

The Mosaic of Ain El Heloui Discovered in Latakia in Syria

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The mosaic of Ain El Heloui was discovered at the site of Ain El Heloui, situated in the northern section of Latakia, a city on the Syrian coast. This mosaic paved a building that had been uncovered during the urgent excavations of 2007. Three years later, the mosaic - which was transferred - is currently at the Mosaics Laboratory at the Damascus citadel where it is being restored. It is quite difficult given the current situation in Syria, to determine the exact nature of the building housing the mosaic, which is located at the site along with other ruins. We are currently awaiting the results of the previous excavation in order to learn more about it. The main subject of the scene is consisting of an amazing representation of marine fauna, with many species of fishes, and crustaceans and mollusks. All animals are figured on a white background with spot shadows under their bellies, rendered from a blue glass tesserae, which have, unfortunately, mostly disappeared. These marine creatures are portrayed in a naturalist style, swimming in opposite directions so as to be viewed from either side

The panel of the Ain El Heloui mosaic represents an interesting example of the *figured* mosaic, known since the second century in the mosaic art of Syria. This mosaic is characterized by multi-frames, decorated with themes inspired either from the Greco-Roman mythology or from the daily life. This type of mosaic has marked mosaic art in Syria, especially during the Roman period. The main subject represented on this mosaic is considered as a scene of daily life. The marine scene is one of the preferred themes figured in mosaic art in the every province of the Roman Empire. One of the category of marine scene is the marine fauna which is distinguished by realistic representation of many species of fish known in the Mediterranean basin, along with crustaceans and mollusks. All these animals are depicted as they appear in their natural environment. The marine fauna scene can be found as early as the Hellenistic Period and in the mosaics and frescoes from the second century BC at Pompeii and in other parts of Italy. We can mention two mosaics from Pompeii, now exhibited in the National Archeological Museum in Naples. Another example of a marine fauna scene, dating back to the third century, is that of the mosaic at the Tarraco Museum. It was discovered in a Roman villa at the site of Cal-Lipolis in Spain. there are several small panels from Antioch, dating from 3 century AD, which include just some marine animals, particularly fish (mosaics discovered near the house of the Sun Dial and near the house of the Boat of Psyche, and the mosaic of the house of the Man of Letters in Daphne).

we propose to date the mosaic of Ain El Heloui to the Hadrianic-Antonine Period. This proposed date is largely supported by the many coins excavated near the mosaic in upper layers that belong to the Age of Hadrian.



Figure 1. Mosaic from Ain El Heloui.