

The Triumph of Dionysus in Two Mosaics in Spain

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Among the numerous representations of the Bacchic Triumph on Roman mosaics there is one type that stands out in its singularity: a mosaic divided into two superposed panels. This iconographic particularity, although also known in other themes, is documented only in three Roman pavements, and is related in each to scenographic representations of the myth of Dionysus, in which the house owners themselves participated as actors, while conveying at the same time an allegorical message: the triumph and virtues embodied by the gods.

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Two Spanish-Roman mosaics of the Bacchic Triumph combine two episodes in a single panel, depicted in two registers, placed one above the other, and separated by a dividing line. These scenes present a narrative sequence, such as those found on some mosaics with hunting themes, where successive episodes from the same hunt appear in several registers:¹ e.g. on the mosaic depicting agricultural tasks in Cherchel, dated to the beginning of the third century CE;² on some pavements displaying mythological themes, such as the Cherchel mosaic of the late third century CE and the Tipasa mosaic of the early fourth century CE, featuring Achilles' legend in three superposed scenes,³ and the Vienne mosaic, dated 220-230 CE, in which an inebriated Hercules is represented on the lower frieze while the gods look on from the upper one.⁴ The combination of various episodes in a continuous narrative style is also documented for Dionysiac mosaics: e.g. the recently discovered mosaic at Sepphoris, from the beginning of the third century CE;⁵ the Dionysiac mosaic at Gerasa, of the mid-third century CE,⁶ distributed among the Pergamon Museum, the Texas Orange University, and the Spanish Embassy in Damascus;

and finally the Cypriot pavement of the House of Aion in Nea Paphos, dated to the second quarter of the fourth century CE.⁷ However, Bacchic Triumphs featuring bipartite schemes have been found to date only in the late Roman Spanish mosaics at Fuente Alamo (Córdoba) and Baños de Valdearados (Burgos), as well as in the mosaic at Sheikh Zouède (Northern Sinai),⁸ with one difference between them: while the Spanish scenes are exclusively Dionysiac, and present a chronological narrative sequence, in the Sheikh Zouède mosaic, the Bacchic Triumph, while also appearing in a continuous narrative style, shares the space with the mythological episode of Phaedra and Hippolytus.

The Dionysiac mosaic from the late Roman *villa* at Fuente Alamo,⁹ dated to the fourth century CE, according to the archaeological finds, paved the rectangular area of an apsidal room, probably the *oecus*, which was entered by five steps through an open patio paved with a figurative mosaic divided horizontally into three panels featuring Pegasus' *toilette*, the three Graces, a maenad and a satyr.¹⁰ The connection between the two pavements reinforces the association of the Dionysiac themes with the three Graces, as portrayed in the patio pavement, and also documented for mosaics at Lixus and at Vinon.¹¹ The apsidal part of the front, approached by one step, is decorated by a shell with 27 radiating flutes, framed by a border of polychrome scrolls of acanthus leaves with inserted fleur-de-lis, springing from a stem in the centre of the straight area.

The polychrome Dionysiac mosaic (5.10 x 4.75 m, Fig.1), is framed by a border of spirals and a frieze of simple swastikas and inserted squares. The mosaic surface is divided into two superposed rectangular panels.¹² The lower panel (2.90 x 1.07 m.), vividly presents Dionysus, accompanied by maenads and satyrs, in the victorious battle over the Indians. In the central part the god and a satyr vent their merciless fury on a kneeling Indian who is defending himself with raised arms. Dionysus, of whom only the upper body is preserved, appears nude beneath a cloak on his left shoulder. In his right hand he is holding the *thyrsus*, with which he attacks the Indian. His head is adorned with tendrils and a bunch of grapes on either side of his face, as in the upper panel. The satyr is wearing a *nebris* floating over his shoulder and shaking the *pedum* in his right hand raised above his head. The group on the left is formed by three figures: a fallen Indian, his hair standing on end in fear, is supporting himself on his left arm upon the oblong shield, his short triangular sword beside him; he is being mauled and disemboweled by a lioness; behind him, another Indian, head in profile, armed with a sword and oblong shield with central umbo, is trying to defend his fellow fighter from the attack of a maenad dressed in a tunic girdled tightly around her waist, and raising a torch in her right hand.



Fig. 1: Fuente Alamo mosaic (after L.A. López Palomo)

On the right side of the panel another group features a maenad, of whom only the upper part is preserved, attired and holding a torch like the maenad on the left, and attacking another fallen Indian who is attempting to protect himself by holding his shield over his head.

Dionysus' battle against the Indians, discussed at length by Nonnos (*Dion.* 13-24; 26-40) and in an earlier summarized version by Lucian (*Bacch.* 2), is quite unusual in the scenography of Roman mosaics. Only two other representations of the battle against the Indians are known.

One, found on a mosaic at Tusculum, dated not earlier than the third century CE, features an episode similar to that on the Spanish pavements: the crucial moment of the battle, when Dionysus and a maenad vent their fury on an Indian, who tries to protect himself with his shield.¹³ The other example, a mosaic in Amiens, dated to the end of the second century or the beginning of

the third century CE, presents the last scene of the battle, in which a maenad is leading an Indian with his hands tied behind his back.¹⁴ These representations seem to derive from Hellenistic paintings, such as those decorating the temple of Dionysus in Lesbos, according to Longus' description (IV 3). The closest precedent for these mosaics can be found on Arretine pottery, as well as on second century sarcophagi. The iconography of the battle also lives on in Byzantine art in two ivory pyxides from the sixth century CE.¹⁵ The triumph of Dionysus over the Indians is mentioned by Augustan and first century CE authors, such as Seneca (*Phaedra* 753 ss.): *Et tu, thyrsigera Liber ab Indis / Intonsa iuvenis perpetuus coma, / Tigres pampinea cuspede territans / Ac mitra cohibens cornigerum caput*; Silius Italicus (*Pun.* 17, 645 ss.): *Ipse astans curru atque auro decoratus et ostro / Martia praebebat spectanda Quiribus ora: / Qualis odoratis descendens Liber ab Indis / Egit pampineos frenata tigride currus*; and Martial (8, 26, 7): *Nam cum captivos ageret sub curribus Indos / Contentus gemina tigride Bacchus erat*. In contrast to the representations of the battle itself, scenes in which Indians form part of the Bacchic Triumph are frequent on Roman mosaics, representing one of the trophies won by the god along his mythical journey, as found for example, in the mosaics at Sétif, El Djem or Nea Paphos,¹⁶ or on numerous sarcophagi.¹⁷

