islam adopted it as an emblem.





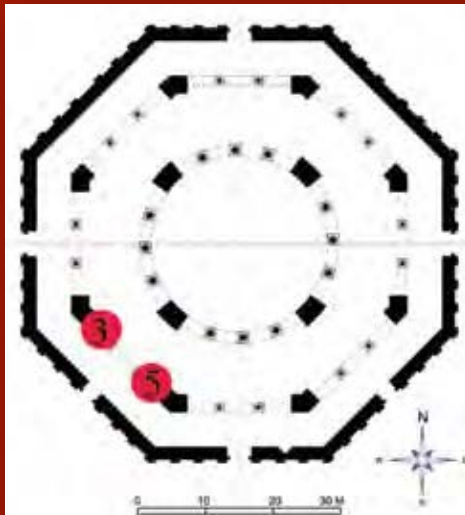
# Islamic art expresses herself in forming and depicting leaves and fruits

## Pieces n. 3 and n. 5 Soffits of Arch in the southwest octagonal arcade

The two similar pieces reproduce the soffit of the arches in the east and in the west parts of the arcade.

We have realized only some of the leaves included in the two soffits, five in the first and seven in the second. Then we have made a watercolour print of the entire two arches, to show all their beauty. The pieces represent large leaves on which the most varied and appetizing fruits are spread out.

We find a few isolated types of this motif in antiquity, first in Roman art, where the leaf is that of the fig-tree, then in Syrian art of the sixth century at Madaba. Here, however, the artist has developed this motif with unequalled imagination and fantasy. Under the Umayyad, the leaf was a favourite motif in wood or stone carving. Many examples of it appeared on the old wooden panels of the Al Aqsa mosque.





The ivy leaves are divided into two clearly defined shades, one green, the other blue, according to a process already familiar to the Byzantine mosaicists of the fifth century. The modelling varies for each leaf, all monotony being avoided. Each has a short green stalk, slightly curved back and swelling at its extremity. A leaf, placed transversely, marks the apex of the arch.

Fruits are spread out on the leaves, like offerings: date, grapes, pomegranates, pears, olive, lemons, cherries, citrus, besides a cucumber-like fruit. Although placed at more than seven meters from the ground, these fruits are drawn with the greatest care. By the refinement of their execution, the beauty of their colours, their strong relief and life-like appearance, they surpass all that has been done of this kind in mosaic.





*Pomegranates.* These are generally modelled in two or three tones of green, or in grey striped with green ribs, or are shaded in red. They are seen in their various stages of maturity, the young, green pomegranate being accompanied by beautiful ripe ones.

*Olives.* The olives are made of several shades of grey or green heightened by a touch of red at the extremity of the fruit. A little green stalk is visible, its starting point marked by a dark cube.

*Cucumber family.* The gourd with its double swelling is constantly repeated here. Usually green, it is decorated with grey ribs, or grey with green ribs. Sometimes a dark cube marks the top of the fruits. Cucumbers are also to be found, of a delicate green, with their seeds, and round, green and bulging marrows or melons.

*Citrus family.* A big green, sometimes yellow, fruit, which has all the appearance of a citron, appears several times. It is extremely curious, with its double swelling and its modelling in concentric gradations. It was probably a product of the country, for it is found modelled in the same way on several pavements of the Byzantine period and in Qasr Hisham in Jericho.





*Corn.* A sheaf of corn tied with a grey or red ribbon is placed on a leaf, accompanied by detached grains. The very fine, light points of the ears are drawn with the aid of minute grey cubes.

*Almond.* Almonds are sprinkled over the leaf of piece n. 5.

*Grapes.* The fruit which predominates is the grape. The white and blue grapes of Palestine are both represented, and vary in size, form, colour and execution. Where the bunches hang in pairs, which often occurs, one of them is green and gold and the other blue and silver. Two kind of bunches can be distinguished, one with round, the other with elongated grapes.



