

Introduction

MOSAICS ARE among the most durable forms of decorative art to have survived from antiquity. They appear first in the Greek world in the form of pavements using natural pebbles set in a bed of plaster or mortar; the earliest decorated examples in Greece belong to the late fifth century BC. The more familiar form, composed of small near-cubic pieces of stone (known as tesserae) set into mortar, was developed in the Hellenistic period between the third and second centuries BC; it was adopted in Rome and Italy, and spread in the following centuries throughout the Roman Empire. Pavements of this type have been found by the hundred thousand in buildings of the Roman period from northern Britain to Libya, from the Atlantic coast to the Syrian desert. They are sometimes regarded as one of the identifying features of Roman presence in an area, so closely is the peculiar technique associated with the spread of Roman culture – although it is occasionally also found outside the actual limits of the empire. The basic structural character of mosaics and the technical methods of laying them remained constant once the use of tesserae had developed, with only minor changes throughout the centuries into the early Middle Ages. Their appearance, however, could vary enormously, ranging from plain monochrome floors through simple designs in two colours, usually black and white, to the most elaborate of polychrome geometric patterns, to designs based on floral and vegetal motifs, and to figured scenes. These in turn could range from simple designs using isolated figures to highly ambitious narrative compositions. Mosaics could also serve as the support for written texts, ranging from single words to quite lengthy verses.

The study of mosaics accordingly permits a variety of approaches. On the one hand they are artisan works serving a practical function, closely linked to their architectural context. Wherever possible they should be studied within that context, as a constituent part of a building: the mosaic removed from its setting and exhibited in a museum, often on a wall instead of its original location on a floor, has lost much of its essential character. On the other hand they constitute a significant art form in

their own right, one that illuminates the evolution of pictorial, figurative and ornamental style and composition over an unbroken span of more than one thousand years. Given the fragmentary nature of our evidence for most comparable media, above all for most of the development of major painting during this period, this continuity itself offers an invaluable contribution to our knowledge: in no other branch of the pictorial arts is it possible to follow through hundreds of examples the development from the late Classical period to the late Antique. Moreover the figured scenes offer an extraordinary range of information about the visual culture of those who commissioned them. The majority of mosaics are found in domestic contexts, and belong to the realm of the private and quotidian rather than that of official state-commissioned art; not infrequently they can be seen as reflections and conveyors of the social preoccupations and interests of their owners.

The opening chapters of this book contain a predominantly diachronic study of the evolution of mosaics; starting with the appearance of pebble mosaics in Greece, they cover the development of the mosaic of regular tesserae and the extraordinarily fine pictorial mosaics that aim to imitate the effects of painting, which are characteristic of the Hellenistic period. These forms were adopted in Italy in the late second and first century BC, alongside locally established forms of pavement. Around the turn of the first century BC to the first AD a huge expansion in the use of mosaic took place in Italy, changing it from a comparatively rare luxury craft to a much more mass-produced and widely diffused form. Workshops multiplied, not only within Italy but in the provinces of the western Roman Empire, where the use of mosaics was introduced in the course of the first and early second centuries AD, presumably at first by immigrant Italian craftsmen. This diffusion brings an end to any unitary development, and it becomes possible to distinguish regional trends and styles, though cross-fertilisation between different areas persists. In the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire the picture is further complicated by the survival of Hellenistic traditions into the second and third centuries

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AD, and their gradual transformation both by fashions from the west and by other elements. The bulk of part I is therefore organised on geographic lines, with chapters focusing on broadly defined regions. Inevitably I make no attempt at complete coverage, and some major regions are omitted: I have not included, for instance, the Balkan provinces, nor Egypt and Cyrenaica in the Roman period. Mosaics have certainly been found in these regions, but at least in the present state of our knowledge they do not appear to contribute much that differs significantly from the picture presented elsewhere.

Many of the regions discussed in part I had indigenous traditions of art of their own, which under the Empire survive in media such as sculpture or metalwork, and alongside products of more direct classical inspiration. Mosaic, on the other hand, in its fully developed form using cut tesserae, is an idiosyncratic technique unknown in most regions until it was introduced from the Graeco-Roman centres; very specific training was needed in order to practise it. This results in a remarkable degree of uniformity in some aspects of the craft; a common ornamental vocabulary, and to a large extent a common repertory of figured scenes, was utilised throughout this vast area. There is almost no sign of the use of the mosaic technique for representations of subjects of identifiable indigenous origin. On the other hand there are substantial differences between the regions: groups of workshops within a region developed their own favoured combinations of motifs and designs, their own methods of treating them; the materials locally available impart distinct characteristics to the finished products; and patrons clearly varied in the type of subjects and designs that they preferred to commission. One of the main aims of part I is to bring out the nature and range of these regional variations within the standardisation imposed by the common technique.

