

THE TOMB MOSAIC OF *FL(AVIUS) ROGATIANUS* AT *FORUM TRAIANI* (ORISTANO, SARDINIA)

El mosaico de la tumba de Fl(avius) Rogatianus en Forum Traiani (Oristano, Cerdeña)

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ABSTRACT:

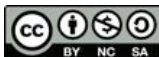
The article focuses on the study of a tomb mosaic discovered in Forum Traiani (Oristano, Sardinia). The mosaic is little known and deserves a study to date it in the absence of excavation data. It also seeks to put this tomb mosaic inside the phenomenon of tomb mosaics in Sardinia.

Key words: *tomb mosaic, Sardinia, Late Antiquity, funerary church.*

RESUMEN:

En el artículo se estudia un mosaico funerario hallado en Forum Traiani (Oristano, Cerdeña). Este mosaico es poco conocido y necesita un estudio para poderlo fecharlo en ausencia de datos de excavación. Además, se intenta poner este mosaico dentro del fenómeno de los mosaicos funerarios en Cerdeña.

Palabras clave: *mosaico funerario, Cerdeña, Tardo Antigüedad, iglesia funeraria.*



The mosaic (fig. 1) described in the article was often mentioned in works that only treated it indirectly (Duval 1994: 210; Serra 1995: 194-195; Zucca 1999: 521; Corda 1999: 155, FTR008; Spanu 2000: 109; Sangiorgi 2002:

357-358; Zedda 2004: 136-137; Fiocchi Nicolai & Spera 2015: 92; Ferri 2015: 557-559), hence it has not been properly published. For this reason, it now seems the right time to improve the study of this tomb mosaic and try and provide a suitable dating.



Fig. 1: The tomb mosaic of *Fl(avius) Rogatianus*, Town Hall of Fordongianus (Oristano, Sardinia).

FORUM TRAIANI AND THE CHURCH OF SAN LUSSORIO

The ancient city of *Forum Traiani*, near the modern Fordongianus, was probably frequented since the Republican Age by the people of the *civitates Barbariae*, thanks to the abundance of its thermal waters. It then became more popular starting from the I century AD, when the important route of *Turre Karales* was built, linking the two main towns of the island, and *Forum Traiani* was located half way. Tolomeo includes the city in his *Geographia* (III 3, 7) and it was probably promoted to the rank of *municipium* between 286-305 AD, as we can read in the *Passio* of San Lussorio. It was thanks to the presence of the relics of the martyr, probably dead on August 21st 304 AD (Spanu 2000: 97; Corda 1999: 152, FRT003; Delehaye 1933: 527-528), that a dedicated sanctuary was built, and that's where the mosaic object of this article was found.

The Church of San Lussorio (fig. 2) didn't have the same architectural structure that we can see today. Few walls of the original building survived (Fiocchi Nicolai & Spera 2015: 89-90), which hint at the church having a single nave with several accessory compartments. Some geometric mosaics have been found, which probably covered the interior of the Church (Sangiorgi 2002: 545-552; Spanu 2000: 107-109; Zucca 1986: 14-19).

THE MOSAIC

The mosaic was found against the eastern perimeter of the church, with size of 2,17 m x 85 cm and several gaps in the sides, both long and short ones. The typology of the mosaic is bipartite, that is having two decorative panels, vertically placed. The mosaic tesserae are white, black, light green, ochre and red. The outer frame of the mosaic consists in a long-dentilled simple file with dentils of squares of four tesserae (*DG 2j*), running all around the perimeter of the floor. The top panel,