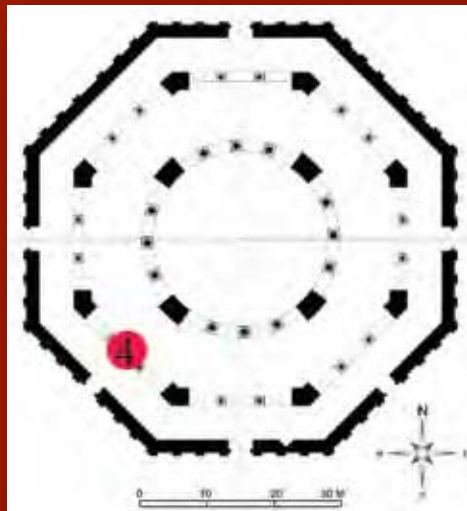


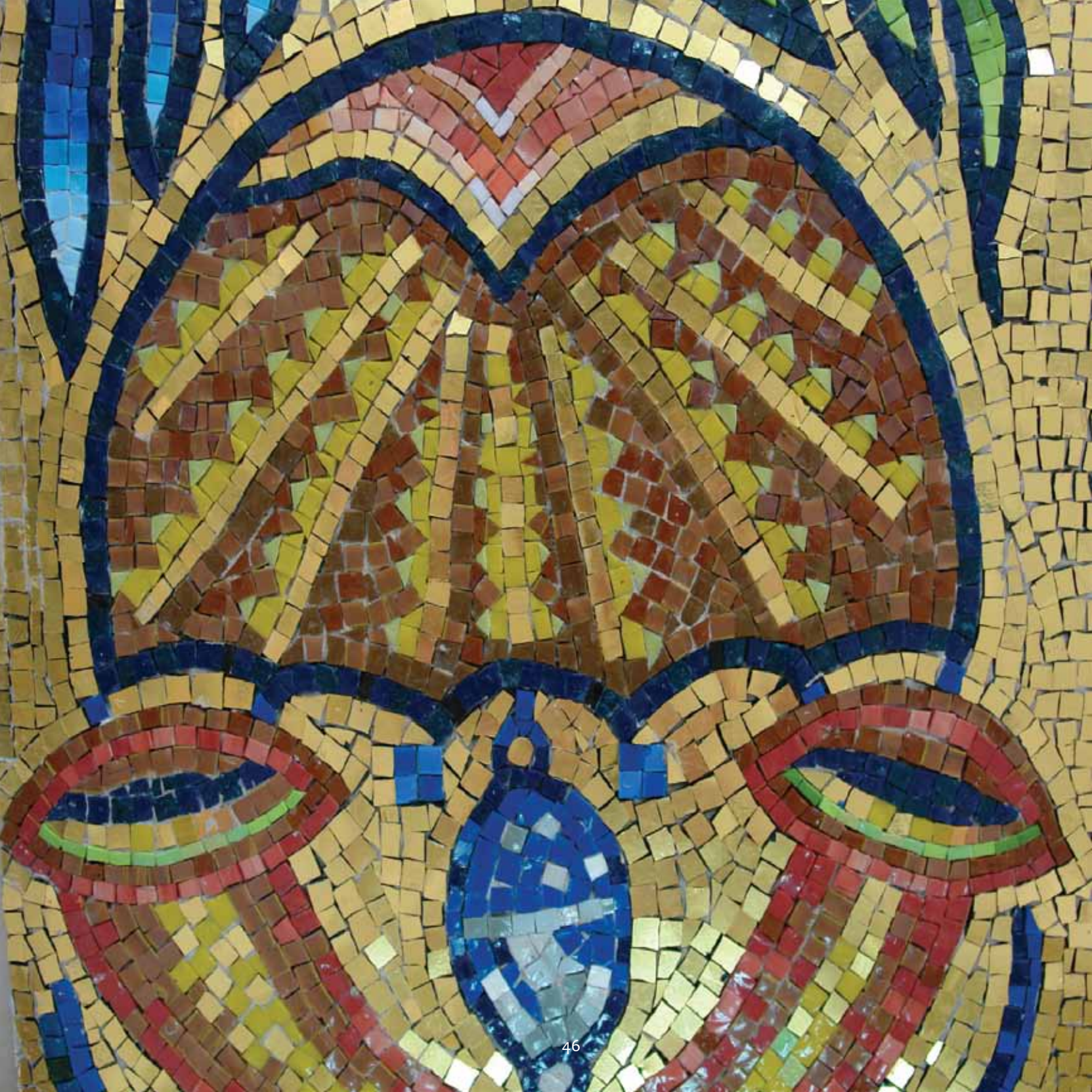


## Stars and crescent on a blue background

### Piece n. 4 – Soffit of Arch in the southwest octagonal arcade

The piece reproduces the soffit in the middle of the arcade. It is decorated partly with a garland, formed of leaves and fruits and partly by small rosettes with a red heart and petals with concentric shades of green and blue. In the apex there is a crescent and some stars on blue background.



