

These stones still speak: the progress of research on late Roman and early Byzantine mosaic pavements in the Eastern Mediterranean¹

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The phrase ‘Byzantine art’ usually evokes images of icons first and, secondly, mosaics. The mosaics conjured by ‘Byzantine art’ are those ethereal, glittering surfaces of the walls, vaults and ceilings that, when taken together, create a heavenly, other-worldly atmosphere on the interiors of churches. The brilliant mosaic programs of the early churches and baptisteries in Ravenna (fifth-sixth centuries), for example, are well-known as are the surviving mosaics in the churches of similar date in Rome. The sixth-century apse mosaic depicting the Transfiguration of Christ in the *katholikon* of the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai is a magnificent example of the art—and what could be found in churches located in remote areas of the empire when imperial funds were provided. Yet, only a small number of these mosaic programs survive. Moreover, it is important to bear in mind that they were comparatively few in number in the early Byzantine period itself. Far more abundant were churches decorated with fresco and stucco decoration. And yet, in some ways this is an academic point, because the superstructures of many Late Roman and early Byzantine buildings are non-extant. While there are exceptions—important exceptions that provide a glimpse of the splendid environment created by mosaics—such as the fifth century Mausoleum of Galla Placidia and the Orthodox and Arian baptisteries in Ravenna, the sixth century Basilica Euphrasiana in Poreč, and the seventh century Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. Instead, what survive in large number are the floor mosaics that decorated churches, synagogues, civic buildings, bath houses and wealthy private homes. The floors vary from monochromatic to polychromatic, and their decoration ranges from geometric to elaborate figural scenes that include animals and humans. The perennial discovery of the archaeological remains of mosaic floors in the eastern Mediterranean has long made them a subject of investigation by archaeologists, art historians, and historians.

From the beginning of the study of Byzantine art as a discrete area within art history in the late nineteenth century, the means employed for the investigation of

¹ I am grateful to Jodi Magness, John Fischer, and Sam Wolff, all of whom read and commented on earlier drafts of this article. I am indebted to Glen Bowersock for his close reading of and valuable suggestions for strengthening this essay. Finally, I owe a debt of gratitude to Richard Woodfield both for accepting an article of such length and his commitment to the value of the transparent peer-review process which I have found very beneficial.

mosaics have been as varied as the mosaics themselves. They are, of course, influenced generally by the prevailing mentalities and conditions of the time and the environment in which the scholars worked. Thus, it is constructive to briefly describe the early fundamental approaches to the art of this period, since they formed the basis for the work of subsequent generations of scholars whose research interests included mosaics, before turning to the history of scholarship on Late Antique and Byzantine mosaics in the eastern Mediterranean.

In the late nineteenth century, scholars were essentially divided into two schools of thought based upon their geographical location. In Western Europe, art historians such as Franz Kraus, Alois Riegl, Franz Wickhoff, and Giovanni Teresio Rivoira subscribed to the tenets of the Western School, which held Italy to be the cornerstone for developments in Late Antique and Byzantine art.² Cyril Mango succinctly summarizes their view that, 'One could follow the development of Christian art from its presumed origin in the Roman catacombs, through the Roman basilicas of the fourth and fifth centuries, to the Byzantine churches of Ravenna—a downward curve showing the gradual debasement of imperial Roman art under Oriental and barbarian influence.'³ As a result, scholars rarely looked beyond the borders of Italy for the evidence that they used in the formulation of theories and conclusions concerning Byzantine art. This narrow mode of inquiry was abandoned by scholars as they came to recognize the greater efficacy of the approach and methods adopted by what might, in juxtaposition, be referred to as the Eastern School.

The Eastern School sought the roots, origin, and development of Late Antique and early Byzantine art in the eastern Mediterranean. The two main proponents of this view were the Czech scholar, Josef Strzygowski, who worked in Vienna, and a series of Russian scholars, whose contributions to the study of early Byzantine art are monumental and should properly be viewed as a subcategory (Russian School) within the Eastern School. Strzygowski rejected the views held by his Viennese colleagues, who were firmly entrenched in the Western School tradition. In 1901, his positions were set forth in *Orient oder Rom*.⁴ In this influential treatise, Strzygowski asserted that the origin and sources for Late Antique art were not to be found in Italy but, rather, in the art of the eastern provinces of the Empire. He adopted an evolutionary approach to developments in art history and, therefore, explained the changes in Late Antique art within the context of the emerging influence of Christian doctrines at the expense of Hellenistic cultural mores and artistic ideals. Strzygowski's was a formal approach; he

² Their views are crystallized in Franz Kraus, *Geschichte der christlichen Kunst*, Freiburg: Herder'sche Verlagshandlung, 1896.