I have not attempted to impose a single terminal date on the discussions within these regional chapters, but have tried to find a natural closing point within each region. In parts of the western empire, the barbarian invasions of the fifth century AD brought to an end the style of comfortable Romanised life in which buildings were decorated with mosaics and craftsmen trained to produce them; in other areas the traditions lingered on, but with definite signs of decline. In parts of the eastern empire, on the other hand, no natural break or terminal point can be found before the seventh century or even later; the traditions remained vigorous and production extensive. New elements appeared in late antiquity, both in the form of

stylistic transformations and of the different requirements imposed by the use of mosaics in Christian churches; but these blend with the earlier traditions to make this one of the most vital and interesting periods in the history of the craft. Even the Arab conquests of the seventh century did not bring the tradition to an end immediately; the spectacular mosaics of the palaces of the Umayyad Caliphs in Palestine and Jordan attest to a final flowering.

Thus far the object of the discussion has been exclusively the use of mosaics for pavements. The application of mosaic to walls and vaults is a Roman invention, distinct in its origins and main development from floor mosaics, although the two related art forms naturally overlap and influence one another. Accidents of survival mean that it is very much less well attested than the more durable floor mosaics, and there are substantial gaps in our knowledge of its development. I have devoted one chapter (14) to it down to the fourth century AD; but here I have not attempted to include the much better known manifestations of the art in early Christian churches. Although these too, of course, grew out of pre-existing traditions and continuity can be traced in many aspects, nevertheless they are better left as a separate topic. Another chapter (15) treats a distinct but related technique, used on both floors and walls: that known as *opus sectile*, in which pieces of marble or other materials are cut to the shape of parts of the design. This was almost certainly executed by different craftsmen from mosaics, and was clearly regarded as a more prestigious form of decoration; but there are enough links between the two forms to make it desirable to include it in this book.

Part II studies the mosaics under broader thematic headings, which aim to set the developments studied in part I more fully into the context of commission and production. Successive chapters cover the craftsmen and their organisation, technical aspects of production, the nature of the repertory and its means of transmission, the relation between the mosaics and their architectural settings, and the patrons who commissioned the works. Many aspects of these topics have had to be treated more briefly and selectively than would ideally have been desirable, many more require further study; some of the most interesting recent research on mosaics has been devoted to questions such as these, but much remains to be done. Within the limits imposed both by the state of current research and by the scope and nature of this book, it is my

hope here to emphasise that variety of approach to the study of mosaics to which I referred at the beginning of this introduction.

The study of mosaics is beset by serious problems of chronology. Comparatively few mosaics are dated at all closely on external grounds. In Christian churches, especially in the eastern Mediterranean, it was a fairly common practice to write the date of construction upon the mosaic itself; but outside this specific category such absolute dates are very rare. Even where such apparently incontrovertible evidence is present the matter is not always straightforward: it is possible that the date given may be that of a repair, or of a later insertion into a pre-existing pavement, rather than that of the original construction. Mosaics from controlled excavations may be dated by the evidence of stratigraphy; but even where it has been possible to excavate beneath the level of the mosaic, the material recovered surprisingly seldom offers more than approximate upper and lower limits, *termini post* and *ante quos*. Mosaics from older excavations, or those found in circumstances where it has not been possible to carry out careful stratigraphic investigation, normally lack even these. Dates based on such factors as the foundation or destruction of a city, and similar broad historical events, can clearly give only wider limits still; moreover the fallacy of regarding events such as the sack of a city as necessarily implying its abandonment or the end of all construction is now better appreciated than it used to be.

Where external evidence is lacking recourse must be had to internal criteria. The dangers of stylistic dating are well known, and it is often misapplied; the dates proposed on stylistic grounds for some especially problematic (because unparalleled) monuments may diverge by one or two centuries, occasionally even more. A craft such as mosaic, which on the one hand is highly traditional, but on the other depends upon the very varying levels of skill of its practitioners, can be especially misleading. Most experts now admit that figured scenes in particular were often closely based upon earlier models, and could therefore preserve characteristics from periods long before their actual creation. On the other hand it has been increasingly recognised in recent decades that

the ornamental patterns used on mosaics offer a much more promising basis for distinguishing chronological development, especially if they are studied within a narrow regional context. Individual workshops and groups of workshops developed their favourite patterns, selecting and combining familiar motifs, elaborating or simplifying; the study of these patterns allows sequences to be established and relative chronologies proposed. However two caveats should be noted concerning such studies. First the regional nature of the evolution must be stressed: conclusions reached in one part of the Roman world cannot be freely transferred to another. And secondly, any dates proposed on such a basis should be left within broad limits: certainly no closer than within a quarter or a third of a century, often broader still.