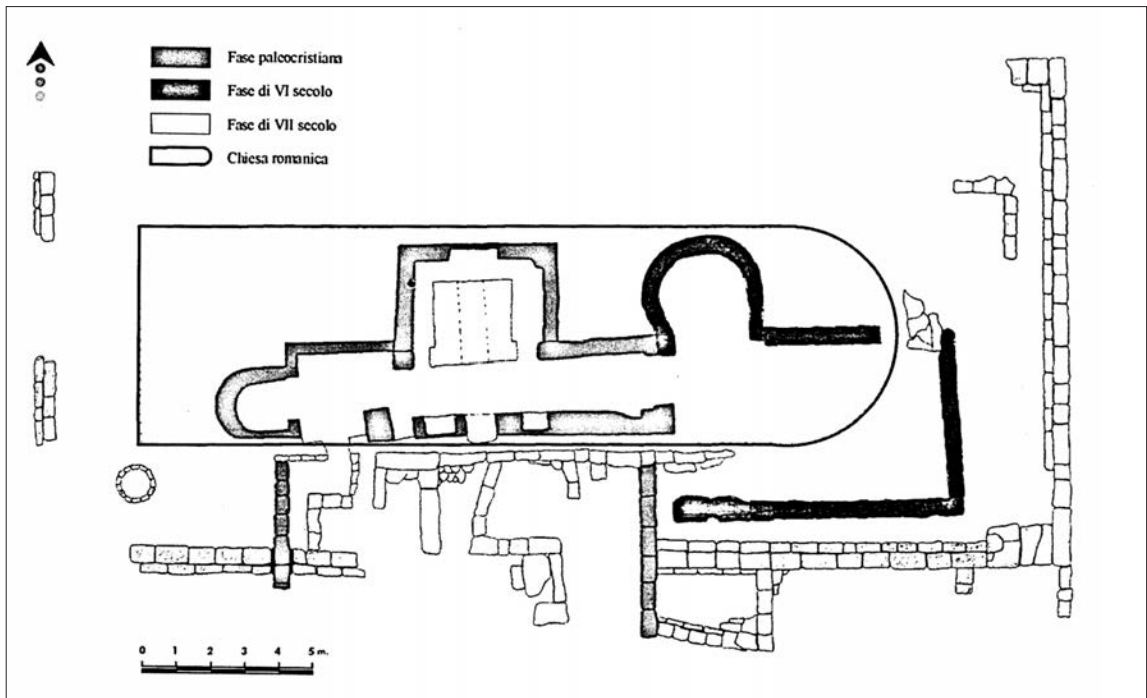


Fig. 2: The Church of S. Lussorio (from Spanu 2000).

almost square in shape, encloses a circumference having a long-dentilled simple filet (*DG 2j*) outer frame and a simple filet (*DG 1a*) inner frame. Inside, we find this inscription:

BM FL RO
 GATIANUS VI
 XIT ANNIS LII DIE
 XV RECESSIT XV
 KAL DEC

which can be solved as *B(onae) m(emoriae) Fl(avius) Rogatianus vixit annis LII dies XV recessit kal(endas) dec(embres)*. Hence, *Flavius Rogatianus* lived 52 years and 15 days, and died on November 17th. Around the circumference, we can find four *kantharoi* of miniature form (fig. 3): the ones at the bottom part are well visible, while the ones at the top are very incomplete. The inscription presents some differences in the size of the letters: in fact, the first two lines have a definitely bigger letter size compared to lines 3-5, as if the *musivarius* had to reduce it during its work, maybe to give more emphasis on the name. Peculiar is also the very tiny size of the *XV* at line 4.

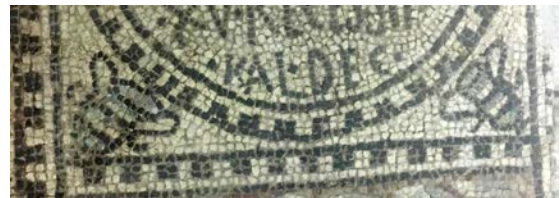


Fig. 3: Detail of *kantharoi* of tomb mosaic.

In the bottom panel, we can find a garland frame of adjacent laurel leaves in threes on a white lateral and dark median ground (*DG 89c*). There's a noteworthy peculiarity in the composition of this frame: the garland begins in the bottom-central part of the bottom panel (fig. 4), with the white side of the leaves placed against the sides, so that two garlands start and reunite in the top part of the panel, where the white part of the leaves re-join. This garland surrounds a rectangle with a *DG 2j* frame (in this case we can see an error in the composition of the bottom part of the frame: starting from the right, the third square is made up of only two tesserae instead of four), with a shaded multi-strand guilloche on a coloured ground (*DG 73f*) on the inside. The overall composition of the mosaic



Fig. 4: Detail of bottom panel of tomb mosaic.