The upper panel (3.22 x 1.43 m.) at Fuente Alamo represents the Triumph of Dionysus, a theme comprehensively dealt with in literary sources (*Prop.* 3.17, 21-22; *Virg. Egl.* 5, 29; *Aen.* 6, 804-805; *Ovid. Ars* I, 549-550; *Sil.* 17, 645-648; *Luc. Bacch.* I; *Nonnos Dion.* 40 ss.). It is frequently presented in Roman art, especially on sarcophagi, as well as in the mosaics from Spain and North Africa from across a wide chronology.¹⁸ The panel features the Bacchic retinue accompanying the god (Fig. 2) on a background of white *tesserae* arranged in overlapping scales. Dionysus is reclining in his chariot, turned backwards, in a pose similar to that in the fresco painting in the Vetii House in Pompeii, in the Gerasa mosaic and on numerous sarcophagi.¹⁹ The vehicle, comprising a curved box and six-spoked wheels, is being pulled by two tigresses in profile advancing to the right, with lowered heads, in a similar posture as those in the mosaics of Torre de Palma, Liédena, Thysdrus, and Trèves. The god is half nude, with a cloak covering his legs; he is crowned with tendrils and a bunch of grapes on either side of his face. He is holding the cloak over his back with his right hand, and holding the reins with his left. The iconography of Dionysus alone in a chariot and usually standing, is frequently found in North African mosaics, as well as in those of Ostia, Nea Paphos, Trèves and Antioch, but is rare in Spanish examples, where it has been found only on the pavements at Alcolea, Olivar del Centeno and Tarragona.²⁰ Behind the chariot there is a feminine



Fig. 2: Detail of the upper register of the Fuente Alamo mosaic, Dionysus and Ariadne (after J. Lancha).

figure in profile, possibly Ariadne. She is wearing a short tightly girdled tunic and holding a veil in her left hand; her hair is arranged in the pyramid style typical of the fourth century CE. In contrast to the representations on the mosaics of Baños de Valdearados and other pavements (see below), where Ariadne appears inside Dionysus' chariot, here she is outside it, as on the Antioch pavement (dated to the Antonine period or the mid-third century CE), perhaps with the intention of emphasizing the god's triumph.²¹ In the center of the procession Pan, pulling the chariot, is dancing with a *pedum* in his left hand, as often depicted in other Dionysiac mosaics. A maenad, only partly preserved, is walking beside and to the left of the chariot, similar in her position in the mosaics from Caeseraugusta, Torre Albarragena and Sousse. The Bacchic procession begins with a group formed by Silenus astride a donkey, as quoted

by the sources (Ovid. *Ars* I 543-547; *Met.* IV 26-27; *Fast.* I 399; Lucian. *deor. concil.* 4; *Bacch.* 4), led by a young satyr and accompanied by a maenad, also in profile, with a long, pleated, tightly girdled tunic, an arched veil floating over her head. Silenus on a donkey is also depicted in other Spanish mosaics from Itálica, Conimbriga, Mérida, Liédena, and Baños de Valdearados.²² Outside Spain this theme appears frequently on mosaics in North Africa, Gerasa, Sepphoris, and Sheikh Zouède. San Nicolás, considers it possible that the satyr and Silenus could be the portraits of the owners of the villa, in this case, father and son, as occurs in other Spanish Dionysiac mosaics (see below). He bases his supposition on various appraisals of the figures of Silenus and the satyr: the superior artistic quality of their execution compared with the rest of the mosaic, the clearly defined and individualized physiognomic features, and the fact that both figures appear in the picture as spectators of the scene.²³

The two registers of this pavement follow a thematic and chronological sequence corresponding to Dionysus' history, such as the battle against the Indians and the god's victory, which allude to the civilizing and cosmocratic nature of Dionysus. According to Turcan, the Greek poets sang of Dionysus as the *Cosmokrator*, who bestows civilized life upon the *oikoumene*.²⁴ This Hellenistic figure of the colonizing hero, conqueror of the brute and disorderly forces of evil, surrounded by the aura of prestige conferred upon the civilizing hero, was very successfully resurrected in the Roman period. This same Silenus figure is therefore presented as a Socratic type: a mature man, the image of wisdom and inner equilibrium, with broad forehead and bushy beard; he appears nude from the waist up, with a white cloak, and carries a philosopher's cane, the personification of philosophical culture - Dionysus' *pedagogus*.

The Dionysiac mosaic of the late Roman villa at Baños de Valdearados (Fig. 3), dated to between the beginning and the mid-fifth century CE, and encompassing an area of 66 square meters, was discovered in a very good state of preservation.²⁵ The richly polychromatic mosaic paved a room facing north-northwest, probably the *oecus* of the villa, is 9.90 m long by 6.65 m wide. The walls comprise a socle topped by adobe walls decorated in the interior with stucco work. The entrance to this room is preceded by three steps, 3 m. wide. At some earlier stage, the room had featured another mosaic, upon which the Dionysiac mosaic was laid, leading to the straightening of its walls.²⁶ A border with a band of volutes, framed within four lines of black *tesserae*, is located over the threshold, while an orthogonal composition of adjacent scales appears on the opposite internal side. A border of a three-strand guilloche frames the surface of the pavement proper, formed by a border of double meanders of swastikas, with a two-strand guilloche, leaving six horizontal rectangular spaces



