

A Colloquium on Ancient Mosaics and Painting
Report on the 1981 Meeting of l'Association Internationale pour
l'étude de la Mosaïque antique, Canadian Branch, Toronto,
27-29 March 1981

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A Colloquium on Ancient Mosaics and Painting

Report on the 1981 Meeting of l'Association Internationale pour l'étude de la Mosaïque antique, Canadian Branch, Toronto, 27-29 March 1981

The meeting was the first gathering of members of the newly-formed North American branch of l'Association Internationale pour l'étude de la Mosaïque antique. The association gratefully acknowledges the financial assistance of a Conference Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

First Day, Friday March 27, afternoon

SHEILA CAMPBELL, University of Toronto,
Chairperson

Elisabeth Alföldi, University of Toronto, was scheduled to give the first paper on *Notes on Mosaics from Aquileia*, mainly isolating some iconographical problems with an assessment of past discussions. However, the paper had to be cancelled as the speaker was unable to be present.

Claudia Smith, Menomonie, Wisc., therefore began the session on the topic of *Mosaics at Diocletian's Palace, Split*. The mosaics are interesting documents which reveal something of the decorative scheme of an architectural monument and of the mosaic style and history in Dalmatia, an area where relatively few mosaic pavements remain. However, they also indicate the stylistic influence of the eastern Empire in fourth-century Dalmatia, and the early use of gold glass in mosaic. The polychrome geometrical patterns bear a strong resemblance to the late Roman mosaics of the eastern Empire, and it is a hypothesis that Diocletian imported workmen or patterns from the same eastern regions that supplied him sculpture and/or sculptors. Among the loose glass tesserae, discovered in the western bath of the palace, was what appears to be gold glass. Scientific analysis is not yet complete but first tests indicate that the gold surface is metal, not a patina. These gold tesserae may be among the first known instances of the use of this technique in wall mosaic.

Mary Katherine Donaldson, Boston, Mass., offered *Wheels within Wheels*, a series of fifth/fourth-century B.C. representations in pebble mosaic of wheels as possible examples of Pythagorean theories, mathematical

problems and archaeoastronomy. A number of questions were formulated with a request for possible interpretations.

KATHERINE DUNBABIN, McMaster University,
Chairperson

Nancy Forsyth, Toronto, Ont., examined the iconography of *The Punishment of Dirce* on fourth-century A.D. contorniate reverses, in comparison with representations of the same theme in painting and mosaics (Fig. 1) in an attempt to discover common prototypes.



FIGURE 1. *The Punishment of Dirce*, Acquincum. (After A. Kiss, *Roman Mosaics in Hungary* (Budapest, 1973), pl. 4,2.

She concluded that a precise model which might have been used by the die-cutters of the contorniates cannot be pinpointed. There seem to be two possibilities. The first is that the contorniate representations, along with the many variations of the theme in ancient works, derive from an original Greek painting or relief, lost to us today. The second possibility lies in the fact that the designer of the contorniates may have been able to draw on a variety of renderings of the theme and to have created his own composition.

Sheila Campbell gave a brief summary of the *Mosaics of Anemurium* in southern Turkey with an attempt to isolate some regional characteristics and to assess their significance and position in the overall picture of mosaic pavements in Asia Minor. The geometric pavements are stylistically more closely connected with North Africa and Greece than with Syria. Figured pavements represent both local interests and widespread Mediterranean themes. Anemurium appears to have been a major centre for mosaic production in southern Turkey. Dr. Campbell suggests the existence of a Cilician school of mosaics due to the close similarities of the various mosaic sites in Cilicia. With the exception of Silifke, none of the sites east of Anemurium, to which it is closely linked as far as mosaics are concerned, was large enough to have been the centre of this school. The role of the sites to the west of Anemurium, to which it is architecturally linked, is unknown as they have not yet been excavated. It is possible that Anemurium may have been the centre, or at least have played a significant role in the development of the Cilician school.

John Dobbins, University of Virginia, continued the eastern theme with an examination of the inter-relationship of *Mosaics and Architecture in the Houses at Antioch*. The mosaics show that the Roman mosaicists were acutely aware of architectural setting and spectator response to their mosaics. Individual architectural

elements are accented by mosaic design. Decorative panels in corridors and framing devices for doorways call attention to principal rooms. Particularly striking are the physically and functionally separated architectural spaces drawn together by mosaic compositions accenting a dominant axis in a building. The patterns of movement and the specific viewing positions of the spectator influenced the composition and placement of mosaics, i.e. the triclinium. Mr. Dobbins also pointed out the use of dynamic compositions in areas of traffic, i.e. corridors (Fig. 2) and courtyards, a kind of co-ordinated programming of physical and visual motion.