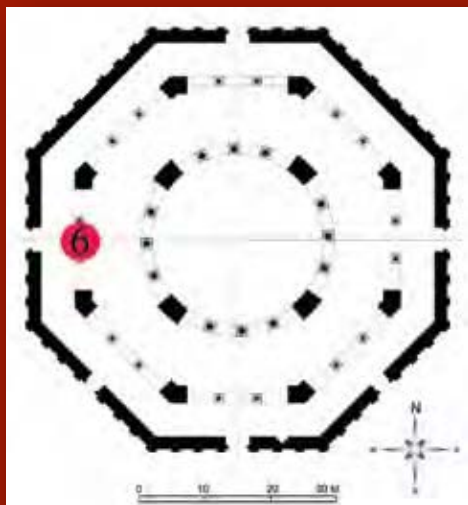


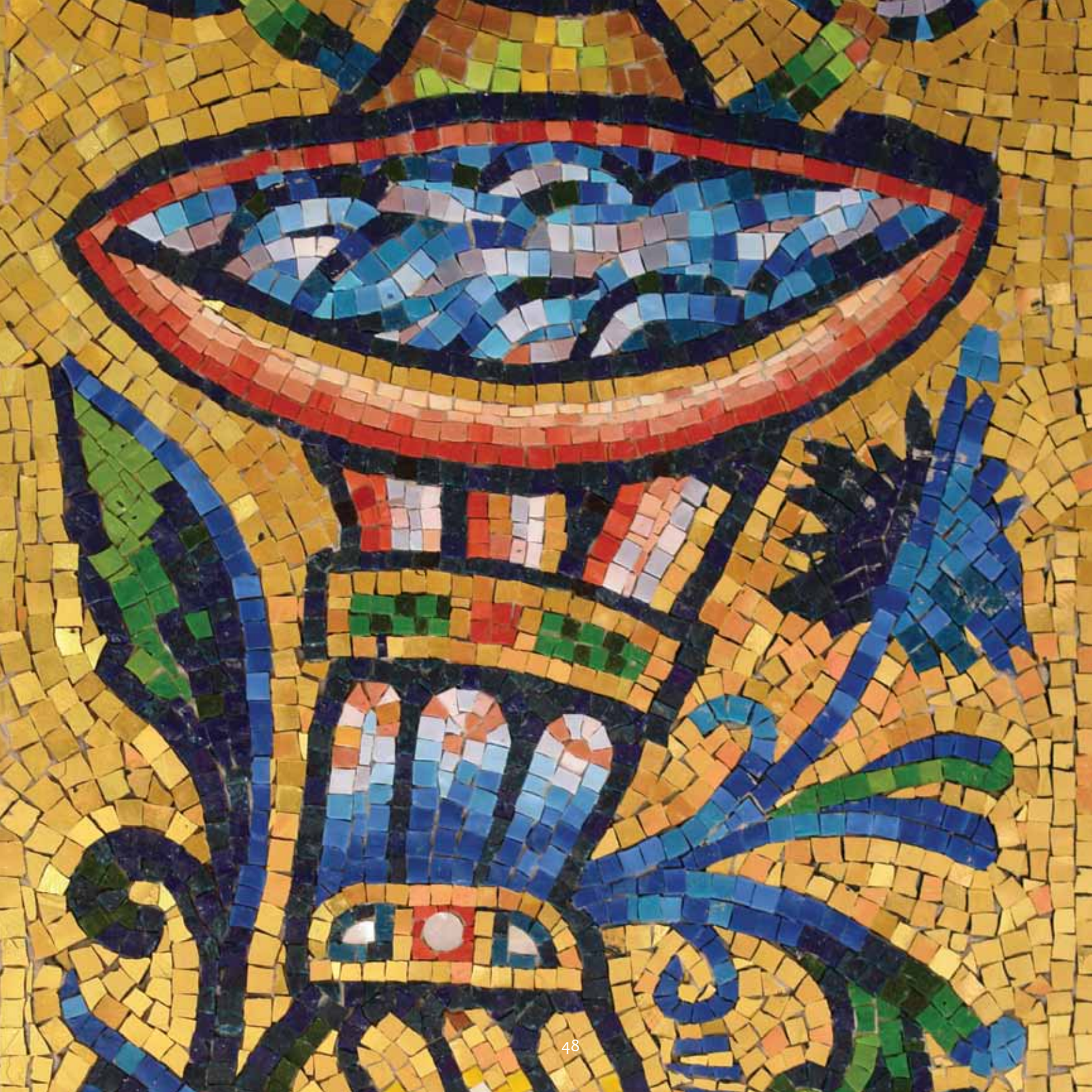
## Cornucopia

### Piece n. 6 – Soffit of Arch in the west octagonal arcade

The piece reproduces the soffit in the middle of the arcade. It includes such an eccentric cornucopia that have been mistaken in the past for mushrooms.

The motif is alternated with a classical form of a shell placed above two inter-crossed cornucopiae.





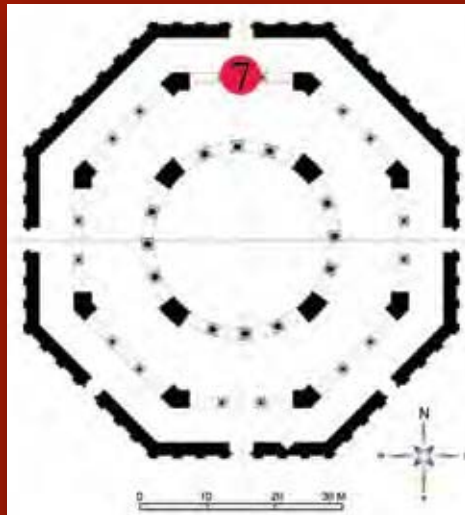


## Vases decorated with gemstones

### Piece n. 7 – Soffit of Arch in the north octagonal arcade

The piece reproduces the soffit in the middle of the arcade. It includes cornucopias with a stiff, clumsy stem, and one of the great variety of vases used in the decorative scheme. Both elements are richly decorated with precious stones.

In the apex, in effect not exactly in the middle of the soffit, there is a basket that contains a beautiful blue and silver bunch of grapes and two green figs. The interlaced withes stand out in green and gold on a mauve background.



