



Workers and Workshops of Mosaics in Egypt during Greco Roman period

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Abstract

Neither the literary nor the archaeological sources, supply us with sufficient information about mosaic workshops, which was called *Officina*, also we don't know who are the people carrying out the work, whether a single worker by his own or a group. we get some sporadic information about mosaic workers from a few sources, such as: stone inscriptions. Pliny mentioned in his *Natural history*, the only individual mosaic worker who became a celebrity after his death, he's the Pergamene artist Sossos who made the panel of the pigeons drinking from a vessel.

Most of signatures consisted of only the name of the worker and sometimes followed by verb "made" such as the panel of Bernice II from Themuis signed by the Egyptian artist Sophilos, who became famous in the Hellenistic period. Signatures supply us with information about both the social status and place of birth of mosaicists. In the Hellenistic period signatures didn't give much information except the names of artists and their origins.

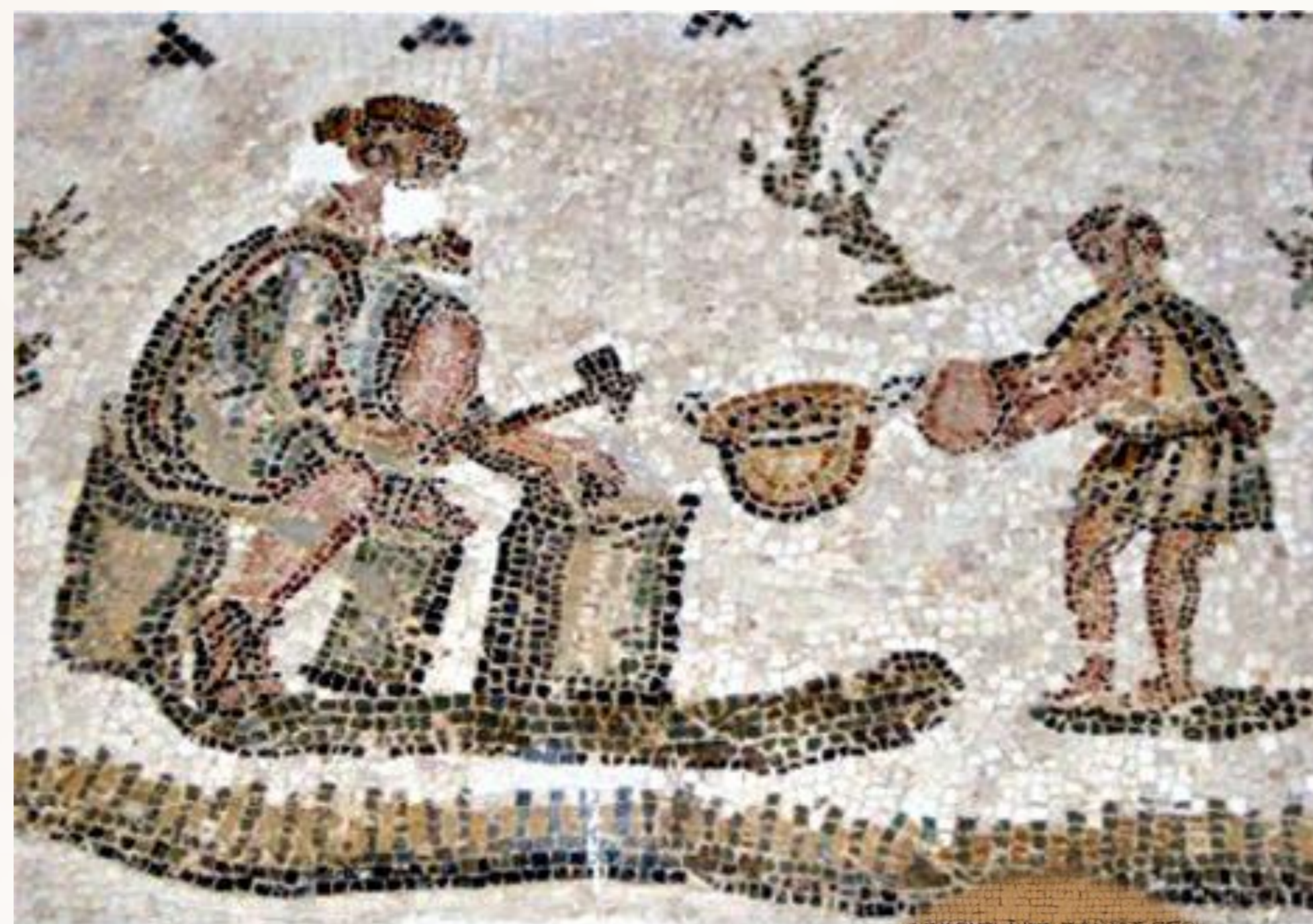
In the Roman period, the names rarely referred to places. Also workers were changing their crafts, or sometimes the boss would establish a workshop in a new center and train a group of local students. In the west, names on mosaic panels were still inscribed in Greek, which shows the distinguished status of the Greek workers in Egypt or the whole world.