Fig. 3: Baños de Valdearados mosaic
(after J.L. Argente)

at the sides, two in the larger ones and one in the smaller ones. These are filled by six hunting scenes, four of which are accompanied by a Latin inscription with the names of the winds: *Eurus*, a dog chasing a hare; *Zefyrus* (sic), a dog chasing a gazelle; *Notus*, a dog chasing a deer; *Boreas*, a dog chasing a doe.²⁷ The corners are filled by four squares decorated with male busts, three of them wearing tunics, while the fourth has a nude torso; each carries a spear over his left shoulder. Although these figures are placed at the angles, there are no details allowing us to identify them as representations of the seasons, or of the winds. A new border of a six-strand guilloche frames the 5 × 2.50 m *emblema* of the mosaic, which is divided into two rectangular panels of different sizes, separated by a line of fragmented multi-coiled volutes; both are decorated with figurative scenes appearing in back view from the entrance, and intended to be viewed from the main part of the room.

The larger upper panel features a band decorated in the centre with a fluted *krater* with a truncated cone foot; scrolls with heart-shaped leaves and vine clusters grow from the *krater*. This is enframed by a rectangular field which resembles the upper part of a building with a pediment, two doves on its roof, and two triangles in the vertices. The pediment presents a line of spirals on the



Fig. 4: Upper register of the Baños de Valdearados mosaic (after J.L. Argente)

exterior part and a central rosette, made up of a simple guilloche and several concentric circles, upon a surface decorated with spirals. The figurative scene (2.50 m long by 2.30 m high; Fig. 4) represents the Bacchic procession depicted on a line representing a rocky landscape, in a variegated composition of ten figures near the drunken Dionysus and Ariadne, who occupy the center of the scene. The god, larger than the other figures, is enclosed in an aureole of four circular bands; he is wearing a wide cloak covering his left shoulder and his legs, leaving his torso and feet bare. He is holding Ariadne's right wrist in his right hand and has his left hand around the neck of Ampelos, who is nude, his body dark-colored; the latter resemble the group of the drunken Bacchus of the Complutum mosaic.²⁸ Ariadne is wearing a long transversally pleated tunic very similar to that worn by Ariadne in the Mérida mosaic;²⁹ she is holding a *thyrsus* ending in a palm, and has a tall hairdo similar to that of the so-called Eudoxia in the Museum of Torlonia, from the end of the fourth century CE.³⁰ The pleated folds of the tunics of the divine couple and the anatomical study of the god's chest are conspicuous elements in this representation. Two maenads appear to the right of Ariadne, one of whom has her right arm raised above her head, and a damaged figure of Pan, who is easily recognizable by his

attributes, such as the leg of a goat, the horns on his forehead, the *thyrsus* ending in a palm leaf placed on his left shoulder and behind him, a cup similar to a late form of Spanish *sigillata*. A figure in profile, also with a palm *thyrsus*, completes this group. The group on the right is made up of five figures, of whom the most conspicuous is Silenus --a white-haired, bearded old man, with a young satyr supporting him by his right arm; they are accompanied by a donkey, of which only the front part is visible. Two maenads in tunics with wide pleats stand near them, one holding a palm leaf. The upper half of a figure in profile blowing a horn, can be seen at the end of the panel, close to the frame. All the clothes appear undulating, as if blown by the wind, giving the scene a sense of movement. The background is enlivened by triangles, squares, Maltese crosses, rhombuses and stars.

The iconography of Dionysus embracing Ariadne, alone or accompanied by members of his retinue, is already known from Attic pottery of the fourth century BCE, as well as from small Hellenistic terracotta altars.³¹ The presence of Ariadne next to a drunken Bacchus is rather unusual in Roman art, although it is documented in some reliefs and sarcophagi, such as that in the Mattei Palace, or on a mosaic pavement in Antioch from the House of the Bacchic *thiasos*, dated to the first half of the second century CE. In both cases, she was identified as a maenad.³² The iconographic type of a drunken Dionysus, alone or leaning on a satyr, is very frequent on Roman mosaics pavements: in Antioch, Byblos, Argos, Thessalonica, Mytilene, Rhodes, Koroni, Aquincum, Cologne, and Carthage. In Spain it is documented for the mosaics of Italica, Complutum and Utebo.³³ In addition to the mosaic and sculpture parallels, this iconographic type also lived on in Coptic textiles of the fifth to the seventh centuries CE, in which Dionysus appears enveloped in a halo, as portrayed in the mosaic at Burgos.³⁴ Guardia Pons finds great similarities between the central group of the Burgos mosaic and that of the Vienne pavement, dated to 220-230 CE, which represent the drunken Hercules between a satyr and a bacchante. Both groups share the same arrangement of Dionysus/Hercules in relation to Ariadne/bacchante, and Ampelos/satyr, as well as the absence of the empty cup that usually dangles from the god's hand.³⁵ Sometimes the group of the drunken Dionysus leaning on a satyr is replaced by Hercules *bibens*, as for example in the pavements at Cártama, Rome, Lyon, Vienne, House of the Horses in Carthage, Sfax, Gerasa, and Sheikh Zouède; parallel scenes can also be found on sarcophagi.³⁶

On the lower panel (Fig. 5), three sides display a band decorated with scrolls of tendrils and heart-shaped leaves, springing from two fluted *kraters* on the base of a truncated cone placed at the lower corners; two pairs of doves are

placed on the *kraters*, three of them leaning over the cup, while the fourth one is erect, its head turned backwards. Two ducks appear within each of the side scrolls, while two busts, one male and one female, are depicted within the two central scrolls of the lower band, and probably represent the owners of the house.³⁷