³ Cyril Mango's preface to Dmitrii Ainalov, *The Hellenistic Origins of Byzantine Art*, Cyril Mango, ed., New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1961, viii. Mango refers to this group of scholars as the 'Roman School'. For the assertion that Byzantine art is a reflection of the decline of Greco-Roman art and not an independent creative movement that relied upon its Hellenistic heritage, see Alois Riegl, *Stilfragen. Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik*, Berlin: G. Siemens, 1893, 273.

⁴ Josef Strzygowski, *Orient oder Rom? Beiträge zur geschichte der spätantiken und frühchristlichen Kunst*, Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1901.

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maintained that the evolution of art could be traced through detailed stylistic analysis and comparison of works of art. He rejected the usefulness of multidisciplinary methods that were grounded in fields such as philology, philosophy, history or aesthetics.

The long-standing interest of Russian scholars in Byzantine art undoubtedly stems from the fact that it is viewed as an integral part of their nation's artistic heritage. Byzantine art formed the foundation for later developments in early Russian art. By the nineteenth century, Russian scholarship was divided into two branches, the 'clerical-archaeological' and the 'scientific'.⁵ The work of the latter group increased general knowledge of Byzantine art in the east and influenced the manner in which it was studied. While Fyodor Busalev was the founder of the scientific method, it was his student, Nikodim Kondakov, who fully exploited the method, which is best described as philological in nature. His extensive travels to Georgia, the Caucasus (in 1873 and 1889), Mt. Sinai (1881), Constantinople (1884), Syria and Palestine (1891), Mt. Athos and Macedonia (1898) provided opportunities for the collection of a large body of material. Kondakov was not interested in the stylistic evaluation of works of art; he found the examination of iconography a more fruitful approach to its interpretation. Kondakov believed that, in order to fully understand art of a particular period, one must take into account the political, religious, social, and cultural climate in which it was made.

Dmitrii Ainalov adopted the philological method of inquiry used by his mentor, Kondakov. His doctoral dissertation, *The Hellenistic Origins of Byzantine Art*, was a continuation and expansion of the work begun by his teacher. In his study, Ainalov asserted that the earliest examples of Christian art in Rome as well as the subsequent development of Byzantine art were derived from artistic trends in the prominent centres of the Near East, namely Alexandria, Palestine, and Syria.⁶ Ainalov's theories concerning the dominant influence of the schools in this region upon Byzantine art were a flash of brilliance when considering that, at that time, there was hardly sufficient evidence to support his claim.⁷ The scientific method espoused by generations of Russian scholars was continued in the work of Viktor Lazarev, who was greatly influenced by the hypotheses of his teacher, Ainalov.

Early twentieth century scholars readily abandoned the theses of the Western School, which had all but collapsed under the weight of the attacks by Strzygowski and Ainalov. The Eastern School's contributions transformed the fields of Late Antique and Byzantine art history. The efforts of the Russian school, in particular, altered the theoretical and methodological approaches to Byzantine art while at the same time, on a basic level, increasing the body of material available to art historians. The early works of

⁵ Ainalov, *Hellenistic Origins of Byzantine Art*, viii.

⁶ Ainalov, *Hellenistic Origins of Byzantine Art*, 6-7.

⁷ Ainalov, *Hellenistic Origins of Byzantine Art*, xii.

Strzygowski and the works of Ainalov form the basis of all the standard textbooks on early Christian and Byzantine art.⁸

The history of mosaic scholarship must be viewed against the background that has just been outlined. It is sensible to begin with those early scholars whose broad interests produced some of the seminal studies on Byzantine art, before moving to a detailed examination of regional developments. The contributions of Ernst Kitzinger to the scholarship on mosaic pavements are unparalleled.⁹ Kitzinger's work defies neat categorization because he was open to multiple methodologies and adopted various approaches over the years. However, his primary mode of investigation was formal analysis; he attempted to elucidate the trends in Byzantine art by tracing developments and transformations in artistic form and style.¹⁰ Kitzinger did not view advances in Byzantine art as a strict, linear progression but, rather, as a dialectical process.¹¹ He stated, 'At certain times and in certain places bold stabs were made in the direction of new, unclassical forms, only to be followed by reactions, retrospective movements and revivals. In some contexts such developments—in either direction—took place slowly, hesitantly and by steps so small as to be imperceptible.'¹²

Kitzinger acknowledged a relationship between form and content. Furthermore, he asserted that in order to successfully interpret stylistic trends in historical terms, every aspect of a work of art must be considered, including iconography and the

⁸ For example, C.R. Morey, *Medieval Art*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1942 and *Early Christian Art: An Outline of the Evolution of Style and Iconography in Sculpture and Painting from Antiquity to the Eighth Century*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1942.