Second Day, Saturday, March 28, morning

JOHN OSBORNE, University of Victoria,
Chairperson

Katherine Dunbabin spoke on *The Victorious Charioteer*, a mosaic discovered in Carthage in the late 1960s, and dated to about 400 A.D. Four circus charioteers framed by arches are represented with their names written in Greek above them. Although the horses and chariots are damaged, they can be reconstructed in a scheme well-known in late Antiquity: the chariot advancing frontally, the four horses split into two pairs, and deployed symmetrically to either side. The various features were discussed and compared to other examples of the scheme and to alternative schemes on mosaics and other arts, and the question of dissemination through copybooks or workshop training was included.

David Parrish, Purdue University, followed with *The Mosaic Program of the Maison de la Procession dionysiaque at El Jem (Tunisia)*. All four of the figural mosaics allude to Dionysos and/or the Four Seasons, with the personification of the year, Annus, included in one instance. The mosaics were discussed and the interpretation of the building by Louis Foucher as the site of a Dionysiac cult questioned. A close examination of the

FIGURE 2. The House of the Calendar, Corridor of the Negro Fisherman, Antioch. (After D. Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements* (Princeton, 1947), II, pl. 7a.



mosaics and building provides no clear evidence to support Foucher's hypothesis. The architectural plan of the dwelling is typical of private houses in Roman Africa. The mosaic imagery forms part of an artistic repertory that is widespread in African pavements, especially in house decoration. It has not been proven that any of the other African examples with this type of imagery embellished Dionysiac cult sites. If a particular symbolic meaning is to be given to the mosaics from the Maison de la Procession dionysiaque, Mr. Parrish suggested a paradisiac one; Dionysos and the Seasons together represent happiness and prosperity in the world. That is, perhaps, the reason one frequently sees evidence of a Dionysiac procession in African mosaics. The concentration of seasonal references in the Maison de la Procession dionysiaque can be related to the frequency of season mosaics at El Jem as a whole, and to local economic circumstances.

Margaret Alexander discussed *The Pavements of the Summer and Winter Baths at Thuburbo Maius* in Tunisia. The mosaics are, for the most part, geometric with the exceptions of a corridor mosaic depicting prophylactic symbols and a marble paving in the Summer baths, and an imitation marble pavement in the Winter baths. The early third-century date generally assigned to the floors is now questioned and a mid to late third-century date suggested.

Afternoon

MARGARET ALEXANDER, University of Iowa, Chairperson

Peter Johnson and Bryn Walters, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, U.K., presented a joint paper on *Late Romano-British Mosaics and Architecture: Problems of Function and Design*. They examined some pavements of the late third and fourth centuries, a period which saw a revival in Romano-British mosaic art after an apparent hiatus. A series of villas was briefly discussed, including those of Brading, Keynsham and Bignor, Hinton St. Mary and Frampton, and Winterton and Withington, pointing out the use of sophisticated mosaics in rooms whose function was something other than normal domestic use. They concluded with the Orphic Temple at Littlecote, identified as such on iconographic and architectural grounds (Fig. 3).

Micheline Ford, de l'Université Laval, a discuté de *La Vénus de Rudston en Grande-Bretagne*. D'une exécution très primitive, loin de la tradition classique, elle révèle tout de même un attachement à l'esprit iconographique romain. D'autres monuments en Grande-Bretagne sont du même style que la mosaïque de Rudston, mais c'est la seule Vénus entourée de quatre animaux. La signification du choix de ces animaux, représentant les quatre saisons, était expliquée et aussi l'évidence d'un culte ou d'une dévotion particulière à Vénus en Grande-Bretagne au quatrième siècle.

Pierrette Carrière, de l'Université d'Ottawa, a comparé deux mosaïques à thème de chasse trouvées en