The figurative scene (2.50 m long and 2.22 m high) presents the Dionysiac Triumph, with three figures participating: Dionysus, Ariadne and Pan, who appear on a background of decorative motives - birds, Solomon knots, baskets, and geometrical motifs. Dionysus is standing in his chariot, which is being pulled by two dark-colored panthers moving to the right, along a line of rocky landscape. The god has a strongly modeled nude torso, with a cloak covering his left shoulder and back, falling from under his right arm, and over the chariot box; he is holding the *thyrsus* in his left hand and an overturned *krater* in his right. A bunch of grapes falls on either side of his face, similar to the two representations of the god in the mosaic at Fuente Alamo (see above). This sort of headdress, created by a horizontal rod from the ends of which the two grape bunches hang, is identically documented in the figures of Bacchus, Silenus, a maenad, and Autumn on the Complutum Dionysiac pavement,³⁸ or in the Autumn bust of the pavement at Los Carabancheles, Madrid, dated as late as the fifth century CE.³⁹ Outside Hispania, the closest parallel can be found in a mosaic at Lambesis, from the early Severan period, where Bacchus' bust is depicted, also surrounded by an aureole and with two succulent grape bunches on the sides of his face, and the busts of the seasons surrounding him.⁴⁰ A female figure is depicted inside the chariot, to his left, her legs not visible. She is probably Ariadne, with a tall hairdo, similar to those in Mérida and Fuente Alamo, wearing a tunic that clings to her waist, a *krater* in her left hand and a *flabellum* with which she is fanning the drunken god, in her right. Behind the chariot a fur-clad Pan is playing the *syrinx*. The chariot has a square box with over-long sides, similar to that in Liédena, and ten-spoke wheels. The chariot box is decorated with guilloche and lattice patterns, painted or sculpted, such as found in other mosaics, e.g. the North African Triumphs at El Djem, Sabratha, Sétif, and Cherchel, and the Spanish ones at Torre de Palma, Valencia de Alcántara, Liédena, and Tarraco - and frequently also on Dionysiac sarcophagi.⁴¹

The iconography of Dionysus holding an overturned *krater* has been documented in other Spanish Triumphs of the second-third centuries CE: the mosaics of Andelos, Itálica, and Ecija - the latter with the *krater* pouring over a *rhyton* - and also on the late Roman pavement at Torre de Palma.⁴² Outside of Spain, the iconographic type of Dionysus in the triumphal chariot, pouring from a *krater* can be found at Ostia, Trèves, Thysdrus at the Bardo Museum,



Fig. 5: Lower register of the Baños de Valdearados mosaic (after J.L. Argente)

and of Sheikh Zouède; holding the *krater* in his hand, but not pouring from it, is found in Acholla, and Sepphoris; while on the Corinth mosaic the god seems to be carrying a *rhyton*, thus placing it closer to the scene at Ecija.⁴³ Contrary to Dunbabin's comment on the North African mosaics, where the presence of the *krater* seems to be an intrusive element,⁴⁴ in Spanish mosaics it is the usual attribute of the god since the third century CE, shown by the above-mentioned examples. Its greater prevalence in Andalusia could even suggest that it was an adaptation by Betic craftsmen or workshops.⁴⁵ The figurative scene on the Baños de Valdearados mosaic might be illustrating the famous *pompe* of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, described by Atheneus (*Deipn.* V 200 ss.), who mentions one of the triumphs in which Dionysus offers a libation, symbol of divine power.⁴⁶

The figure of Ariadne accompanying the god inside the chariot was documented on Greek pottery as early as the sixth century BCE, and later on in Pompeian wall-paintings, in reliefs and sarcophagi, and on later textiles.⁴⁷ The Spanish-Roman mosaics reflect the couple of Dionysus and Ariadne in the chariot found in pavements at Ecija, Cabra, and perhaps also Andelos and Liédena. Elsewhere, both figures appear in the chariot in Gerasa, and in North African mosaics at Sant-Leu, Sabratha, Orange, and Sétif. Although Donderer identified the figure as *Nike* in the latter mosaic on account of the palm leaf she is holding, I do not consider this a determining factor since Ariadne too carries this attribute in the other cases, in which her identification is beyond doubt.

The style of the scenes is characterized mainly by *horror vacui*, the two-dimensionality of the figures and their marked frontality, rounded heads and exophthalmic eyes, as well as their lack of proportion. All these features can also be found on other late Roman pavements in Spain, and are but one more example of the expressionist artistic trends adopted in the Mediterranean region from the end of the fourth century CE. In Spain, the closest stylistic parallels to the Burgos mosaic can be found in Santisteban del Puerto (Jaén), the *Annius Ponius* in Mérida, and in that of Estada (Huesca), within a chronology fixed in the fifth and sixth centuries CE.⁴⁸

Theatrical decoration, evident in the architectural structure with a pediment of the upper register, resembling a *scaenae frons*, flanked by two emblematic figures in profile, and the presence of the portraits of the owners in the lower area, may suggest a scenographic representation of the myth of Dionysus, in which the leading actors are the house owners themselves.⁴⁹ Some mosaics are known to depict the staging of certain literary texts,⁵⁰ for the rich *domini* enjoyed the staging of Classical myths in their *triclinia* and *oecus*, in which they themselves, their guests and servants played the parts. Such an interpretation has been suggested, for example, for the figures of Silenus and the satyr on the pavement at Fuente Alamo (see above); and for the mosaic of the Bacchic Triumph at "El Olivar del Centeno" (Cáceres), for which the discoverer proposes the theory that the owners of the villa appear as the maenad and Silenus, who can be seen in the background as spectators viewing the scene.⁵¹ Thus too, on the mosaic of the Bacchic Triumph at Tarragona, the god, according to the same scholar, is a divinized depiction of the owner of the villa.⁵² This may also be the case for the mosaic of *Annius Ponius* of Mérida,⁵³ as well as the Dionysiac banquet represented on the Carthage mosaic, where the dancers are clearly imitating Silenus playing the *syrix*, and the maenad with castanets, thus illustrating the literary texts by Nonnos (*Dion.* XVIII 90 ss.) and by Sidonius Apollinarius (*Ep.* IX 13) describing the celebration of Bacchic dances in Late Antiquity banquets, in which the real dancers personified Dionysiac figures as a sign of animation and *joie de vivre*.⁵⁴