⁹ A select bibliography: 'Studies on Late Antique and Early Byzantine Floor Mosaics (Mosaics at Nikopolis)', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 6, 1951, 83-122; 'The Stylistic Development in Pavement Mosaics in the Greek East from the Age of Constantine to Justinian', *La Mosaique Gréco-romaine. Colloques internationaux du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique*, Paris : Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1965, 341-51. Reprinted in W.E. Kleinbauer, ed., *The Art of Byzantium and the Medieval West: Selected Studies by E. Kitzinger*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976, 64-88; 'Mosaic Pavements in the Greek East and the Question of a 'Renaissance' under Justinian', *Actes du VIe Congrès International d'Etudes Byzantines, Paris, 1948*. vol 2. Paris: École des Hautes Études, 1951, 209-23. Reprinted in W. E. Kleinbauer, ed., *The Art of Byzantium and the Medieval West: Selected Studies by E. Kitzinger*, 49-63. See also Kitzinger, *Studies in Late Antique and Byzantine Art*, vol. 1 of his *Studies in Late Antique, Byzantine and Medieval Western Art*, London: Pindar Press, 2002.

¹⁰ A good overview of his approach to Byzantine art over the years can be found in the introduction to Ernst Kitzinger, *Byzantine Art in the Making. Main lines of stylistic development in Mediterranean art, 3rd-7th Century*, 2nd edition, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980, 1-6.

¹¹ The dialectical method as conceived by the German philosopher, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), was part of a cyclical concept that formed an alternative explanation to continuous linear evolution. The fundamental notion of Hegel's dialectic is that things or ideas have internal contradictions. From his point of view, analysis or comprehension of a thing or idea reveals that underneath its apparently simple identity or unity is an underlying inner contradiction. This contradiction leads to the dissolution of the thing or idea in the simple form in which it presented itself and to a higher-level, more complex thing or idea that more adequately incorporates the contradiction. For a summary of the influence of these two philosophies upon art history, see W. E. Kleinbauer's introduction to *Modern Perspectives in Western Art History: an Anthology of 20th-century Writings on the Visual Arts*, reprinted in *Medieval Academy Reprints for Teaching* 25, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989, 19-26.

¹² *Byzantine Art in the Making*, 4. The chapters of Kitzinger's book are arranged and entitled in such a manner as to directly parallel the triadic precepts (thesis, antithesis, synthesis) of the dialectical method.

message it conveys; function; patronage; the reliance upon earlier prototypes; and any possible connotations associated with them. In his studies on floor mosaics, Kitzinger occasionally ventured into areas of iconographical interpretation¹³ but, with one exception, he generally avoided symbolic interpretations of the pavements.¹⁴ His broad knowledge of floor mosaics throughout the eastern Mediterranean provided him with the basis for the establishment of a general framework for the stylistic transformations that occurred in pavements of the early Byzantine period.¹⁵

Kitzinger adopted the views of the Eastern School, which, by his time, had prevailed among scholars. Nonetheless, he rejected Strzygowski's hypotheses in favour of those of the earlier Russian school.¹⁶ Strzygowski claimed that the anti-classical predilections in Late Antique art were the result of a re-emergence of some of the characteristics of the art of the ancient Near East during the decline of the classical world. Kitzinger shared the Russian scholars' convictions that Classical art, which had thoroughly permeated the Near East, formed the foundation for developments in Late Antique and early Byzantine art. There are a couple of themes that appear throughout Kitzinger's publications and provide coherence to his body of research. He applied these themes to various artistic media, including floor mosaics. Kitzinger proposed that changes in artistic style can be 'other-directed' or 'inner-directed'; it seems that another alternative might be a combination of these two. 'Other-directed' change was effected by an outside force such as the church, the imperial court, or individual patrons. 'Inner-directed' change was an intuitive, creative act on the part of the artist who gave visual representation to the religious and social conditions of his environment.¹⁷ Additionally, Kitzinger postulated that the form and style of a work of art were significantly affected by the content.¹⁸ This is his theory of modes, which holds that particular styles were used for particular subjects or realms of existence. Therefore, two quite different styles of the same date could appear in the same work.¹⁹ Kitzinger's use of style as the basis

¹³ *Byzantine Art in the Making*, 4, note 8.

¹⁴ 'The Threshold of the Holy Shrine: Observations on Floor Mosaics at Antioch and Bethlehem', *Kyriakon. Festschrift Johannes Quasten*, Patrick Granfield and Josef Jungman, eds, vol. 2., Münster and Westfalen: Aschendorff, 1970, 639-47.

¹⁵ Kitzinger, 'Stylistic Developments in Pavement Mosaics in the Greek East from the Age of Constantine to the Age of Justinian', 341-51.

¹⁶ *Byzantine Art in the Making*, 10.

¹⁷ *Byzantine Art in the Making*, 18.