is fairly well-finished. The *Rogatianus cognomina* (Kajanto 1965: 297) seems to have substantial evidence in *Numidia, Mauretania Caesarensis, Africa Proconsularis* (for example: *BCTH* 1904: 155, 156, 275; *BCTH* 1932/33: 199; *BCTH* 1946/49: 350; *BCTH* 1979/80: 37; *BCTH* 1982: 38; *CBI*: 784; *CIL* VIII: 613, 719, 811, 1056, 1288, 1307, 1611, 1620, 1685, 1722, 1903, 2062,

2403, 2489, 2561, 2562, 2564, 9115, 0129, 9673; Haidra V: 161; Haack 2006: 7; *IL Afr*: 204, 205, 292, 588; *IL Alg* I: 1174, 1662, 2287; Beschaouch 1965/66: n. 16); in Rome we have fewer examples (*CIL* VI: 1057, 2384, 3000, 3043, 3057, 3581, 13202, 14673, 20792); two examples in *Hispania* (*CIL* II: 4118, 6131); in *Dacia* (*CIL* III: 1597, 1599); in *Noricum* (*CIL* III: 964). It becomes clear that the *cognomina*, given its broad use in North Africa, must have its origins in those areas.

DATING

Without excavation data, we can only proceed with dating by way of style. Unfortunately, the decorative elements only offer very wide chronological ranges. We cannot thus make any parallel for the frame of kind long-dentilled simple file with dentils of squares of four tesserae (*DG* 2j), since it's widely used. For what concerns the garland of adjacent laurel leaves in threes on a white lateral and dark median ground (*DG* 89c), we have no example in Sardinia so far. Of a similar typology, with a few minor variations, is a mosaic of *Capo Frasca*, found in a thermal building and datable to the III century (Angiolillo 1981: 131-132). A garland with of adjacent leaves in two can also be found in Nora in the *Domus dall' Atrio Tetrastilo* in two mosaics dated between the late II and half III century (Angiolillo 1981: 48-52) and in a mosaic of *Turris Libisonis* of the III century from the area of the *Palazzo di Re Barbaro* (Angiolillo 1981: 185). These few examples of Sardinia, however, are not indicative of any chronology: we have to turn our attention off the Island. More interesting are the examples coming from the Italic Peninsula. In the Church of SS. Felice and Fortunato of Venice we can find something very similar to our garland in a mosaic dated between the late IV and early V century (Rinaldi 2007: tav. XCIII). In the *Villa di Melda*, in Melda di Sotto, in room 1 we can find an example of *DG* 89c in a mosaic dated to the V century (Paolucci 2013: scheda 14735). Later is the example of the *Duomo di Napoli* in a mosaic dated between the late V and early VI century (Ebanista & Cuccaro 2010: 511-530; Schiavone 2009: 3-34). In the Iberian Peninsula, we can find an example in Alcazar of S. Juan dated to the IV century (Blázquez 1982: 27) and in Lérida around the IV century (Blázquez *et al.* 1989: 19-20). And again, in Ramalete in a mosaic with a hunting scene of the IV century (Caetano 2016:

150-151). More interesting are the examples of tomb mosaics coming from *Tarraconensis*: in *Tarraco* two mosaics of the Necropolis of Francoli dated between the late IV and early V century (Gómez Pallarès 2002: 68-70); both the mosaics of *Tarraconensis*, for what we can see from the fragments, present the same technical expedient of the leaves branching and then re-joining. In North Africa, there are many mosaics with this kind of garland. I'm omitting the many mosaics found in the residential contexts, like: Acholla, El Jem, Tabarka, *Thuburbo Majus*, dated between the second half of II and late IV century (Yacoub 1995: 116, 189, 211, 240, 285) for the Tunisian area; Timgad, between the late III and early V century (Germain 1969: n. 20, 21, 58, 79, 142, 185, 188) and Cherrhell in mosaics dated between the IV and V century (Ferdì 2005: n. 77, 83, 88) for the Algerian area. I'll concentrate on the tomb mosaics found in the Tunisian area because they offer the most valid comparisons. In Uppenna we can find a mosaic having the same frame of the mosaic of *Fl(avius) Rogatianus*, dated to the early IV century. This mosaic consisted in the epigraph only (Raynal 2005: 523-524). Another mosaic, found in Tunis and dated to the late IV century, presents a *DG 89c* frame enclosing a tripartite area, with a central circle and an epitaph, and a dove on both sides (Fantar 1979: 71). Two mosaics found in a church of *Furnos Minos* are dated to the first half of the V century instead, the first of which is more ancient and presents an elegant mixture between the *DG 89c* and *DG 60e* frames (Duval & Cintas 1978: 892, 894), while in the second, probably dated to the half of the V century, we can find a *DG 89c* frame surrounding a tripartite area (Duval & Cintas 1978: 924, 926). Another example can be found in Kélibia, dated back to the first half of the V century, presenting not only the same frame but also the epitaph inside a circumference, a decoration rarely used in tomb mosaics. In the church complex of Sidi Jdidi we can find at least three examples, all from the second half of the V century, having this same frame (Ben Khader & al. 2011: 321-322, 327-328). Even more interesting is the data coming from Algeria where we can find this frame in mosaics dated *ad annum*: in Sétif between 449 and 467 (Février 1965: 436-437) and in the mosaic of *Victoria* in Ténès of 447 AD (Février 1965: 447).

For what concerns the motif of shaded multi-strand guilloche on a coloured ground (*DG 73f*), we can do only a few comparisons. In Sardinia, some examples are

in *Caralis* in a mosaic found in a thermal environment, datable to the half of the III century (Angiolillo 1981: 81-85; Quattrocchi 2015: 219-222). Another example is in Romana, in a still undated mosaic in *Fontana 'e sa figu* (Angiolillo 1981: 165), but which could find its timing around the half of the III century (Angiolillo 2016: 327). More interesting are the comparisons with three tomb mosaics, still from *Turris Libisonis*, placeable between the first fourth and the half of the IV century for the most ancient one (Angiolillo 1981: 194; Quattrocchi 2014: 249; Quattrocchi 2017: 1031-1032), and between the second half of the IV and early V century for the other two examples (Quattrocchi 2014: 249; Quattrocchi 2017: 1028-1031). In the Italic Peninsula, we can find several examples: in the cathedral of Pesaro, in the right aisle, a mosaic of the IV-V century (De Marinis & Quiri 2004: 129-133; De Marinis *et al.* 2006: 580-581); another one from the second fourth of the V century in an apse room of Via Dogana in Faenza (Maioli 1990: 65-66; Maioli 1995: 195-196); finally, in the church of Aquileia of the second half of the V century (Bertacchi 1971: 32, 44; Bertacchi 1980: 231). However, the decorative motif is unreliable and of little use for the purpose of dating.

Still unreliable are the *kantharoi* visible around the inscriptions, since their style is very stereotyped. Similar *kantharoi* can be seen in a recently discovered mosaic in the Roman villa of the V century of Pont del Treball in Barcelona (Alcubierre *et al.* 2016: 367-368).

Unfortunately, all the decorative elements of our mosaic are little useful to date and don't provide a clear picture. It becomes necessary to focus on the type of mosaic. The floor presents something rare in the tomb mosaic field: the epitaph is inside a circumference. This particular typology is rather documented in the tomb mosaics of the area of Kélibia: in fact, in the Church of S. Felix we can find several mosaics reproducing the epitaph inside a circumference. However, an accurate comparison for the schema of our mosaic wasn't possible, since the mosaics of Kélibia are all much more decorated and are dated between the first half and the third fourth of the V century (Cintas & Duval 1958: 179-256).

There have been several hypotheses of datation for the tomb mosaic and the mosaics located in the church, which are contemporaneous: between the late V and the first half of VI century (Spanu 2000: 107-109; Oppo 2002: 171-173; Sangiorgi 2002: 345-352; Coroneo 2011: 79).



Fig. 5: Map of tomb mosaics distribution in Sardinia.

The garland of adjacent laurel leaves in threes on a white lateral and dark median ground (DG 89c), and especially the circumference with the epitaph inside, set the datation of the tomb mosaic of *Fl(avius) Rogatianus* to the half of the V century, probably between 440 and 460 AD. Thanks to these comparisons I can now deviate from N. Duval's assertion, stating that the mosaic of *Fl(avius) Rogatianus* can't be compared to the North African mosaics: it is in fact re-elaborated version of the North African copybook done by the artisans of Sardinia.