Mosaics were classified as one of craftsmanship and not an art. And so mosaic craftsmen are considered just workers or decorators, since mosaic works are related to constructing and building purposes. we get some sporadic information about mosaic workers from a few sources, such as: stone inscriptions.

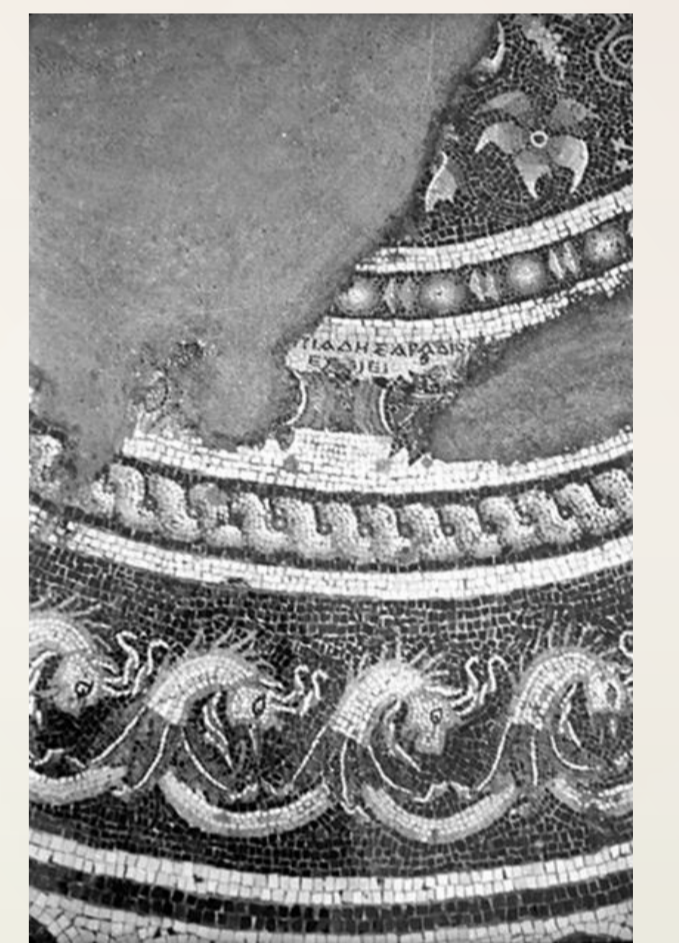
There is one stele found on a tomb in Ostia, which is dated from the beginning of the 4th century AD. As the stele shows mosaic workers counting the cubes in the upper part of the stele, then it may imply that the dead once had a mosaic workshop and this stele was erected for his memorial in posterity

Egypt has many different panels of mosaics in different places.