¹⁸ 'Byzantine Art in the Period between Justinian and Iconoclasm', *Berichte zum XI. Internationalen Byzantinisten-Kongress, München, 1958*. IV, 1, Munich: C.H. Beck, 1958, 1-50. Reprinted in W. E. Kleinbauer, ed., *The Art of Byzantium and the Medieval West*, 157-206. Also in Kitzinger, *Byzantine Art in the Making*, passim.

¹⁹ Other scholars made use of the theory of stylistic modes, notably Kurt Weitzmann, 'The Classical in Byzantine Art as a Mode of Individual Expression', in Kurt Weitzmann, *Studies in Classical and Byzantine Manuscript Illumination*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976, 151-75. Henry Maguire calls for the introduction of the concept of modes into the discourses of the power of images in his 'Byzantine Art History in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century', in *Byzantium. A World Civilization*, Angeliki Laiou and Henry Maguire, eds, Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1992, 130-34. He asserts that this particular stylistic phenomenon could elucidate contemporary issues, such as the issue of empowerment.

for dating mosaic pavements and his proposal of stylistic modes for certain subjects in art was sharply criticized by Cyril Mango in his review of *The Art of Byzantium and the Medieval West*.²⁰ While Mango's review raises many interesting questions concerning Kitzinger's scholarship, the main value of his criticism for the present study is that it highlights the different approaches to material culture that have been taken by historians and art historians in the past. A single quote from Mango well illustrates his concern: 'Stylistic attribution is perfectly legitimate when it is based on a sufficient body of accepted facts.'²¹ '...on a sufficient body of accepted facts.' – there's the rub: what constitutes a sufficient body as well as an accepted fact differs from historian to art historian. Mango states that Palaeologan painting meets the criteria, and it does.²² However, Palaeologan art dates to the 13th c. and, therefore, is naturally better preserved and able to be more precisely dated than the earlier material that Kitzinger was investigating. Mango's call for caution was certainly correct; however, it has not generally prevented careful, responsible scholarship on Late Antique and early Byzantine material culture.

André Grabar is best known for his contributions to the field of Early Christian and Byzantine iconography.²³ Grabar's views and his own approach to the study of early Christian and Byzantine art reveal that he was a disciple of the Russian School and, therefore, place him squarely within the tradition of the Eastern School. Grabar often drew direct parallels between the construction of verbal language and the creation of visual language; however, his approach was not simply philological (as was that of the Russian scholars) but also semiotic.²⁴ He made a distinction between informative and expressive images, '(t)he first appeal solely to the intellect (exactly like a technical text), while others make an appeal to the imagination and the aesthetic sense', although he admitted that it is often difficult to clearly distinguish between the two types.²⁵ Scholars would find his assertion that not all painted, drawn or sculpted images should be considered works of art objectionable and they would not view as an exclusionary factor the fact that many of these images are signs which can be interpreted in a descriptive or a symbolic manner.

²⁰ Review of *The Art of Byzantium and the Medieval West* by Cyril Mango in *Times Literary Supplement*, Issue 3915, 25 March 1977, 381; Ernst Kitzinger's response to Mango's review in *Times Literary Supplement*, Issue 3921, 6 May, 1977, 561; Mango's reply to Kitzinger's response in *Times Literary Supplement* Issue 3923, 20 May 1977, 621.

²¹ *Times Literary Supplement*, Issue 3923, 621.

²² *Times Literary Supplement*, Issue 3923, 621.

²³ *Christian Iconography. A Study of its Origins*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968; he applies similar methodology to architecture in *Martyrium*, 2 vols, Paris: Collège de France, 1943-46.

²⁴ See the introduction to his *Christian Iconography. A Study of its Origins* for a summary of his views towards images. For a good summary of the past and potential contribution of semiotics to the study of art, see Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, 'Semiotics and Art History', *Art Bulletin* 73: 2, 1991, 174-208. Their article opens with the following definition of semiotics, 'The basic tenet of semiotics, the theory of sign and sign-use is anti-realist. Human culture is made up of signs, each of which stands for something other than itself, and the people inhabiting culture busy themselves making sense of those signs.'

²⁵ Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, xlv.