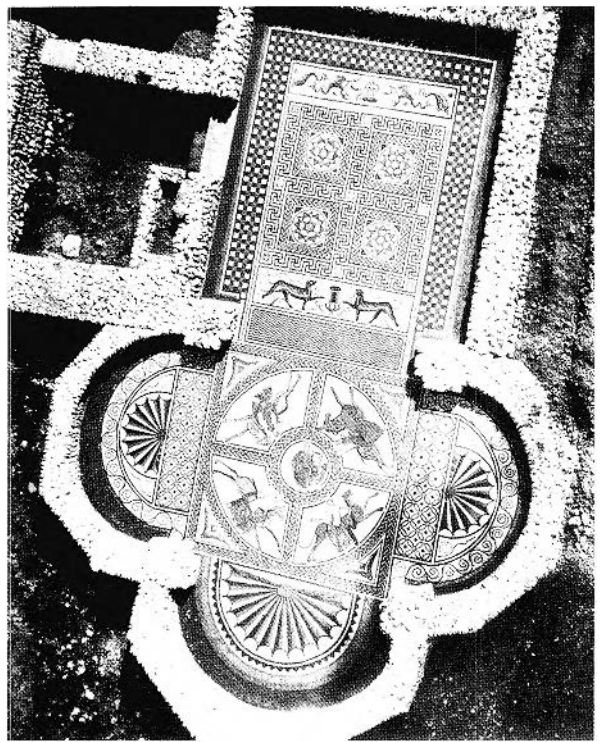


FIGURE 3. Mosaic pavement from the Orphic Temple, Littlecote Park, England.

France, à Lillebonne et à Villelaure, à d'autres qui figurent sur les pavements de Piazza Armerina et plusieurs sites en Afrique du Nord. Elle a distingué deux genres de chasse illustrés sur ces mosaïques, la chasse sportive pratiquée dans les bois d'un domaine et la chasse spectacle qui se déroule dans l'arène d'un amphithéâtre.

Victorine von Gonzenbach, Princeton, N.J., followed with a paper on *Survival and Revival*. She proposed a second/third-century A.D. transformation in mosaics of the Western provinces with such characteristics as non-figured white on black mosaics, and dark backgrounds for figured panels and border motifs. There is also the use of architectural motifs in borders, and the use of isometric motifs as overall patterns in fields as well as borders. Besides their somewhat abrupt appearance in the early third century, these elements are all characteristic of the Hellenistic mosaic style, especially of the second century B.C. and later. This is interpreted as another classicistic trend in Roman art.

Third Day, Sunday, March 29, morning

LUBA EILEEN, University of Toronto, Chairperson

Wilma Fitzgerald, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, addressed the meeting on *The Faces of Heaven*, the portrayal of Heaven in the Greco-Roman arts of pagan antiquity and pointed out similarities with early Christian representations of the theme. She considered three aspects which are to some extent related to phases of development in beliefs about the afterlife; firstly, evidence of belief in a life which continues within the grave itself or its vicinity; secondly, a visual portrayal of the communal life of the dead within the depths of the earth, and thirdly, the belief in celestial immortality evinced in mystery religions, often with a grounding in philosophical teaching.

Joanne D. Sieger, Earlham College, followed with *Apocrypha at Santa Maria Maggiore*, a discussion of the Annunciation and the Flight into Egypt scenes from the triumphal arch. She challenged the general interpretation of their derivation from the apocryphal gospel of pseudo-Matthew and suggested that their sources may be found in the traditional exegetical patterns of the early church.

John Osborne introduced *The Mosaic Decorations in the Dyrrachium Amphitheatre Chapel (Dürres, Albania)*. The wall-paintings have not survived, apart from scattered traces of pigment, but the back wall of the chapel and the adjoining area of one of the side walls had received additional decoration in mosaic. The best preserved area is the side wall, where there are two mosaic panels.

One depicts St. Stephen (identified by an inscription). The second comprises a group of five standing figures: a central figure dressed in Byzantine imperial garments and holding an orb and sceptre, two flanking archangels, and two diminutive figures, presumably donors. An inscription in Greek reads: "Lord protect your servant Alexander." At least five figures were also depicted on the end wall of the chapel: a central figure (almost entirely lost), two flanking archangels, and two female saints, identified by inscriptions as Sophia and Eirene. The two principal points for discussion were the identification of the central figure on the side wall (Christ, Emperor Alexander, or the Virgin Mary?), and the dating of the mosaics. A late sixth-century date is proposed on the basis of stylistic parallels with the mosaic decorations of St. Demetrius at Salonika.

Richard Gyug, University of Toronto, concluded with a discussion of *The Date of the Deesis of Hagia Sophia: Before 1204 or After 1261?* He discussed the positions held by various scholars, in particular Talbot Rice and Lazarev and by Demus. After analyzing the individual features of Mary, Christ, and John, and comparing them with other works, he found that Mary seems to be closest in detail to works of the mid thirteenth century. The figure of Christ demonstrates affinities of both type and style with examples from the mid thirteenth century. The figure of John the Baptist is less amenable to precise dating partly due to the lack of comparable material. A tentative date shortly after 1261 was favoured.

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