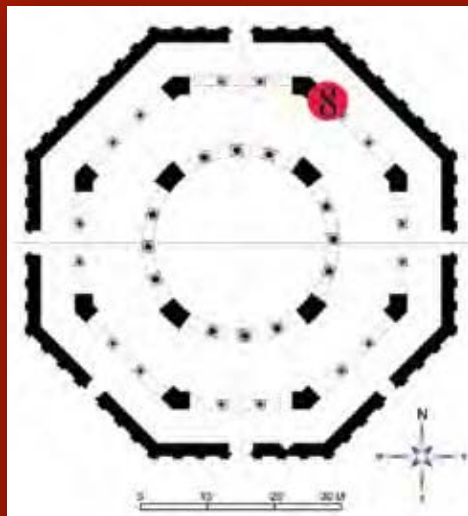


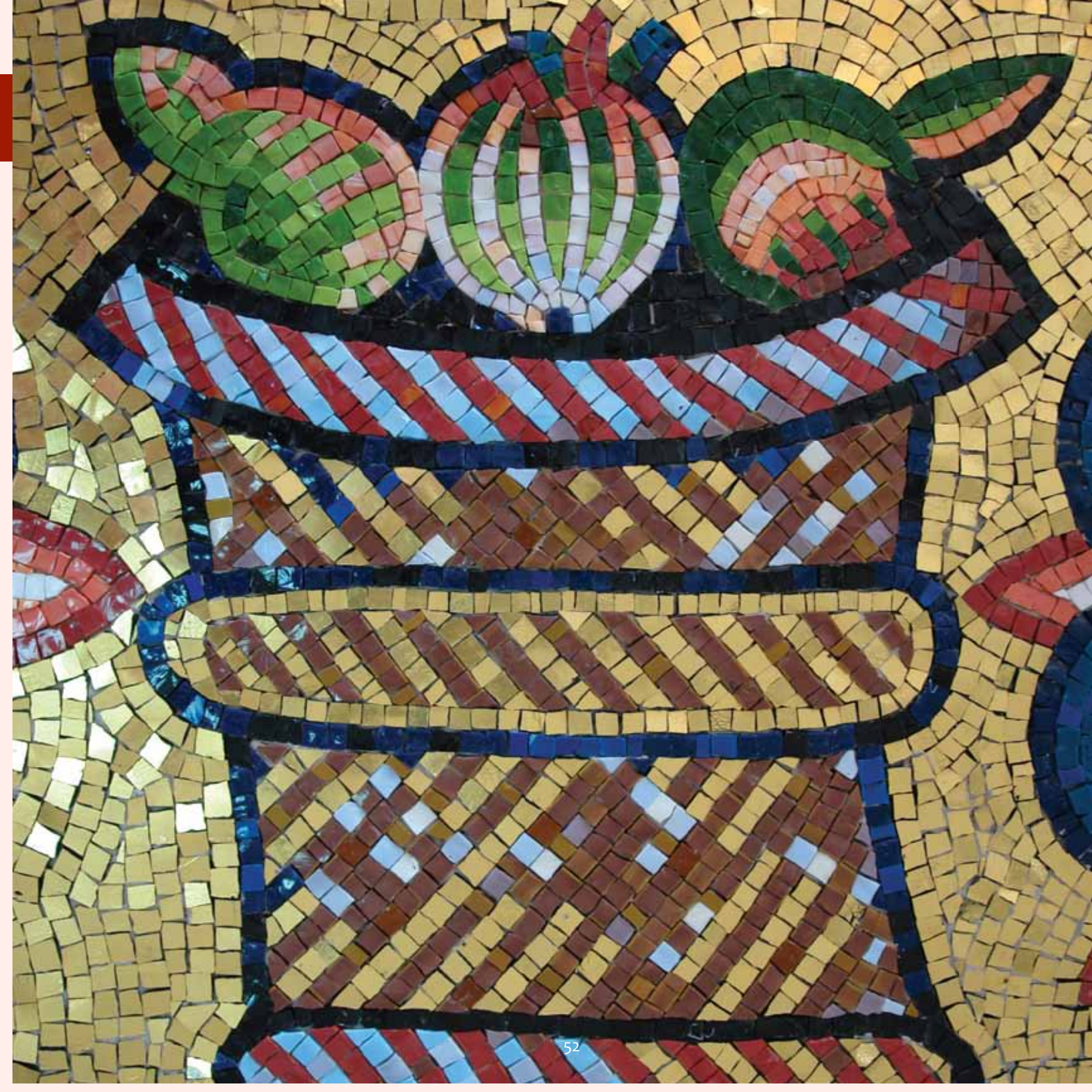
## A woven basket with colored mosaic Piece n. 8 – Soffit of Arch in the northeast octagonal arcade

The piece reproduces the soffit in the north part of the arcade. It is decorated with a garland, formed of little acanthus plants set one within the other, and fruit.

A garland, issuing from each side of a basket, a vase, or a bag, was one of the favourite motifs of ancient mosaicists. It decorates a great number of soffits anterior to the Dome of the Rock.