Grabar's assertion that Christian iconography developed against a background of contemporary Greco-Roman art and that motifs in the common repertory could be transformed into an image with Christian connotations by the incorporation of new features or details is significant for the evaluation of floor mosaics. Some scholars still believe that floor mosaics, because of their perceived 'lowly position' and the fact that at first glance they 'all look the same' regardless of their secular or sacred location, are purely decorative and hence, devoid of any symbolic meaning. However, Grabar persuasively argued that the changes could be sufficiently minor and insignificant or even expressed indirectly so as to be noticeable only to the informed viewer.²⁶ Along these same lines he found that the image could have different meanings in different contexts. Of particular importance for the present study, however, are the tentative steps that he took towards the suggestion that images could have different meanings, which could be apprehended separately or simultaneously.²⁷

Grabar believed that the floor mosaics in the Greek East, as distinct from those in the West, are imbued with allegorical meaning and are justified in receiving a symbolic interpretation.²⁸ For example, he argued that the bird in a cage, a composition that occurs frequently in pavements, is a Neoplatonic symbol for the soul of man.²⁹ Grabar declared that there were no Christian images produced in Late Antiquity solely for decorative purposes; art for art's sake did not exist.³⁰ Finally, at an early date he observed the similarities in the contemporaneous wall paintings in synagogues and churches and raised pertinent questions concerning the relationship between Jewish and Christian iconography.³¹ This is a subject that has received a good deal of attention from scholars in recent decades and is particularly relevant for the study of mosaics, given their appearance in both synagogues and churches in the eastern Mediterranean.³²

In his monumental work, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, Erwin Goodenough examines numerous media, including mosaic pavements and, significantly, unveils an innovative methodology for the treatment and interpretation of symbols in the study of religion.³³ He developed a method for explaining the meaning (his term: value) and use of symbols that relied primarily upon the art and archaeology

²⁶ Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, xlix.

²⁷ Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, lii. He uses the orant as an illustration, 'the image of the orant had several meanings to the earliest Christians, however, by the fifth century, this image could have all of them [meanings] at once to the viewer.'

²⁸ Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, 51-54.

²⁹ A. Grabar, 'Un Thème de l'Iconographie Chrétienne: L'Oiseau dans la Cage', *Cahiers Archéologiques* 16, 1966, 9-16.

³⁰ Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, xlix.

³¹ Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, 27. An interesting discussion of the nearly simultaneous emergence of artistic expression in Judaism, Christianity and Manicheism.

³² Rachel Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Land of Israel*, Leiden: Brill Publishers, 1988; Rachel Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Diaspora*, Leiden: Brill Publishers, 1998.

³³ *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, 13 vols, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953-1968. For a good overview, see Jacob Neusner, ed., *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, (hereafter, *Jewish Symbols, Abridged*), Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.

and only secondarily upon textual evidence. Jacob Neusner recognizes the broader significance of the general question Goodenough sought to answer: 'how to make sense of the ways in which people use art to express their deepest yearnings, and how we are to make sense of that expression in the study of the people who speak—without resort to words—through it.'³⁴ His treatment of the symbols of Hellenistic Judaism can be viewed as a case study. Apart from his methodological approach, Goodenough's view that Hellenistic Jewish art served as the conduit between pagan and Christian art has been disproven. In short, he argued that artistic representations, which originated in the pre-Christian period and later appeared in Christian art, were adapted from the Jewish repertory along with scenes from the Old Testament.³⁵

In the first three volumes, Goodenough presented the archaeological evidence for Jewish art in the Greco-Roman period. In the next five volumes, he interpreted the symbols found in the archaeological data. Throughout these volumes, the author sought to answer three questions: if the extant rabbinic sources did not provide encouragement for the use of symbols, whence did the encouragement come? What conclusions can be drawn concerning the extent and nature of rabbinic authority? How should the clearly identifiable Jewish use of imagery adapted from pagan art be interpreted? In dealing with these questions, Goodenough confronted some of the same misconceptions that arise in the study of early Christian art, including mosaic pavements. The simplest, and most frequently mentioned, conclusion is that the artistic representations are purely decorative and without symbolic meaning.³⁶ The commonly repeated view, which parallels that ascribed to the early Church Fathers, is that the rabbis did not approve of iconic art but, because of its popularity with the masses, gradually accepted it. Goodenough argued that the funerary and religious settings in which the Jewish symbols occur have always been environments prone to symbolic imagery, regardless of era or region. Further, the selection of a relatively small number of motifs and compositions from the large quantity available, he asserted, is proof of their symbolic value. He inferred that the repeated use of only a handful of symbols in religiously charged environments indicates that their function surpassed mere decoration.

Goodenough defined a symbol as '...an image or design with a significance, to the one who uses it, quite beyond its manifest content. Or for our purpose we may say that a symbol is an object or a pattern which, whatever the reason may be, operates upon men, and causes effect in them, beyond mere recognition of what is literally presented in the given form.'³⁷ He proposed that symbols have a lifespan: when they lose their power, symbols die.³⁸ The same symbols might experience a rebirth under a new religious movement at which time they are given new explanations and associations. According to Goodenough, this process occurs because the old symbols

³⁴ Neusner, *Jewish Symbols, Abridged.*, editor's foreward, xi.

³⁵ Neusner, *Jewish Symbols, Abridged.*, 26-27; 34-35.