Another stele from Elalia (Uzalis), display now in Bardo museum, dated 2nd century A.D. depicted craftsman with his son, the name of his son write on the stele, his name Proklos, it is the only name which found on the stele, he was of great skill in his work, and he became a member of the city council.

This Stella is a witness about the workers of the mosaics, he appeared sits on a chair and in front of him is a trunk on which he puts the crumbs of stones, and in his hand is a hammer or chisel with which he cuts stones into blocks, and a small child stands in front of him is his son helping him in the work.



Pliny mentioned in his *Natural history*, the only individual mosaic worker who became a celebrity after his death, he's the Pergamene artist Sossos who made the panel of the pigeons drinking from a vessel. Vitruvius mentioned some details about the structure of the floor and its types, he didn't speak about mosaic workers or the way they accomplished the work.



Other panels of the Hellenistic period were also signed such as that from the Pergamene palace with what looks like a small paper signed by Hephaestion. Also the panel of the Dolphin from Delos, signed by [Askle] piades of Arados, and other two parts from the middle central panels found in Pompeii and signed by Dioskourides from Samos.



Signatures left on some panel also give us some information, as about seventy to eighty signatures were preserved.

Most of signatures consisted of only the name of the worker and sometimes followed by verb "made" such as the panel of Bernice II from Themuis signed by the Egyptian artist Sophilos, who became famous in the Hellenistic period. "ΣΩΦΙΛΟΣ ΕΠΟΙΕΙ" which means "Sophilos made"

The signature of Sophilos was not the first one to appear; two earlier signatures were found on two pebble mosaics dated to the fourth century BC., These were on the stag hunt panel from Pella with the signature of Gnosis "ΓΝΩΣΙΣ ΕΠΟΗΣΕΝ" which is one of the main pieces executed by pebbles

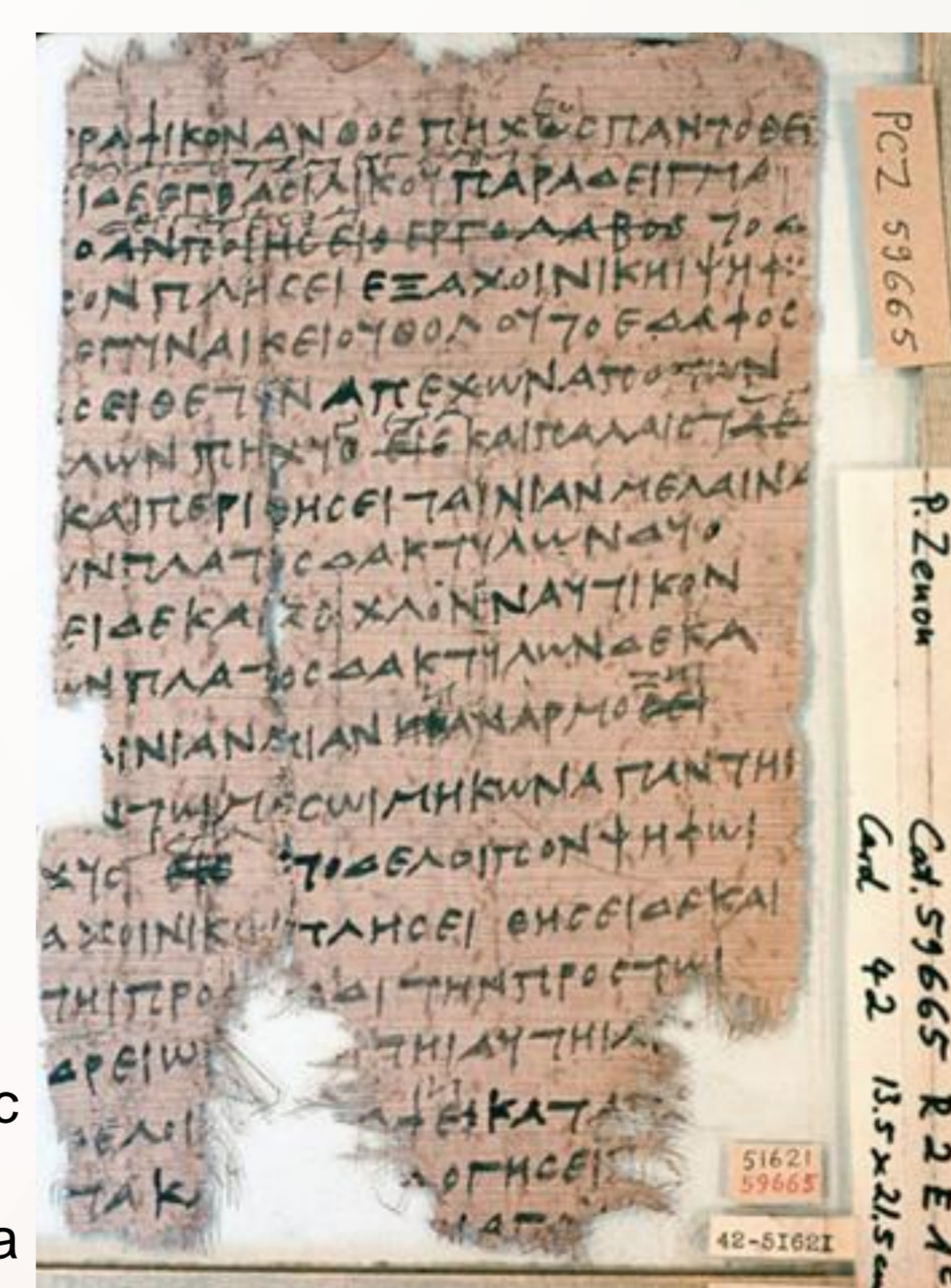
In villa from Lebanon villa Awazi, we found floor of mosaics depicted the names of the months; we found panel to April, depicted two names, one for craftsman, another one for the artist which painted the panel.