In the apex there is a basket of esparto grass, full of flower. It is a great bulging basket, woven of gold, silver, red, and blue withes, whence issues a sheaf of flowers, roses or tulips, with long green stems, green calices, and red petals. It is the only example of naturalistic flowers of the whole decorative scheme.





## Vegetal scrolls dominate the mosaics of the Dome of Rock Piece n. 9 – Soffit of Arch in the southeast octagonal arcade

The piece reproduces the soffit in the middle of the arcade. As in the piece n. 8, the decoration is accompanied by a little scroll which runs at its side and covers one third of the soffit.

The scroll is an important and frequently repeated motif because it is flexible and extensible at will and describes varying curves according to the surface which it decorates. The scroll here is formed by a thin simple stem, terminated by grapes, pomegranates and leaves. In the piece n.8 it is terminated by ivy leaves.

In the apex there is a basket of esparto grass, in which rest three green and red pomegranates. It is a tall basket slightly splayed at the top. The gold and silver wickerwork is decorated along the edges and at the base by a red, blue, and silver border.

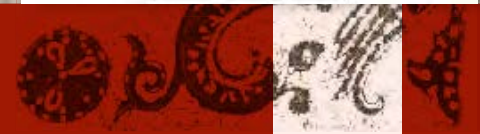


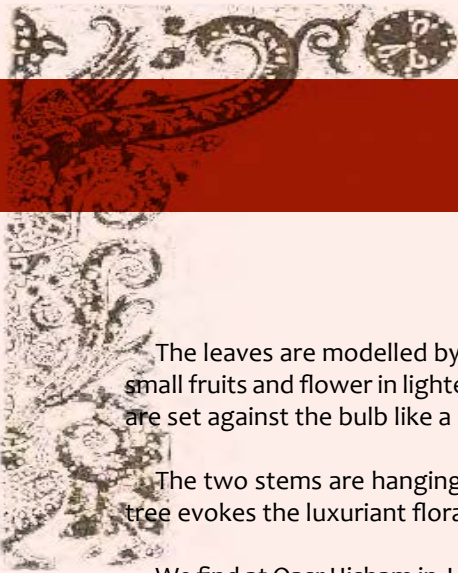


## Garden's stories in Arabic imagination

### Piece n. 10 – Spandrel of the outer face of the north octagonal arcade

It is the largest copy and reproduces one of the decorated spandrel of the outer face of the octagon. As many of the mosaics in the spandrels of the octagon, it is an absolutely new, very complicated and fantastic composition. It represents a superimposition of plant elements, based on a naturalistic palm tree support, treated with realism and loaded with fruits. Its foliage spreads out, and at the starting-point of the leaves, two full bunches of dates bend a stem under their weight: they are composed of graduated tones of green heightened with gold.





The leaves are modelled by a gradation of green shaded with blue, and in the middle of this green and blue flash small fruits and flower in lighter colours. It is crowned at its summit by a flower bud, a kind of bulb. Long palm fronds are set against the bulb like a corolla.

The two stems are hanging fruits and a motif resembling an artichoke and end in fantastic bunch of grapes. The tree evokes the luxuriant flora of the Arabian tales.

We find at Qasr Hisham in Jericho the same treatment of the foliage: opposition of tones, with the same gradation of greens for the lighter parts, blues for the shadows and dark indigo for the edges of the leaves.









## The Mosaic Centre - Jericho

The activity of mosaic conservation started in Jericho in 2000 as part of the “Requalification and Valorisation of the Tourist and Archaeological Resources of Qasr Hisham” project, funded by the Italian Cooperation and run by the Italian NGO CISS, in cooperation with the Palestinian Department of Antiquities (Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities), under the scientific supervision of Prof. Michele Piccirillo of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum. Since the end of the project, in 2003, some of the trainees have established the Mosaic Centre Jericho, as a branch of the Committee for the Promotion of Tourism in the Governorate of Jericho, so as to put forth in practice their skill as conservators and mosaicists. They are now able to manufacture copies of ancient and new artifacts. The mosaic production is carried out with traditional methods and equipments, originated from the Roman times. Tesserae are manually cut, one by one, from local coloured stones. The stones are found in Jericho and neighboring regions.