³⁶ An interpretation frequently given for the mosaic pavements in Byzantine churches.

³⁷ Neusner, *Jewish Symbols, Abridged.*, 33.

³⁸ Neusner, *Jewish Symbols, Abridged.*, 42. Goodenough refers to symbols as 'live' or 'dead'.

have an inherent symbolic power capable of producing a strong emotional response in man. Live (active) symbols are also transmitted from religion to religion. In sum, certain symbols are adopted by multiple religions because of their inherent symbolic value. The connotative value is retained while the myths and explanations of the old religions are discarded.³⁹ The symbol receives new myths and explanations specific to each of the religious systems. In this way, continuity of religious symbols is established. Goodenough posited that the continuously used symbols formed a *lingua franca*, which communicated a common meaning for the religious movements of the day as well as for all levels of society within a particular religion.⁴⁰ He states, '(s)ymbols are for the intellectual and childish alike.'⁴¹ The implication of this statement is that religious symbols were social equalizers in a way that was impossible with written texts. Visual representations appeal to all people regardless of social status, although they likely did not have the same meaning for everyone.

Goodenough devised a method for determining whether a symbol has value that does not depend upon written documents since he found textual evidence insufficient for the interpretation of Jewish symbols. He stated, 'It seems to me that the motive for borrowing pagan art and integrating it into Judaism throughout the Roman world can be discovered only by analyzing the art itself.'⁴² His methodology for the evaluation of symbols was based upon a combination of historical and psychological approaches. At its basic level, Goodenough's method is the consideration of the psychological implications of the historical (i.e., archaeological) evidence that had been presented. The process established for the evaluation of symbols involved a number of steps. Following the presentation of the physical evidence for Jewish symbols, Goodenough traced the individual symbols back to their earliest appearance in an attempt to reconstruct the *lingua franca* of symbols in their varied uses. His aim was to determine the basic value that each symbol carried with it. He suggested, '...the lingua franca of symbolism, the medium of continuity of values in symbolism, is the key to understanding the symbols borrowed by the Jews, and that this lingua franca can be read, and the values of the symbols recovered., only as we consider the figured symbolism in the light of the newer psychology.'⁴³ The conclusions drawn by Goodenough through his use of Freudian and Jungian psychological principles are problematic. For example, he concluded that the basic value common to all of the symbols was eroticism, which was based upon the desire for fertility. While the author maintained that he was neither a Freudian nor a

³⁹ Neusner, *Jewish Symbols, Abridged.*, 42. Goodenough accepted Susanne Langer's definition of denotative and connotative thinking as largely a distinction between verbal and non-verbal thought. (Susanne Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite and Art*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942, as cited by Goodenough.) He held that symbols have both a literal, denotative value and a deep emotional, connotative meaning.

⁴⁰ E.g., the same symbols are used in association with Dionysus, Orpheus, Mithras, Judaism, and Christianity.

⁴¹ Neusner, *Jewish Symbols, Abridged.*, 51.

⁴² Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, vol. 4, 10.

⁴³ Neusner, *Jewish Symbols, Abridged.*, 69.

Jungian in his approach to psychology and remained open to any system that aided in the interpretation of the symbols, his application of their principles is one of the weaknesses of his work. Psychological interpretation aside, Goodenough's analysis of various symbols, particularly astronomical, as well as the Dura Europos synagogue paintings, has made a significant contribution to scholarship.⁴⁴ The importance of Goodenough's method lies in its serious attempt to seek the meaning of Jewish art in the works of art themselves and refusal to allow it to be determined by texts which may be insufficient for art's interpretation. The premise of Goodenough's work, that Jewish symbols had meaning beyond decorative, was sharply criticized by scholars of his day and continues to have detractors.

More recently, the subject of Jewish art (including mosaics) in a late antique context has been dealt with in penetrating studies by Jaś Elsner and Steven Fine. Elsner has persuasively argued for a change in the discourse on the relationship between Jewish and Christian art by problematizing the use, both historically and currently, by art historians and archaeologists of the categories Jewish art and Early Christian art as distinct from the rich spectrum of Greco-Roman religious art.⁴⁵ As he indicates, 'In other words, the religion we require to imbue the artefacts we label 'Jewish' or 'Christian' or 'pagan' was pretty certainly not put there by their artisanal creators, does not inhere unquestionably in their particular iconography, and is not certainly applicable even through a clear context of use like the Dura synagogue. It would have been a matter of individual viewer investments and of ritual charging in specific liturgical contexts.'⁴⁶ Elsner does not question whether Jews and Christians made and used art in the years before the fourth century (he accepts that they did); instead, he questions the methods and motives of the modern scholars who defined it and, by their definitions, lent it an exclusivity that is not supported by the evidence.⁴⁷ A more accurate interpretation of the evidence, according to him, reveals the tightly interwoven nature of late antique religions. Thus, none of the religious arts of this period were produced independently of the others: 'the iconographies and visual strategies of any one cult are a complex mixture of structural rejections of the particular forms favoured by the others and the borrowing of motifs.'⁴⁸ According to Elsner, a fuller, more nuanced interpretation of the appearance of Jewish and Christian art is possible only when the full context against which these forms appeared is considered.