THE MOSAIC OF *FL(AVIUS) ROGATIANUS* IN THE TOMB MOSAIC HERITAGE OF SARDINIA

Sardinia (fig. 5) is one of the regions, outside of North Africa, which gave back the highest number of tomb mosaics. They have been documented in at least five locations: *Caralis*, San Sperate, Nora, *Turris Libisonis*, and *Forum Traiani*. Some researchers also supposed that tomb mosaics were present in ancient Cornus

(Pani Ermini 1985: 117; Pani Ermini 1986: 72), since several loose tesserae have been found in the examined layers, however there is no certainty so far.

The picture that emerges for Sardinia, however, is very similar to that of other regions like *Hispania* (Quattrocchi 2017) and Sicily. If the tomb mosaic used mainly by early Christians has its origins in North Africa, as it strongly seems, then "Africanized" regions (from the point of view of mosaics) like *Hispania*, Sardinia and Sicily could have been fertile ground for the expansion of the phenomenon. This didn't happen, though: we know about only 33 tomb mosaics in the Iberian Peninsula, mostly concentrated in *Tarraconensis* (Quattrocchi 2017 in print); Sicily gave back only very few evidences (Novara 1975: 47-56) and Sardinia has nine visible examples nowadays, together with several news about lost mosaics (Esquirro 1624).

All the tomb mosaics of Sardinia concentrate in areas where, almost simultaneously, the cult of some martyr was also born. It happened in Nora and *Caralis*, but also *Turris Libisonis* and *Forum Traiani*. This can be probably justified by the higher request of Christian devoted to be buried near the remains of the martyr (Duval 1982; Duval 1988; Duval 1991: 333-351).

The problem of lack of findings, however, lies in the very nature of the mosaic.

The tomb mosaic was more used in funerary churches, not only for devotional reasons but also for *utilitas*. In fact, mosaic-covered burials helped saving space in the church without hindering the normal rituals. This fact collides with the architectural fabric of Sardinia, where few funerary churches have been found so far (Fiocchi Nicolai & Spera 2015: 82-123; Pergola *et al.* 2010: 353-410). Hence, if on the one hand Sardinia was a fertile ground for tomb mosaics, on the other hand the architectural fabric prevented this phenomenon from expanding further.

CONCLUSIONS

This article aims at drawing attention on this little known mosaic, which is an important part of the phenomenon of tomb mosaics, both in Sardinia and in the Western Mediterranean Sea (Duval 1976).

The discovery of this mosaic, inserted inside a Christian worship space, supports the thesis of funerary churches being the natural habitat of tomb mosaics. Specifically, this tomb mosaic is important for Sardinia, since it considerably differs from other examples discovered in the same

island, most of them having a horizontal disposition, instead of vertical like the mosaic of *Fl(avius) Rogatianus*. This leads us to think that several influences affected Sardinia around the V century, coming from both the Tunisian and Algerian areas, thus creating a mixture of copybooks which local artisans reused, not always with enough skill.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BCTH = *Bulletin Archéologique du Comité des Travaux Historiques*, Paris.

CIL II = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum. Inscriptiones Hispaniae Latinae*, Berlin.

CIL III = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum. Inscriptiones Asiae, provinciarum Europae Graecarum, Illyrici Latinae*, Berlin.

CIL VI = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum. Inscriptiones urbis Romae Latinae*, Berlin.

CIL X = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum. Inscriptiones Bruttiorum, Lucaniae, Campaniae, Siciliae, Sardiniae Latinae*, Berlin.

DG = BALMELLE C; BLANCHARD LEMÉE M.; CRISTOPHE, J.; DARMON, J. P.; GUIMIER-SORBETS, A. M.; LAVAGNE, H.; PRUDHOMME, R.; STERN, H. (1985-2002): *Le décor géométrique de la mosaïque romaine*. I-II, Paris.

IL Afr. = *Inscriptions latines d'Afrique (Tripolitaine, Tunisie, Maroc)*, Paris, 1923-.

IL Alg. = *Inscriptions latines d'Algérie*, Paris, 1922-.

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