This source supplies us with some information about the mosaic placed in the two rooms of a bath in Philadelphia – Fayoum, where Zenon lived. The first room might be in a men's bath where a flower was made and the contractor started to follow the same model (Paradeigma), it was directed by the Ptolemaic royal court. While women's bath were preserved in a better state, and it was decorated with a black strip of two fingers width, of model called Kochlos Nautikos of nearly ten fingers width. These decorations were lately called wave crest, then another strip was put to fit all the previous decorations. In the middle of the flower we found the outer part of two floors filled with rough stones. We recognized that many details mentioned in this papyrus were quite obscure and unclear although they were important for two main reasons, the first that the design was defined in magnificent details, even the simple sides, such as the width of borders, were mentioned. Secondly that it was about a model offered by the central authority in Egypt followed by the contractor in the most detailed parts of the design and the whole theme was defined by this model.

Employment pay	Profession
50denarii	Baker
50denarii	ironsmith
50 denarii	builder
50 denarii	carpentrt
50denarii	Floor mosaic maker
60 denarii	Plaster maker
60denarii	Wall mosaic maker
75denarii	Wall painter

A decree, dated from Diocletian's reign (301 AD) revealed that mosaic workers were like other artists; as they had the same wages. They were divided into two kinds: The wall mosaic workers "Musaearius" or "Musivarius". Who got sixty Denarius, where as the floor mosaic workers Tessellarius or Tesserarius got fifty denarius, which means that wages weren't the same among mosaic workers, also there might be difference in wages between decorators and other ordinary workers who made the simple floors, free from any decorations this variance of wages was due to dangers the wall mosaic workers were facing on high building



In Egypt the only literary source who talked about the mosaic and its workers, is a part of Zenon's papyri, dated from the middle of the third century BC., in the Ptolemaic period.



Fragment of mosaic with the representation of a mosaics craftsman, preserved in the National Museum of Denmark in Copenhagen.

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