In *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World: Towards a New Jewish Archaeology*, Steven Fine argues that Jews were full participants in the visual culture of the Greco-Roman world, selectively adopting, adapting, and modifying imagery from the

⁴⁴ Neusner, *Jewish Symbols, Abridged.*, 116-73; 177-265.

⁴⁵ Jaś Elsner, 'Archaeologies and Agendas: Reflections on Late Ancient Jewish Art and Early Christian Art', *Journal of Roman Studies* 93, 2003, 114-128.

⁴⁶ Elsner, 'Archaeologies and Agendas', 119.

⁴⁷ Elsner, 'Archaeologies and Agendas', 124.

⁴⁸ Elsner 'Archaeologies and Agendas', 126

predominant visual culture in order to create a 'minority or ethnic art.'⁴⁹ His search for a 'Jewish *koiné*'⁵⁰ involves synthesizing the disparate literary sources and material culture in order to arrive at a more 'holistic' interpretation of the evidence.⁵¹ The first chapter of Fine's book considers the essential questions: what is Jewish art, what is Jewish about Jewish art, and how should it be studied. He poses much the same questions for 'Jewish archaeology'. A historiographical exploration of both fields, which have arguably been subject to misrepresentation over the years, ensues—not simply in Part One but throughout the book.

While he does not grapple with some of the thornier issues taken up by Elsner: for example, Fine accepts the appearance of the menorah as sufficient to identify a work of art as Jewish,⁵² he is critical of the methods used by Goodenough and later scholars who study objects separately from their original contexts. Hence, for the study of late antique synagogues, Fine recommends an approach that calls for 'get[ting] into the 'heads' and 'bodies'' of ancient Jews by drawing upon every type of evidence available, including mosaics, in order to attempt a reconstruction of the liturgy that took place there.⁵³

North Africa

The mosaics of North Africa have been the objects of intense study over the past fifty years. The majority of publications deal with individual mosaics or assemblages in a particular location or that address a specific theme.⁵⁴ Two scholars, Irving Lavin and Katherine Dunbabin, have attempted to take a more comprehensive view of mosaic pavements in North Africa as well as to place this material within the broader context of developments in the mosaic tradition in the wider eastern Mediterranean.

In his article, Lavin offers an alternate interpretation of the developments in mosaic pavements of Late Antiquity to the one that had been recently traced by Doro Levi in his study of mosaic floors in Antioch.⁵⁵ Lavin rejects Levi's conclusion that the changes and transformations visible in the Antioch mosaics were consistent with the linear evolution of artistic trends that occurred throughout the Greco-Roman world. Moreover, he is critical of the manner in which Levi employed formal analysis as a methodology; he asserts that Levi's preoccupation with the detailed examination of individual motifs and scenes prevented him from dealing with the compositional

⁴⁹ Steven Fine, *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World: Towards a New Jewish Archaeology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 3.

⁵⁰ Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 3.

⁵¹ Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 165.

⁵² Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 139.

⁵³ Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 213.

⁵⁴ See, for example, the collection of thematic essays assembled in Michèle Blanchard-Lemée, Mongi Ennaïfer, Hedi Slim and Latifa Slim, *Mosaics of Roman Africa. Floor Mosaics from Tunisia*, Kenneth Whitehead, trans, New York: George Braziller, 1996.

⁵⁵ *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*, 2 vols, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947.

programs of the pavements as a whole. As a result, according to Lavin, Levi failed to recognize the significant shift in the conception of the floor. By taking a broader approach to the floor, argues Lavin, it becomes clear that the changes that appeared in the late fourth/early fifth centuries cannot be due to a rational and balanced linear evolution, as Levi proposed.⁵⁶ Rather, Lavin asserts, such an approach reveals that the manner in which the floor was conceived had fundamentally changed. He identifies a clear break between the earlier pavements, which were firmly rooted in the Hellenistic tradition and the later floor mosaics, which implemented stylistic convention that, in time, were viewed as inherent qualities of early medieval and Byzantine art. Lavin agrees with Levi's conclusion that the developments in Late Antique floor mosaics were not the result of Eastern influence (which some scholars believed resulted from the tumultuous and uncertain times of the late Roman period in the provinces along the far eastern boundaries of the Empire during the tumultuous and uncertain times of the late Roman period)⁵⁷; instead, he argues that North Africa is the source for the changes in compositional and stylistic principles in mosaics.⁵⁸