On the Sheikh Zouède polychrome mosaic in northern Sinai (Fig. 6), dated to between the mid-fourth and mid-fifth centuries CE, the mythological scenes are likewise split into two registers clearly separated by a frame of two lines of black *tesserae*. A third panel in the lower part of the pavement encloses a *tabula ansata* with an inscription in Greek of welcome, surrounded by a Nilotic frieze, including various birds, plants, a snake and an overturned basket of grapes being pecked at by a bird. This 4.75 m x 3 m mosaic used to decorate the floor of a large rectangular hall, 7.25 m x 6.60 m, while the other pavements displayed



Fig. 6: Sheikh Zouède mosaic (after A. Ovadiah *et al.*)

geometrical motifs.⁵⁵

The scene of a Bacchic *thiasos* appears in the central register, developed horizontally in two friezes with no dividing line in between. The procession starts at the lower right end with a dancing maenad, a *thyrsus* in her right hand and *tympanum* in her left, wearing a swirling *chiton*, almost identical to the assumed Ariadne or maenad accompanying Silenus on the upper register at Fuente Alamo; she is turned towards the satyr who is following her, and blowing his horn, similar to the figure located in the right border of the lower register at Baños de Valdearados, who is holding the *pedum* in his left hand. Pan comes next, dancing and playing castanets in his raised left hand, and he holds a bunch of grapes in his right hand; the *syrinx* and another pair of castanets are under his arm. His head is turned towards the next group, comprising Hercules *bibens* leaning on a satyr, and separated from Pan by a leopard clasping a *krater*. The procession ends with another *krater* at the left. On the upper part, from right to left, a satyr playing cymbals is dancing with a maenad playing castanets, one arm above her head, like the maenads on the Spanish mosaics. They are followed by Papposilenus astride a donkey, and then by Dionysus' chariot pulled by a centaur playing an *aulos* and a centauress strumming the lyre, and led by Eros with the reins in his hands (Fig. 7).⁵⁶ The god is sitting in his chariot, of which can be seen only two eight-spoke wheels. His headdress features two bunches of grapes falling over his temples, similar to the Spanish mosaics at Fuente Alamo and Baños de Valdearados. He is wearing a long-sleeved tunic



Fig. 7: Detail of the Sheikh Zouède mosaic (after A. Ovadia *et al.*)

and a cloak that covers his legs, his feet visible beneath. He is holding the *thyrsus* in his left hand while his right one holds a *krater* from which he is pouring liquid towards which a second leopard is running. The god's posture is reminiscent of the figure in the Triumph at Baños de Valdearados. A vine bearing three bunches of grapes closes the scene at the upper left. Several Greek inscriptions indicate the names of *Herakles*, *Eros* and *Dionysos*, as well as the words *skirtos* and *telete*, referring to the Dionysiac mysteries. The entire procession is pervaded by a sense of movement that connects the various groups and lends a narrative continuity to the scene, despite its presentation in two planes.

The upper register depicts the myth of Phaedra and Hippolytus by means of three groups of figures. From left to right we can see Phaedra sitting in an *aedicula* with curtains; in the center Hippolytus, dressed as a hunter, in a long-sleeved v-necked tunic very similar to that of Dionysus in both registers at Baños de Valdearados, is accompanied by his dog, and receiving Phaedra's letter from the hands of her nursemaid, in the presence of Eros; on the right, Hippolytus' companions, next to the horse, are waiting for him to set off hunting. The names in Greek of *Phaedra*, *Eros*, *Trophos*, *Hippolitos*, and *Kinagoi* identify the figures. Greek inscriptions at the top and bottom of this register invite the spectator to behold the beauty of the mosaic.⁵⁷ Choosing these two mythological episodes for a single pavement was probably intended to underline the



Fig. 8: Detail of the upper register of the Baños de Valdearados mosaic, Ariadne, Dionysus, Ampelos, Silenus, satyrs and maenads (after J.L. Argente)



Fig. 9: Detail of the Sheikh Zouède mosaic: Silenus, satyr and maenad (after A. Ovadia *et al.*)

consequences of different behaviours: in other words, they were chosen for their allegorical meaning .

The analogies between the three pavements discussed here are determined first by the division of the figurative space into two superposed registers, and second by the architectural decoration and the border adorned with aquatic birds at Baños de Valdearados and in Sheikh Zouède. However, most surprising is the close stylistic relation they bear, due possibly to the fact that three are



Fig. 10: Detail of the upper register of the Baños de Valdearados mosaic, satyr and maenads (after J.L. Argente)

works of art from the periphery (Figs. 8-10): the pose of the god in the chariot, with the *thyrsus* in his hand, the upturned *krater*, the v-necked tunic, the central position of the figure of Pan, the posture of the maenads with arm raised above the head, the exophthalmic eyes and the similar expressions of all the figures, the shape of the eyebrows and nose, the sense of movement, the lack of proportions of the bodies, the frontal or three-quarter positions, the hairstyles, the clothing, i.e. all those features that characterized the art of the Late Empire, dominated by *horror vacui*, and all in a continuous narrative in two registers. In regard to the Sheikh Zouède mosaic, the Ovadiahs have noted that the heads depicted in profile of the figures of the maenad, the satyr, Pan and Phaedra's nursemaid are one of the few instances of profile views, since these are very rare on pavements of the Holy Land and of the neighbouring countries.⁵⁸ However, satyrs and bacchantes are also represented in profile on mosaics of the Dionysiac *thiasos* all dated to the beginning of the sixth century CE: at Gerasa, at the Villa of the Falconer in Argos, and at Sarrîn; particularly in the Nilotic frieze of the latter, one figure stands out, in profile and wearing the garland of the god Nile.⁵⁹ The Spanish Dionysiac mosaics of the Triumph, which span a wide period of time, frequently feature figures in profile: e.g. the figure of Pan in the Andelos pavement, that of Bacchus in that of Alcolea, and the two maenads of Torre de Palma, as well as the maenad accompanying Hercules *bibens* in the Cártama mosaic. It is precisely these stylistic features (Figs. 11-14), typical of the Sheikh Zouède mosaic, that mark it as the closest to the Spanish