In a book of this scope, it is obviously not possible to go into chronological questions of this sort in detail. Where a generally accepted date for an individual mosaic or a complex exists, I have given it. This is not an appropriate occasion for radical attempts at redating, though I have sometimes indicated if I find the conventional dating doubtful. I have tried to make readers aware of the nature of the evidence, external or internal, on which proposed dates are based, and to acquaint them with controversies; bibliography which will allow those who wish to pursue the question in greater detail is given in the notes.

Note on modern scholarship

Mosaics were long regarded by archaeologists and historians of ancient art as a minor and insignificant branch of art, of interest chiefly as evidence for lost works of ancient painting.¹ New developments, forming the foundation for modern mosaic studies, began essentially in the 1960s, with the holding in 1963 of the first in a series of International Colloquia on Ancient Mosaics (*CMGR* 1), and the founding of the Association internationale pour l'étude de la mosaïque antique (*AIEMA*).² At much the same period began the publication of series of regional corpora (sometimes continuing work started early in the century), which aimed at the complete publication of all

¹ Among conspicuous exceptions are the works, still basic today, of Marion Blake on the Italian mosaics (1930, 1936, 1940); Pernice on the mosaics of Pompeii (1938); and above all Doro Levi on the mosaics of Antioch (1947).

² Successive International Colloquia have followed at regular intervals;

the eighth at Lausanne in 1997. Six (*CMGR* 1–v1) have been published to date. The more-or-less annual *Bulletin AIEMA* contains full bibliographic coverage of mosaic publications, especially valuable for new discoveries, together with reviews and occasional articles.

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mosaics from a given site or geographic region, from the simplest and most fragmentary to the most elaborate.³ Most parts of the Roman world have since seen the launching of similar projects, though coverage to date remains very uneven. Another major project has been the attempt to classify the ornamental designs found on mosaics and to standardise the terminology used in five European languages to describe them.⁴

The bibliographies at the end of each chapter are intended to introduce non-specialist readers to the principal catalogues, corpora, and monographic studies of the

mosaics discussed in that chapter, with emphasis on recent works. For the benefit of students some additional books and articles in English are included, and reference is given to especially well-illustrated works. Specialised bibliography for individual mosaics or for specific themes and problems is given in the notes. There have been very few recent attempts to provide an overview or synthesis of the history of mosaics that goes beyond the individual region, but two short works by French scholars provide useful introductions, of value especially for the individual approaches taken by their writers.⁵

³ See bibliographies for individual chapters. The first volume of the Corpus of mosaics of Gaul (*RecGaulle* 1.1) was published in 1957 by Henri Stern, to whose initiative was also due the foundation of AIEMA and the holding of the first International Colloquium in 1963.

⁴ *Décor* (1985): see ch.18, n.1. It refines and expands the publication, *Répertoire graphique du décor géométrique dans la mosaïque antique* (*BullAIEMA* 4, 1973), which proposes a terminology only in French.

⁵ Ph. Bruneau, *La mosaïque antique* (Paris 1987); H. Lavagne, *La mosaïque (que sais-je?)*, Paris 1987).

PART I: Historical and regional development

Origins and pebble mosaics

THE ORIGINS of decorative mosaics in Greece have been much disputed. Earlier theories traced them back in the east as far as the coloured cones of terracotta used for wall decoration by the Sumerians at Uruk-Warka in the fourth millennium BC;¹ but a search for so distant a derivation has long been discarded, and the technique may rather be seen as an indigenous development in Greece. Floors paved with plain or coloured pebbles set into clay or plaster are found there from a very early date; the practice probably arose wherever suitable materials were available from riverbed or seashore. Simple examples of such floors are found in Crete as early as the Neolithic period, and were used by both Minoans and Mycenaeans; on one late Mycenaean example, from a house at Tiryns, the pebbles are set to form a rudimentary pattern.² After the Bronze Age there is a gap in our knowledge, and undecorated pebble floors appear next in temples and sanctuaries of the seventh and sixth centuries BC, for instance in the Sanctuary of Artemis Orthia at Sparta, and the Temple of Athena Pronaia at Delphi.³ In the latter, pebbles of several colours are combined indiscriminately, but there is no sign of the use of patterns on such floors at this date. On the fringes of the Greek world, however, patterned pebble floors were in use earlier among peoples with whom the Greeks were in contact. They have been found at Gordion in Asia Minor, in three houses of the Phrygian period dating from the late eighth century BC. In the best preserved, the west Phrygian House, dark blue, dark red and white pebbles were laid in a clay bed to form a variety of geometric motifs without any overall design.

