

MOSAICS OF MĀDABĀ (THE PAST AND THE PRESENT)

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The art of mosaic making originated in ancient Sumeria but only became popular in the second millennium BC in Mesopotamia, from where it developed and spread over time to the Greek, Roman, Byzantine and Islamic worlds. The art of mosaic production was thus constantly evolving through time and across different states and civilizations; from big cubic shaped (Tessera) to small colored and crystallized pieces of later periods.

Over the past century a number of mosaic pavements have been uncovered in Mādabā; discovered as part of extensive excavations undertaken by previous explorers. When you visit Mādabā in Jordan, it will become clear that the art of mosaic making acquired a unique standard, one shared by all the architectural remains which have mosaic pavements. Whether they are palaces, temples, churches, chapels or public houses, mosaics were used for decorative purposes to visualize local religious and social concepts.

In 1992, the Mādabā Mosaic School was established by the Franciscan Institute, with the cooperation and support of the Italian Government, the Jordan Ministry of Tourism and the Department of Antiquities of Jordan. The main objective of the School is to train national teams in the scientific treatment, conservation and preservation of mosaic pavements in order to preserve and consolidate existing mosaics for the education and enjoyment of the people of the Kingdom of Jordan. Many students have already graduated from the School and have been hired into the government sector (e.g. The Department of Antiquities), while others have established their own workshops, participating in the development of this sector in order to strengthen that part of the economy concerned

with tourism. Over time, the mosaic workshops run by the School have had a significant role to play in enhancing the income of the city and it has been inevitable that the Department of Antiquities have set several criteria and standards for their operations. In particular, new standards have been implemented which oversee the methods used to protect national heritage (for example, the imitation of mosaic portraits). It has been important to differentiate between workshops, and to manage the export of imitations abroad.

With cooperation from USAID, the School has become a scientific institute capable of dealing professionally with surviving mosaics in archaeological contexts and with the preservation of this important aspect of Jordanian heritage.

The Department of Antiquities has set several “must comply” prerequisites:

1. The name Jordan or its abbreviation, JOR, must be printed in English on all reproduced or imitated mosaics.
2. It is forbidden to imitate a newly found mosaic before it has been studied and publicized.
3. To print clearly on the back of the portrait the identity of the portrait and the name and address of the workshop that produced it.
4. To present an Origin Certificate for each portrait, with codes and with fixed dates.
5. To obtain an official Hand Written Assurance from the workshops that they would be suspended if they are found guilty of breaking the Jordan Antiquities Law No. 21/1988.

The expert outputs and creations of highly-trained workshop owners and the skilled technicians they employ, created a new challenge, where the transformation of an ancient art form, previously treated as an historical reading and visualization of the past, became a form of eco-

conomic income. Enhancing and reinforcing local production of imitated mosaics creates wealth and prosperity for Jordanians who might also considered the descendents of those who invented the art of ancient mosaic making. In this respect, the following are examples of some of the ways in which local production has been enhanced:

- Local production of small sized micro-mosaic stones, which enhance the detail of locally produced portraits.
- The introduction of new colors of stones for reproductions of mosaics.
- The invention of new designs and technologies, such as photographs that can be shaped into a mosaic portrait.
- The expansion of mosaic portraits into other media, not just pavements but swimming pools, building entrances and walls designs.
- The introduction a new technique of illustrating the mosaic art concept on Ostrich egg shells and pottery using images from original mo-

saic pavements found on archeological sites.

- The production of rugs and carpets with imitations of original mosaic portraits.

The enduring attraction of mosaics is exemplified by the recent discovery of a most beautiful mosaic pavement in the Mādabā Archeological Park which shows three ladies sitting on chairs with a cross and fruit baskets in their hands. Above each lady there are three Greek inscriptions naming three important cities: Rome, Gregoria and Mādabā. The mosaic is now used as the official logo for social activities, publications, posters and tickets sold at tourist sites. It has also become the official logo of Mādabā's Mosaics Institute. In the future it is hoped that it will become the logo for Mādabā Municipality's cultural publications.

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