Fig. 11: Detail of the Sheikh Zouède mosaic, satyr and maenad (after A. Ovadiah *et al.*)



Fig. 12: Detail of the upper register of the Fuente Alamo mosaic, maenad (after J. Lancha)

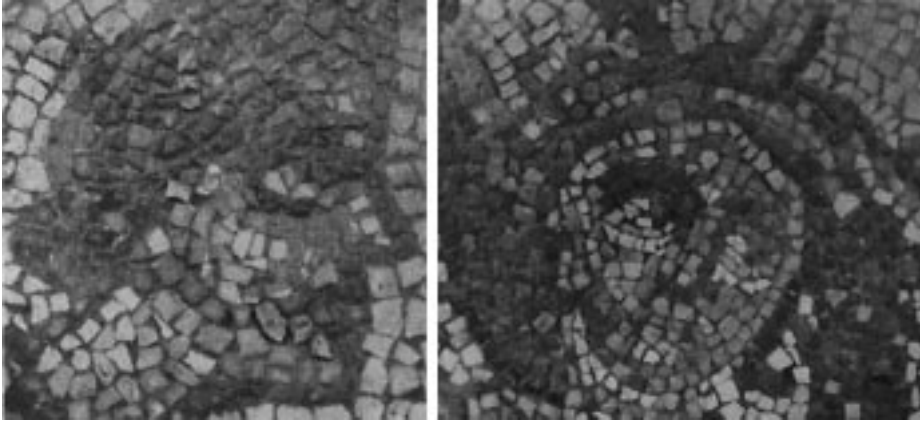


Fig. 13: Details of the upper register of the Fuente Alamo mosaic, Ariadne and Dionysus (after L.A. López Palomo)

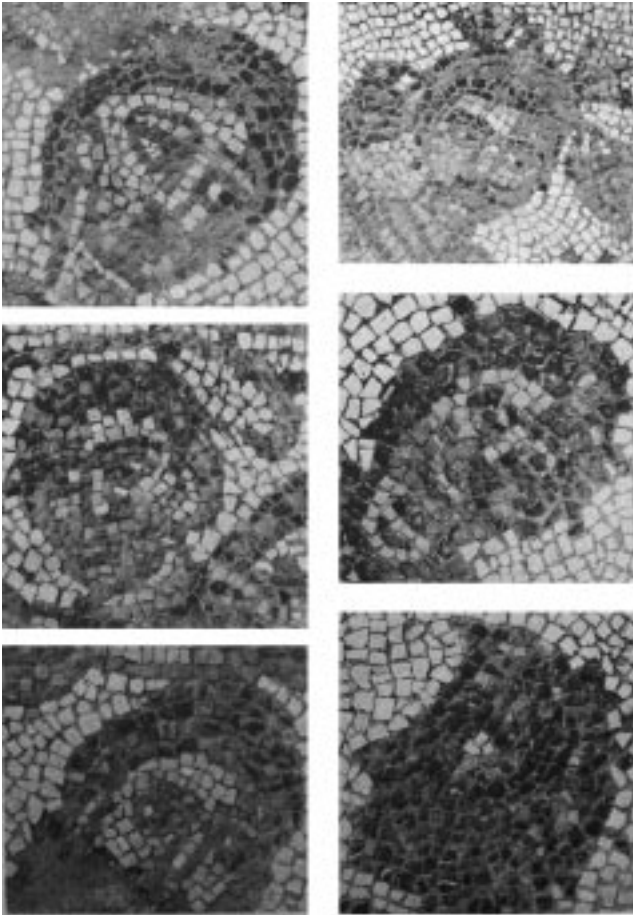


Fig. 14: Details of the lower register of the Fuente Alamo mosaic, Dionysus, Indians, maenads and satyrs (after L.A. López Palomo)



Fig. 15: Dionysiac mosaic at Mérida (Photograph: G. López Monteagudo)

pavements, especially to that of Fuente Alamo, where some figures (e.g. Ariadne, the maenad, Pan or the Indian), are almost identical. Furthermore, in the Baños de Valdearados mosaic the two figures, emblematically placed at either end of the higher panel (Figs. 8 and 10), are represented in profile, as in the Argos mosaic, and are similar to certain Roman sarcophagi from the second and third centuries CE.⁶⁰ Another Spanish mosaic of the Late Empire, from Mérida, decorated with two *quadrigas* and figures of the Dionysiac *thiasos* in the central circle, also presents close analogies to the Sheikh Zouède pavement, especially in the figures of the maenads dancing with arms raised, playing castanets and cymbals, and in the panther running towards the *krater* (Figs. 15-16).⁶¹

Not only do the three discussed mosaics show close similarities in their iconography, but also in possible interpretations conveyed by the images: the