These include several chequer patterns of squares, and many motifs which later formed a standard part of the mosaicists' repertory: simple meander, lozenges, rosettes, the swastika. Later buildings at Gordion show the tradition continuing in the sixth and fifth centuries; the patterns now were clearly laid out in repetitive chequers and meanders.⁴ Other examples of pebble floors with simple patterns dating from the eighth century have been found further East, at Altintepe in eastern Anatolia, and in the Palaces of Arslan Tash and Til Barsib in Assyria.⁵

The earliest decorated mosaics to survive in Greece date from the late fifth century BC. It must remain doubtful whether they were influenced by the early examples of decorated pebble mosaics in Asia Minor and Assyria; an independent evolution is perhaps more likely. Although precise dates are often lacking, there are enough which possess *termini* established on archaeological or historical grounds to permit a general outline of their development. The largest group consists of the pavements from the New Town at Olynthos in northern Greece, founded in 432 BC, and destroyed by Philip of Macedon in 348; these general limits may be accepted for the mosaics.⁶ Other early examples come from the Peloponnese, from Attica and Euboea; there is no reason to assign their invention to any one region of the Greek world. The earliest stage is represented by a mosaic from the Centaur Bath in Corinth, a building constructed in the last quarter of the fifth century⁷ (figures 1, 2). The centre of the floor is occupied by a large, four-spoked wheel, the spaces between the spokes alternately

¹ E.g. Gauckler 2090–1, followed by many later authors. For the Uruk-Warka mosaics, cf. A. Parrot, *Sumer* (London/New York 1960), 67, figs.84a–b; M. Brandes, *Untersuchungen zur Komposition der Stiftemosaiken an der Pfeilerhalle der Schicht IVa in Uruk-Warka* (BaM Beiheft 1, Berlin 1968).

² C. Podzuweit, D. Salzmann, 'Ein mykenischer Kieselmosaikfussboden aus Tiryns', *AA* 1977, 123–37; Salzmann 5, 114 no.129.

³ R. Dawkins, *The Sanctuary of Artemis Orthia at Sparta* (London 1929), 6–7; R. Demangel, *FdD* 11, 3, *Le Sanctuaire d'Athéna Pronaia 1, Les Temples de Tuf* (Paris 1923), 16, fig.22.

⁴ R. Young, 'Early mosaics at Gordion', *Expedition* 7,3, 1964/5, 4–13; Salzmann 6–7, 93–4 nos.46–56, for the dates.

⁵ Salzmann 4, 82 no.5, 84 no.15, 114 nos.127–8, with refs.

⁶ *Olynthus* 5, 13–14; *Olynthus* 8, 1–17, 287–9; Salzmann 11. W. Hoepfner, E.-L. Schwandner, *Haus und Stadt im klassischen Griechenland (Wohnen in der klassischen Polis* 1, 2nd edn Munich 1994), 99, 103–5, 338 n.255, conclude that all the Olynthos mosaics are to be placed after the beginning of the fourth century, including one from the Old Town often considered to be earlier (*Olynthus* 2, 26; Salzmann 11, 21–2, 104 no.93). Recent discussions about the later history of Olynthos appear to indicate only very limited later occupation of the site; cf. Hoepfner, Schwandner, *ibid.*, 70.

⁷ C.K. Williams II, J. Fisher, *Hesperia* 45, 1976, 109–15, pls.13, 14; Williams, *Hesperia* 46, 1977, 45–51, pl.19.

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1 Corinth, Centaur Bath, general view. Original size 4.60 m × 4.60 m. End of the fifth century BC.