The Mosaic Centre is not only a handcraft laboratory, which produces and sells new mosaics in Palestine and abroad, but also a cultural promotion and training centre. Within its projects, the Mosaic Centre aims at raising awareness among people about Palestinian cultural heritage and fostering participation of local communities in the protection and promotion of Palestinian cultural and natural resources.





فسيفساء شلال - غزة  
Shellal Mosaic - Gaza

فلسطين  
Gaza



## ATS - Pro Terra Sancta

*“We definitely need tangible help, but above all we need promoters to help us maintain and spread the beautiful message of hope and peace that the Holy Places have shared for centuries with visitors from all over the world”.*

Fr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa OFM, Custos of the Holy Land – President of ATS Pro Terra Sancta

ATS Pro Terra Sancta (Holy Land Association) is the non-profit, non-governmental Organization (NGO) of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land. The President of ATS is the Custos of the Holy Land. ATS Pro Terra Sancta has its legal seat in Rome and an operational office in Jerusalem.

The mission of the NGO is to serve the Custody of the Holy Land in its proper task of: maintaining and promoting the Holy Places, supporting local communities in the Middle East, fostering peace and dialogue. ATS Pro Terra Sancta would like to give everyone the opportunity to contribute to the fulfillment of this mission in the Holy Land.

The activities and projects supported by ATS Pro Terra Sancta have always turned to everyone without any discrimination, of language, race or religion. ATS Pro Terra Sancta is active in the two following main areas:

Emergency, Education, Development – Providing emergency relief, alleviating social hardships, supporting minorities, caring for the elderly, providing support in cases of illness, assisting with housing needs, resolving conflicts in the Holy Places in the Holy Land.

Memory and Culture- Holy Sites – Conserving and promoting sanctuaries and archaeological sites, supporting studies of early Christianity and Biblical research, taking care of archives and museum, writing and publishing.



## The mosaic artists and the team of the project

Arch. Osama Hamdan was born in Jerusalem, and is the Director of the Mosaic Centre- Jericho. He is an architect specialized in architectural conservation and enhancement of historical and archaeological sites. He has directed many projects of conservation in Palestine and abroad. He tries with his work to link the Palestinian cultural heritage to local economy and to reinforce local communities. He has published several books and articles in different languages.




Carla Benelli was born in Rome, Italy and is an art historian. She has been working in the Palestinian Territories for many years. She is a member of the Mosaic Centre- Jericho since its foundation. She works as a consultant for ATS Pro Terra Sancta and other international institutions and has published several books and articles about cultural heritage.



Hani Nur el - Din has a PhD in Eastern Archaeology. He was born in Jerusalem and has been teaching in Al-Quds University since 1992. He has been a member of the Mosaic Centre- Jericho since its foundation. He has participated as a researcher in various projects of the Mosaic Centre and wrote several articles in the field of history and archaeology.





Silvia Angeletti was born in Genova, Italy, studied in Perugia at Art School and continued her studies at the Mosaic School in Spilimbergo, Italy. In 1999, she founded the Musivaria Mosaic Company in Udine, Italy and since then, has made art mosaics and won awards for public decorations. She works in the field of restoration and mosaic decorations in Italy and abroad. She has participated in the first and second project.



Raed Khalil was born in Nisf Jubayl (Nablus), and was among the first specialists in mosaic who followed the training course in mosaic conservation in Palestine. He implemented several training courses and participated in many projects in the field of conservation in Palestine and abroad. He has been a member of the Mosaic Centre- Jericho since its foundation. He has participated in the first and second project.



Donatella Garavallo was born in East Bourne, Great Britain, and studied at the Mosaic School in Spilimbergo, Italy. She founded the Musivaria Mosaic Company in Udine, Italy, with Silvia Angeletti. In the current years, Donatella with Musivaria has produced many artistic mosaic pieces. She has participated in the first and second project.





Suhaib Hawari was born in Germany, but he is of Palestinian origin, from Sabastiya. He studied archaeology in Yemen. He was trained in mosaic production and conservation in the Mosaic Centre Jericho. He became a member of the Centre in 2007. He works in several projects in the field of conservation. He participated in the first project.