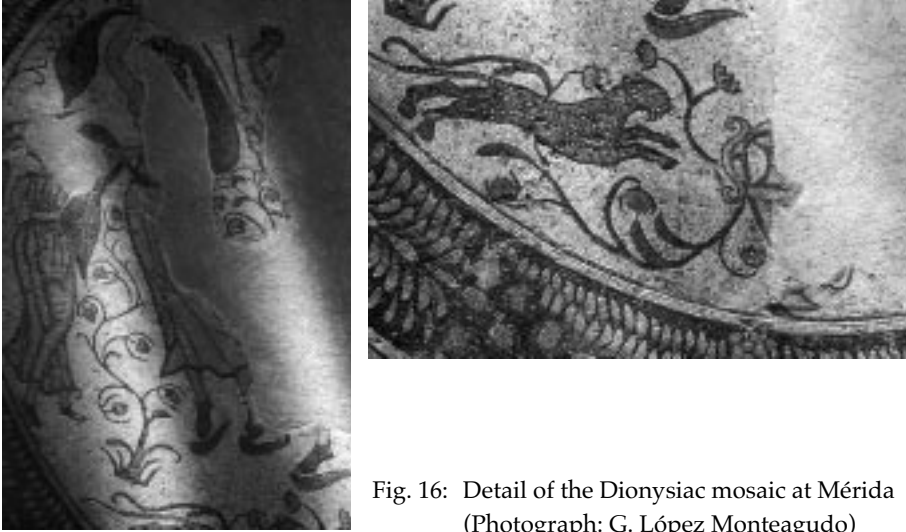


Fig. 16: Detail of the Dionysiac mosaic at Mérida
(Photograph: G. López Monteagudo)

persistent opposition between the divine and the human, the mortal and the immortal. The Triumph in all of them relates to the virtues of good over evil, depicted at Fuente Alamo by the victorious battle of Dionysus and his retinue against the Indians, who represent the brutal forces of Nature; in the Sheikh Zouède mosaic by confronting the characters of Hippolytus and Phaedra as embodiments of the moral ideas of good and evil,⁶² and finally, in Valdearados, the amorous affection of Ariadne for Dionysus, the union of the divine and the human, the *telete* that gives its name to the mystery. Ariadne, abandoned by Theseus on the island of Naxos, where Dionysus finds her asleep upon his return from India, is brought by the god in his triumphal chariot and made his wife, as expressed by Nonnos (*Dion.* XLVII 428-452), who has Dionysus comfort Ariadne with these words: *Young woman, why do you mourn an Athenian who has abandoned you? / Why do you keep Theseus' memory?, you have got Dionysus for a husband: / Instead of an ephemeral husband, an undying one / ... / Desire saves you for a better wedding. / Happy for having abandoned Theseus' poor heart: / On Dionysus' bed you will see the Star. / Could you ever wish for a greater joy than having at the same time, / Heaven for your home and Cronus' son for a father in law? / ... / I will make a crown of stars for you so that you are remembered / as Dionysus' bright wife...*⁶³

Likewise, Hippolytus represents virtue in rejecting Phaedra's proposal of love, for Phaedra is the wife of his father, Theseus. This *sophrosyne* will tragically lead to his death, when out of spite for having been rejected, Phaedra accuses him of trying to seduce her. He will die when his chariot is hurled die against the rocks by a gigantic wave (personified as a sea bull) that Theseus asks

Poseidon to conjure up, when Hippolytus is driving in his *quadriga* by the seashore (Eur.*Hipp.*1201-1248).⁶⁴ Hippolytus attains immortality, becoming a constellation, having been borne up to the heavens by divine favor.⁶⁵ Thus we see how the sacrifice of mortals, Ariadne in one case and Hippolytus in the other, is rewarded with immortality by turning them into constellations, as a reward for their upright behavior. These mortals are represented in the mosaics by the owners of the house who, through their roles as actors, not only identify themselves with the divine characters, but also subliminally suggest themselves to the viewers as repositories of the virtues embodied by the gods.

Notes

- 1 Dunbabin 1978: 48-50.
- 2 Bérard 1935: 115-142.
- 3 Bruhl 1931: 109-123; Leschi 1937: 25-41.
- 4 *Recueil Général des Mosaïques de la Gaule* III-1, 1979: 101-117; *ibid.* III-2, 1981: no.307, fig. XLIV.
- 5 Weiss and Talgam 1994: 231-237; see also, Turnheim and Ovadiah 1997: 107-116.
- 6 Joyce 1980: 307 ff.; Theophilidou 1984: 264-266.
- 7 Daszewski 1985.
- 8 Ovadiah *et alii* 1991: 181-191.
- 9 López Palomo III, 1987: 105-115; San Nicolás Pedraz 1994: 1289-1304.
- 10 López Monteagudo *et alii* 1988: 788-795; Blázquez *et alii* 1993: 271-275, figs. 36-38.
- 11 Euzennat 1966: 480; Lavagne 1994: 243-248.
- 12 San Nicolás Pedraz 1994a: 405-420, with a thorough study of all parallels and of the bibliography.
- 13 Donderer 1983: 125, Pl. LXXV, 1.
- 14 *Recueil Général des Mosaïques de la Gaule* I-1, 1957: 61-62, Pls. XXXI, 1 and XXXII.
- 15 San Nicolás Pedraz 1994a: 405-420.
- 16 Donderer 1988: 781-799; Foucher 1994: 70-80, fig. 17; Daszewski and Michaelides 1989: 24-27, fig. 12.
- 17 Matz II, 1968: 212 ff.; Matz IV, 1975: nos. 237-245. In Spain a scene represented in a Roman painting from the end of the first century or the second century CE, found in the House of Mitreo, Mérida, has been recently identified as Dionysus as the object of vassalage by three Indians accompanied by a herald, cf. Altieri 1996; Altieri: in press.
- 18 Fernández-Galiano 1984: 97-120; *LIMC* III: 515 -531, *s.v.* "Dionysos (in Peripheria Orientali)"; *LIMC* III: 540-566, *s.v.* "Dionysos/Bacchus"; *LIMC* IV: 908-923, *s.v.* "Dionysos/Bacchus (in Peripheria Occidentali)"; San Nicolás Pedraz 1994: 1289-1304, featuring the last Spanish findings; Dunbabin 1971: 52-65; Foucher 1975: 55-61.
- 19 *LIMC* III: 557, no.221, *s.v.* "Dionysos/ Bacchus"; Matz II, 1968: nos.78, 82, 84-86, 88, 90, 92, 108, 109, 142, 143, 149A, 149, 150, 161, Pls. 94, 98, 110, 111, 121, 134, 149, 166, 167, 170, 172, 180-183.
- 20 López Monteagudo *et alii* 1994: in press, with complete bibliography.
- 21 Levi 1947: 93-99, Pl. XVIc.