2 Corinth, Centaur Bath, detail of centaur (north-east corner).

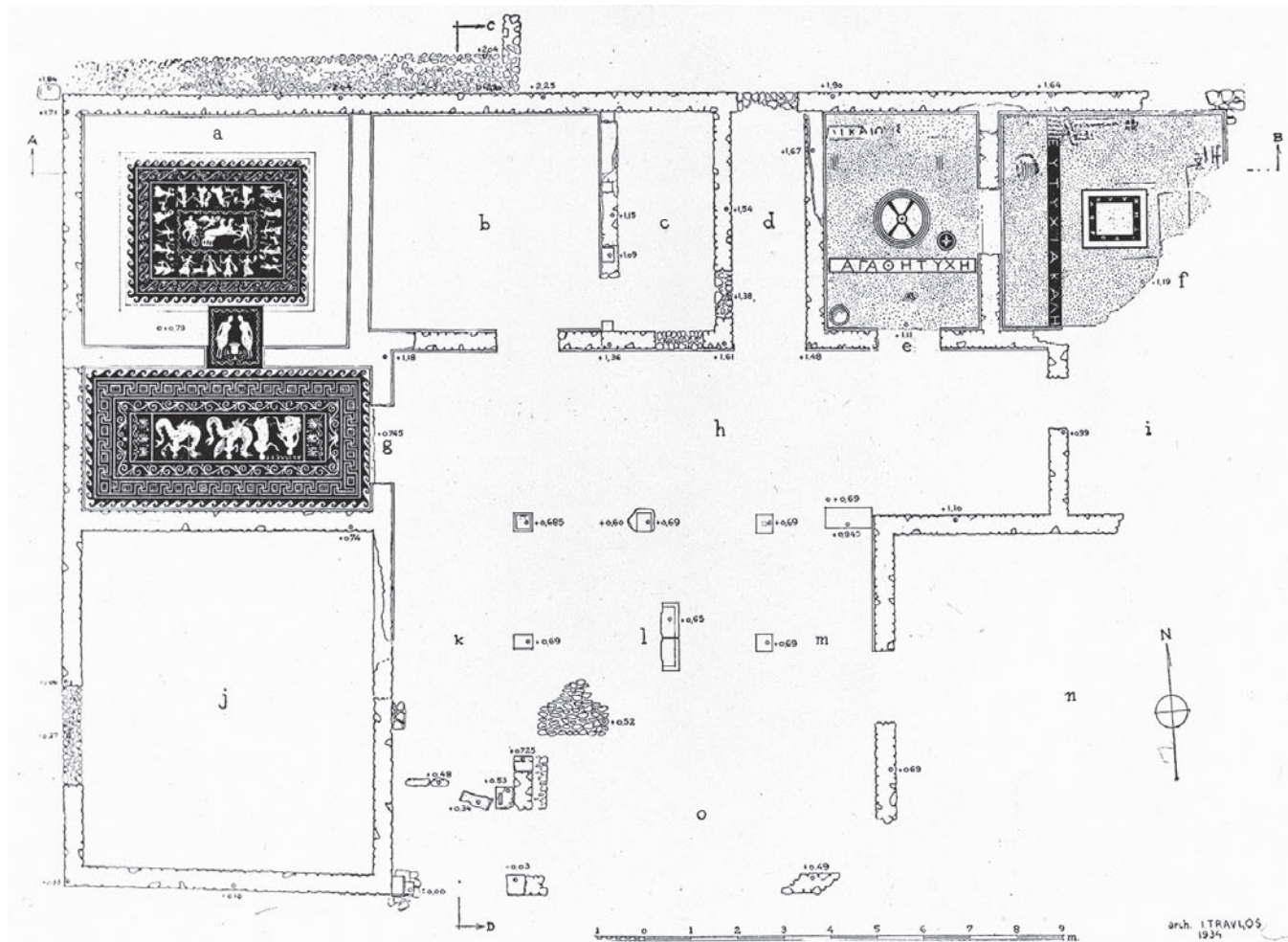
black and white; around it are circular borders of triangles, a maeander, and a waveband. In the angles between this circular design and the outer square are figures, shown in white silhouette against a plain black ground: two survive, a centaur chasing a spotted feline, and an ithyphallic donkey. Within the figures black lines are used to show overlapping limbs and the main features of the centaur; there is no attempt to render musculature. A few red and tan pebbles are scattered at random on the black ground, but colour is not used for deliberate effect. Although the treatment of the figures is simple, the floor is well designed and the geometric motifs competently handled except for an error in laying out the waveband. This is not an art in its infancy, even if we cannot trace it back any earlier.



3 Olynthos, House of the Comedian, *andron* mosaic. 1.85 m × 1.60 m; entrance panel 1.00 m × 0.95 m. First half of the fourth century BC.

Following this initial stage, a group may be distinguished which belongs to the late Classical period, from the early fourth century down to c.340 BC. It is best represented by most of the mosaics from Olynthos, by several pavements from Corinth and Sikyon, and by the House of the Mosaics at Eretria. The pavements of this period are composed of smooth natural pebbles; the average sizes vary from as little as one centimetre in diameter in some floors to five centimetres or more in others; most are between one and two centimetres. They are set in a layer of fine mortar on top of a coarser layer, which in turn rests on a foundation of larger stones, much as in the later tessellated mosaics. The designs are normally laid in white against a dark ground, though examples of dark-on-light are found occasionally. Some floors are strictly bichrome, others use pebbles of additional colours, yellow, red, and green, for details, or scatter them at random among the stones of the background.