Giulia Vodrig was born in Cividale del Friuli, Italy. She studied at the Art School of Udine and then at the Mosaic School of Spilimbergo, Italy in 2006. She has been working at the laboratory of Musivaria, in Udine for two years, and has made a lot of big flooring and wall mosaics. She participated in the first project.



Rasmi Shaer was born in Sabastiya, and is a mosaicist and conservator. He attended the training in mosaic production at the Mosaic Centre- Jericho and became member of the Centre in 2006. He coordinated several training courses and projects in the field of conservation in Palestine and abroad. He has participated in the first and second project.





Sandra Borgogno was born in Argentina, where she studied art. She continued her studies in art in Asti, Italy and participated in several exhibitions in Italy and Argentina. Since 1981, she has worked in an art laboratory and has realized several projects of set design. In 2008, she illustrated a children's book about Hisham Palace, published by the Mosaic Centre- Jericho. She participated in the first project.



Imad Doudin was born in Abda, near Dura (Hebron). He studied archaeology at Al Quds University in Jerusalem and graduated in 2007. Since then, he has been a member and worked as a mosaic artist and restorer at the Mosaic Centre -Jericho. He participated in several projects of conservation inside Palestine and abroad. He has participated in the first and second project.



Ne'ma Shawa is from Jericho and attended a mosaic training course at the Mosaic Centre- Jericho in 2005. Since then, she has been a member of the Centre and works in conservation projects and as mosaic artist. She has good experience as a trainer for children and women. She has participated in the first and second project.



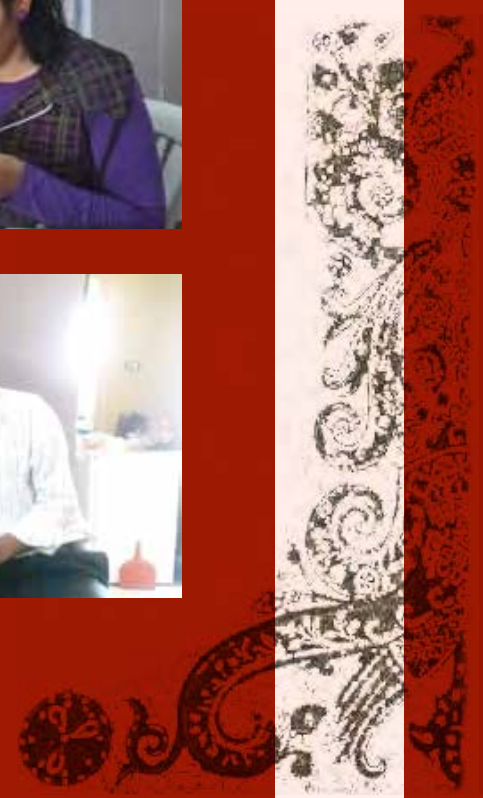
Rafat al Khatib is from Tulkarem. He completed the training period at the Mosaic Centre- Jericho in 2008, and became member of it. He has already participated in conservation and mosaic production projects. He has participated in the first and second project.




Rinan Barham was born in Jericho. She attended a mosaic training course at Mosaic Centre – Jericho in 2010. Since then, she has been a member of the Centre. She has participated in many mosaic activities and in a mosaic workshop in France. She has participated in the second project.



Iyad Njoum was born in Amman. He has got a bachelor in English language. Since 2010, he has been working at Mosaic Centre – Jericho in the administrative and public relation matters. He has participated in the second project.





Faten Alhoshia was born in Yatta (Hebron). She graduated with a B.A in Fine Arts in 2007 and also, obtained a Diploma in Maintenance and Restoration at Al Quds University in 2009. Presently she is a volunteer in the Mosaic Centre Jericho. She participated in the first project.



Juda Maali was born in Deir Jrer (Ramallah). He graduated with a B.A in architecture in 2005. He works in conservation projects. He participated in the first project.



Murad Sulaiman was born in Turmosaya (Ramallah). He graduated with a B.A architecture in 2011 and works in the restoration field. He has participated in the second project.







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