- 22 López Monteagudo 1990: 227, with all Spanish parallels.
- 23 San Nicolás Pedraz 1994: 1298.
- 24 Turcan 1966: 441-472.
- 25 Argente Oliver 1975: 899-912; Blázquez 1982: 407-423; Fernández-Galiano 1984: 107-108, fig. 6; *Corpus de Mosaicos Romanos de España* XII, 1998: 13-16, no.1, fig. 1, Pls. 1-3, 31-33.
- 26 Argente Oliver 1979: 46-58, fig. 18, Pls. II-VII.
- 27 Gómez Pallarés 1997: 76-78, Pl. 23.
- 28 Fernández-Galiano II, 1984a: 160-168, Pls. XXXI, LXXXVIII and XCI, also with parallels to other varieties, wherein the god, following the Praxitelic model, appears pouring from the krater by himself or leaning against a column.
- 29 *Corpus de Mosaicos Romanos de España* I, 1978: 34, no. 15, Pl. 26.
- 30 Bianchi-Bandinelli 1971: 292 ff., fig. 272.
- 31 LIMC III: 483-484, nos. 718-730, s.v. "Dionysos".
- 32 Matz IV, 1975: no. 288, Pl. 312; Levi 1947: 45-46. Pl. VII c.
- 33 *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II 12.2: 266-429; LIMC III: 521-522, nos. 78-85, s.v. "Dionysos (in Peripheria Orientali)"; LIMC IV: 913-914, nos. 106-128, s.v. "Dionysos (in Peripheria Occidentali)"; Fernández-Galiano II, 1984a: 160-167; *Corpus de los Mosaicos Romanos de España* IX, 1989: 23-24, no. 2, Pls. 8-9 and 33-34.
- 34 Weitzmann 1979: no. 123; LIMC III: 521-522, s.v. "Dionysos (in Peripheria Orientali)"; LIMC III: 547-548, s.v. "Dionysos/Bacchus".
- 35 Guardia Pons 1992: 121-127; *Recueil Général des Mosaïques de la Gaule* III-1, 1979: 101-117; *ibid.* II-2, 1981: no. 307, fig. XLIV.
- 36 Fernández-Galiano II, 1984: 160-167; LIMC V: 158-159 s.v. "Herakles" On the lower panel of the fragmentary mosaic at Gerasa, kept in the Pergamon Museum, the central group made up of three figures: a satyr carrying the cudgel and holding a drunken Hercules who is trying to undress the maenad, presents close parallels to the mosaics at Cártama and Lyon, cf. Kriseleit 1985: 18-21.
- 37 Blázquez 1994: 473-489.
- 38 Fernández-Galiano II, 1984a: 148-171, 179-180, Pls. LXXXI, LXXXV, LXXXVIII, LXXXIX, XCI and C.
- 39 *Corpus de los Mosaicos Romanos de España* V, 1982, 53-54, No. 38; Ferrete 1984: 229-233, Pls. 1-7.
- 40 Dunbabin 1978: 184, Pl. 183.
- 41 San Nicolás Pedraz 1994a: 405-420, with complete bibliography on the parallels; Turcan 1966: 441-472.
- 42 Fernández-Galiano 1984: 97-120, figs. 3, 5; Mezquíriz 1987: 59-61; López Monteagudo *et alii* 1997: in press, with complete bibliography.
- 43 Becatti IV, 1961: 197, no. 367, Pl. LIII; Parlasca 1959: 40-41, Pls. 40-41; Foucher 1975: 55-61, Pls. XX,1, XXI,2, XXIII,2; Dunbabin 1971: 52-65; *Corinth* I/V, Pls. 54, 57.
- 44 Dunbabin 1971: 52-65.
- 45 San Nicolás Pedraz 1994a: 405-420.
- 46 Picard 1948: 810-821.
- 47 LIMC III: 486, nos.763-769 s.v. "Dionysos"; LIMC III: 527-528, nn. 135-137 s.v. "Dionysos (in peripheria orientali)"; LIMC III: 556-557, nos. 208-220 s.v. "Dionysos/Bacchus"; Matz II, 1968: 188-212, Pls. 94-121.
- 48 Blázquez 1987: 28-34.
- 49 Blázquez 1997: in press.
- 50 Lancha 1990: 89-105.
- 51 García Hoz *et al.*, 1991: 396-398.

- 52 Fernández-Galiano 1984: 109-110.
 53 García y Bellido 1965: 201.
 54 Parrish 1995: 307-332.
 55 Ovadiah *et alii* 1991: 181-191.
 56 On Dionysiac Triumphs pulled by centaurs, cf. López Monteagudo 1998: in press.
 57 Cf. Ovadiah 1997: 441-444, Figs.1-4.
 58 Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 178, and nn.162,163.
 59 Akerström-Hougen 1974: 36, 110-116, Figs. 68, 70, Pls. VII-VIII; Balty 1990: 32-46, 77 and 79, Pls. XVII,1, XXXI,2, XXXII,1 and XL.
 60 Matz I, 1968: nos. 35 and 40, Pls. 32 and 37; Matz II, 1968: no.139, Pl. 162.
 61 *Corpus de los Mosaicos Romanos de España I*, 1978, 45-46, no. 43, Pls. 77, 79 and 101.
 62 For this approach, see Muczniak 1999: 137-138.
 63 The golden crown or tiara that was turned into a constellation afterwards.
 64 Such a scene is depicted on an Apulian volute *krater* of the third quarter of the fourth century BCE, cf. *LIMC V*: no.105, s.v. "Hippolytos I".
 65 A similar scene seems to be represented in the mosaic of the Auriga at Conimbriga, cf. Dunbabin 1982: 84-85; López Monteagudo 1998: 299 ff.

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