The mosaics of this period are found almost exclusively in private houses, in contrast to the plain pebble floors of the Archaic period, which were found in temples. Their use here testifies to the increasing demand of the wealthier citizens for elegance and comfort in their domestic surroundings. They were evidently a luxury; even at Olynthos, the site where the greatest single number has been found, they are confined to a small percentage of houses. Their use within the house is also limited. A few occur in courtyards and corridors, where their practical, water-resistant and hard-wearing qualities were evidently valued. Most often, however, they are found in dining-rooms (*andrones*) (figure 3). A decorated portion in the centre of the room is usually surrounded by a plain raised band for the dining couches, and often accompanied by a separate panel at the threshold, and sometimes by a similarly decorated anteroom. These constitute the reception area of the house, where the master entertained his friends at dinner and the symposium;



4 Olynthos, Villa of Good Fortune, plan. First half of the fourth century BC.

decoration is concentrated where it will impress the visitors.⁸

On some of these pavements, the choice of motifs does not appear to be governed primarily by ornamental considerations. On one floor at Olynthos (A XI 9), in a courtyard, motifs are scattered at random, with even less organisation than those of the Gordion floor several centuries earlier.⁹ Prominent among them are swastikas, concentric circles and circles divided into four quadrants forming a wheel-pattern, and a double axe. Circles or wheel-patterns occur on several other floors at Olynthos,

sometimes as part of a very irregular design;¹⁰ they are found also in the Centaur Bath at Corinth, and on later pebble mosaics in Athens, Megara, and Eretria.¹¹ In the Villa of Good Fortune, one of the grandest houses at Olynthos, two small rooms decorated with motifs of this sort give an indication of their probable significance (figure 4). In the first, a large and a small wheel are placed immediately above an inscription reading *Agathe Tyche*, 'Good fortune'. Other motifs are scattered around this and the adjoining room, which has inscriptions reading *Eutychia kale*, 'Success is fair', and (around a

⁸ Cf. K. Dunbabin, 'Triclinium and stibadium', in W.J. Slater ed., *Dining in a Classical Context* (Ann Arbor 1991), 121–2. Practical considerations also encouraged the use of mosaics in dining-rooms, since they allowed the floor to be flushed down with water to remove the debris of the meal.

⁹ D.M. Robinson, *AJA* 38, 1934, 510, pl. xxxi; *Olynthus* 8, 127; Salzmänn 21, 100 no. 83. The absence of organised design is not a sign of early date; the house, which is one of the few that apparently continued in use after 348, may owe its present form to late rebuilding (Hoepfner,

Schwandner, *Haus und Stadt* (cit. n. 6), 103–5).

¹⁰ *Olynthus* 12, 254–7, pls. 203, 221; *Olynthus* 2, 26, fig. 99; *Olynthus* 5, 9, 11–13, pls. vii, 14b, 16b; Salzmänn 98–104 nos. 81, 85, 91, 93.

¹¹ Athens: H. Thompson, R. Wycheley, *The Athenian Agora* 14, *The Agora of Athens* (Princeton 1972), 180–2, pl. 89; Salzmänn 88 no. 25. Megara: Salzmänn 96 no. 70, with refs. Eretria, gymnasium, among other good luck symbols: K. Scheffold, *AntK* 9, 1966, 114–15; Salzmänn 92–3 no. 44.

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central square) *Aphrodite kale*, 'Aphrodite is fair'; among the motifs are a double axe, a swastika, and at the entrance a large 'A'. Although the function of the rooms is not clear (suggestions have ranged from a gaming-den or brothel to – more probably – a shrine of Aphrodite), the inscriptions suggest that the motifs serve as lucky or apotropaic symbols, reinforcing the allusions to Good Fortune; and the wheel/circle is probably the Wheel of Fortune.¹² It may therefore be suggested that one function of the floor-decoration was the attraction of good luck, and the exclusion of hostile influences from the house or some portion of it; where ordered design is entirely lacking, this role may be taken to be dominant.

Most of the mosaics in this late Classical group are much more decorative than these. They are usually designed with a series of borders or friezes around a central element; many compositions are based on a circle-in-square design. Border-patterns include the maeander, wave-band, scroll, palmette frieze, and rows of triangles. Figures sometimes form a frieze, most often with rows of animals, real or fabulous; others may be placed in rectangular panels, or in the angles between a circle and an enclosing square. Some of the finest examples of this group come from the House of the Mosaics at Eretria, which has a *terminus post quem* of the early fourth century¹³ (figures 6, 7; plate 1). An *andron* is decorated with a central circle with a star surrounded by a lotus-and-palmette frieze, with eagles and ox-skulls filling the angles of the enclosing square. Then comes a figured frieze with Arimaspians fighting griffins on two sides, lions attacking horses on the other two; and an outer border of maeander. A panel at the entrance shows a Nereid riding a sea-horse; in the anteroom are sphinxes and felines in a border of lotus-and-palmette. In this group of mosaics animal scenes and friezes are common; mythological scenes are comparatively rare, and usually occupy central panels. In the *andron* of House A VI 3 at Olynthos Bellerophon is neatly placed in a circle, mounted on Pegasus and striking at the Chimaira beneath; numerous concentric borders surround the

circle, while a separate threshold panel shows griffins with their prey.¹⁴ The most elaborate design of the group is found in the *andron* complex of the Villa of Good Fortune at Olynthos (figures 4, 5). In the anteroom Thetis leads a procession of Nereids mounted on sea-monsters to bring new arms to Achilles; they are placed in a long rectangular panel, surrounded by a series of borders. A small panel with two Pans confronted across a *crater* occupies the threshold. In the *andron* itself further borders surround a large central panel, which combines a figured frieze, of maenads and satyrs, with a central panel showing Dionysus driving his leopard-chariot.¹⁵

The figures on the mosaics of this group are essentially two-dimensional, light against a dark ground. Dark figures on light occur once, on a fragmentary mosaic from Sikyon, but seem to be used there simply as a variation.¹⁶ Interior details are indicated by lines of dark pebbles. A development may be traced from a minimum of interior detail on the figures of the earliest mosaics of the group to a fuller rendering on those presumably to be placed later in the fourth century: thus the Bellerophon mosaic at Olynthos belongs to a slightly earlier phase in the development than those in the Villa of Good Fortune. There are, however, few precise dates to support this relative chronology, and the evolution was not necessarily uniform in different regions. Additional colours are used tentatively at first, then with increasing confidence, to highlight specific parts of a figure or to pick out objects and details. A griffin on a threshold at Sikyon has uniform red patches on its wing and body, and a red tongue (figure 8);¹⁷ the Nereid from the House of the Mosaics at Eretria rides a sea-horse with red fins, wears yellow shoes and a red-bordered cloak, and carries a yellow shield rimmed in red (plate 1). Figures, human and animal, are in rigorous profile in the earliest examples, and faces continue to be in profile throughout this period; but later examples show freer movement of the rest of the body. The Maenads in the Villa of Good Fortune, for example, twist and turn in a variety of poses, though the lines that indicate their swirling drapery are coarse and simplified; the

¹² Robinson, 'The Villa of Good Fortune at Olynthos', *AJA* 38, 1934, 501–6, figs.1–2; Robinson, *CP* 41, 1946, 208–10 (gambling-parlour); Salzmann 103 nos.89–90; Hoepfner, Schwandner, *Haus und Stadt* (cit.n.6), 93 (suggesting that the rooms had a cult function and the building as a whole was a club-house).

¹³ P. Ducrey, I. Metzger, K. Reber, *Eretria 8, Le quartier de la Maison aux Mosaïques* (Lausanne 1993), esp.85–96. They propose a date around 360 (against Salzmann 27, 90–1 nos.36–8, who proposed c.350–40).

¹⁴ *Olynthus* 5, 4–6, pls.1, 12; Salzmann 23, 99 no.78.

¹⁵ Robinson, *AJA* 38, 1934, 506–10, pls.xxviii–xxx; *Olynthus* 8, 55–63, pls.16, 84; *Olynthus* 12, 341–68, pls.1–111; Salzmann 24–5, 102 nos.87–8. Salzmann dates the mosaics c.370–60 BC, on the basis, among other criteria, of the character of the scroll border on the mosaic of Achilles and Thetis.

¹⁶ D. Salzmann, *AA* 1979, 290–306; Salzmann 25–6, 111 no.116.

¹⁷ From the threshold of the room with the scroll, discussed below, n.20; Salzmann 26, 112 no.118.



5 Olynthos, Villa of Good Fortune, Dionysiac mosaic from *andron*. 3.90 m × 3.20 m.

Arimaspians at Eretria, brought to their knees by the attacking griffins, move freely in complex positions. Overlapping of figures or parts of figures is avoided at first, then it too comes to be rendered more confidently. In the Villa of Good Fortune, Dionysus' pair of panthers overlap, and the paws of one are seen against the running satyr, while the Nereids in the anteroom sit somewhat precariously on the coils of the sea-monsters. A second mosaic of Nereids from Olynthos, presumably slightly later, places the Nereids much more freely and firmly on the sea-monsters' backs, and coils the creatures' tails into spirals.¹⁸ In none of this group is there any use of modelling or shading;¹⁹ nor do the figures have any indication of spatial setting.

Floral and vegetal elements – rosettes, palmettes, acanthus and ivy scrolls – occupy a prominent place on many of the mosaics. A development may be seen here more clearly than with the figures. Early examples are stylised

and two-dimensional; and conventional designs such as the palmette continue to be treated in this way. The scrolls, however, acquire a greater richness, and begin to be treated in a more three-dimensional manner. An especially fine example from Sikyon covers the whole floor with a design of interlaced scrolls around a central rosette, symmetrical and artificial in overall composition, but increasingly realistic in individual details (figure 8). The leaves curling back from the stems and the great trumpet-flowers in which the scrolls end are now rendered three-dimensionally, and red is used to enhance the effect. The mosaic looks forward to the magnificent floral designs that are characteristic of the early Hellenistic period.²⁰

These early pebble mosaics have often been compared to textiles; but in fact the mosaicists clearly drew their inspiration from many sources. The designs of the floors with their multiple borders, usually slightly set in from the edges of the room, are indeed reminiscent of a carpet,

¹⁸ *Olynthus* 2, 80–8, figs.203, 205; *Olynthus* 5, 2–3, pls.11, 11; Salzmänn 25, 98 no.77.

¹⁹ The shield carried by the Nereid in the House of the Mosaics at Eretria gives a slight hint of shading through the admixture of red and yellow pebbles, but it is done in a very unsystematic way; in the

same mosaic, volume is occasionally suggested by the lines in which the pebbles are set.

²⁰ Orlandos, *Praktika* 1941–4, 59, fig.3; Salzmänn 18, 112 no.118, suggesting a date c.360–50; cf. below, n.32.

PART I: HISTORICAL AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT



6 Eretria, House of the Mosaics, anteroom and *andron*. Mid-fourth century BC.

with the threshold panel acting as a rug at the door; and they share with textiles their essentially two-dimensional character as a decoration of a flat surface. Some of the common ornamental motifs are among those found in textile decoration or suitable for weaving; and it has been argued that the (apparently) sudden appearance of such floors should be seen as a translation into permanent forms of the luxurious textiles from the Near East fashionable in the later fifth century.²¹ But many motifs, such as the meander, wave-band, and palmette frieze, form part of the standard repertory shared by architecture, vase-painting, and other crafts. Other parallels have been drawn with red-figure vase-painting, with which the mosaics share the representation of light figures on a dark ground, as well as the iconography of some figured scenes. But it seems unlikely that a small-scale art such as vase-painting would have acted as a primary inspiration for work in a very different medium; and the two do not

in fact have much in common. The rendering of the figures on the earlier pavements is infinitely less sophisticated than on contemporary vase-painting, and seems to revert to a level of anatomical knowledge typical in that medium of a century or more earlier. The evolution within the handling of the figures which has just been discussed is an internal evolution, as the mosaicists grew more confident in the handling of their material; it does not run parallel to any similar evolution in vase-painting, but rather aims to catch up with achievements mastered there much earlier. Only in the treatment of vegetal ornament is there a comparable development in mosaic and vase-painting, which does suggest a relationship, though perhaps in the sense that both drew on a common source.²²

The influence of major painting is hardly to be discerned in these early mosaics. Written sources suggest that painters in the late fifth and fourth centuries were pre-occupied with questions of naturalism, the representation of space and handling of the third dimension, and the use of shading to model form in figures and objects. These concerns are foreign to the mosaics of the late Classical period, though a few tentative steps in this direction are to be seen on some of the finest examples, those from the House of the Mosaics at Eretria or the Sikyon scroll. Only at the end of the fourth century is an attempt to imitate or rival the achievements of painting perceptible in the mosaics, and then in a very specific group.

This next group belongs to the early Hellenistic period, approximately the last third of the fourth century BC. Its outstanding products are the mosaics from two large houses in the Macedonian capital of Pella, dated on archaeological grounds to the closing decades of the century.²³ House 1.1 contained figured mosaics of a Lion Hunt and of Dionysus (figures 9, 10), both occupying the centre of large *andrones*, while threshold panels represented a griffin with its prey and a pair of centaurs. Coarser geometric designs of lozenges and squares paved the anterooms to the *andrones*.²⁴ In House 1.5 there were

²¹ F. von Lorenz, 'Barbaron hyphasmata', *RömMitt* 52, 1937, 165–222; Ph. Bruneau, *Archeologia* (Warszawa) 27, 1976, 20.

²² Cf. M. Robertson, 'Early Greek mosaic', in *Studies in the History of Art* 10, *Macedonia and Greece in Late Classical and Early Hellenistic Times* (Washington 1982), 244–6, for a comparison of the floral designs on the mosaics to the 'flower-paintings' ascribed by Pliny, *H.N.* 21.4; 35.125, to Pausias of Sikyon in the mid-fourth century; Salzmann 14–20 for parallels between vegetal ornament in vase-painting and other media and that on mosaics.

²³ Makaronas, Giouri 124–45, 168 (for the date). Stratigraphic excava-

tions under the mosaics in both houses revealed an identical system of bedding, and ceramic and numismatic material which gave a *terminus post quem* of 350–25 for both: I. Touratsoglou, *ArchDelt* 30, 1975, A, 165–84. The variations in style and technical means between the mosaics in the two houses should not be ascribed to a difference in date, but to one of workmanship, and perhaps also of models being imitated. Touratsoglou suggests a date early in the reign of Cassander as the most likely.

²⁴ Makaronas, Giouri 133–40; Ph. Petsas, 'Mosaics from Pella', *CMGR* 1, 41–56, figs.1–5; Salzmann 28–30, 104–6, nos.94–9.