Lavin acknowledges that his hypothesis contradicts the prevailing theories of his day, which sought the origins of Late Antique and Byzantine art in the Greek East. However, his ideas do not represent a wholesale return to the Western school of thought. At the time, Lavin's theory that a province, such as North Africa, could have been responsible for new artistic developments, which were then transferred to both imperial capitals and other provinces, was innovative. It marks a small step in challenging the widely held and long-enduring 'imperio-centric' notion that any artistic innovations or developments must have their origins in the imperial cities despite the fact that, ultimately, Lavin weakens his own argument by taking the position that the new style was transmitted through imperial channels.⁵⁹ Lavin does 'not necessarily assume an immediate and direct 'influence' from North Africa in the eastern half of the Empire...but rather a broad and progressive diffusion of basically Western point of view, of which North Africa developed certain special aspects.'⁶⁰ Nonetheless, he maintains that attitudes and developments, which had their origins in the West, were the primary sources of influence upon nascent Byzantine art in the East.

According to Lavin, the hunting and animal pavements that appeared in Antioch in the third quarter of the fifth century reveal an internal evolution of their own which can only be explained in terms of an earlier external source (North Africa) that exerted

⁵⁶ 'The Hunting Mosaics of Antioch and their Sources: a Study of Compositional Principles in the Development of the Early Medieval Style', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 17, 1963, 182.

⁵⁷ Charles Rufus Morey, *The Mosaics of Antioch*, London, New York, Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1938, 47-48; Jean Lassus, 'Les Mosaiques d'Antioche', *Comptes rendus des l'Academie des inscriptions et belles lettres* 80, 1936, 39-42; Clark Hopkins, 'Antioch Mosaic Pavements', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 7, 1948, 93-97; Donald N. Wilber, 'Iranian Motifs in Syrian Art', *Bulletin of the American Institute for Iranian Art and Archaeology* 5, 1937, 22-26.

⁵⁸ Lavin, 'The Hunting Mosaics of Antioch and their Sources', 183.

⁵⁹ Lavin, 'The Hunting Mosaics of Antioch and their Sources', 266.

⁶⁰ Lavin, 'The Hunting Mosaics of Antioch and their Sources', 183-84.

influence in the period of transition between the Hellenistic tradition and the emergence of Late Antique art.⁶¹ His main concern is the changes and developments in style, not iconography, of the overall design of the mosaic pavements. A weakness of Lavin's study is his concentration upon figural compositions to the virtual exclusion of developments in the area of non-figural, abstract, and geometric decoration. There has been a tendency among scholars, which persists to this day, to play down the importance of non-figural, abstract mosaics. This is an important oversight; close examination of these pavements, while, perhaps, not as interesting as those with figural compositions, reveals changes and developments that correspond to regional artistic trends and can be helpful as indicators of chronology.

Katherine Dunbabin takes a broader approach both in scope and methodology than Lavin to the mosaics of North Africa.⁶² Leaving aside formal analysis, Dunbabin focuses upon issues of iconography and patronage in the development of mosaic pavements. She attempts to demonstrate that the mosaicists of North Africa created different solutions than those of Italy and the northwestern provinces to meet the new conception of the floor that had emerged with the decline of the emblema-type mosaic.⁶³ Dunbabin proposes that the solutions formulated by North African patrons and mosaicists gradually came to influence mosaic pavements in other areas of the Empire. She argues that the motivation for the change in the types of subject matter that appear in the North African pavements came from the patron whose choices were reflections of 'the interests and activities, social, civic, and religious, of the society or individual.'⁶⁴ Their requirements forced the artists to formulate new stylistic and compositional methods that would permit them to visually express the new themes in the medium of mosaic. In short, differences in the formal aspects of the mosaics were predicated on changes in theme and subject matter. For Dunbabin, who has adopted a sociological approach to art, the desire for change in artistic trends is 'other-directed', initiated by outside factors and influences.

Dunbabin asserts that during the third and fourth centuries, as classical principles were increasingly abandoned in the realm of official art, the various regional styles that had previously existed in isolation began to coalesce to form the new style of Late Antiquity.⁶⁵ She argues that the appearance of the new style in mosaics originated in North Africa and subsequently spread to Italy and the western provinces.⁶⁶ Unlike Lavin, who claims that there was a strong mosaic tradition in Italy that influenced the

⁶¹ Lavin, 'The Hunting Mosaics of Antioch and their Sources', 196.

⁶² Katherine Dunbabin, *Mosaics of Roman North Africa. Studies in Iconography and Patronage*, (hereafter, *MRNA*), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978. Dunbabin's most recent publication, *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, is a broad survey of the mosaic tradition, from the earliest pebble mosaics in the Greek world through the tessellated mosaics of churches in the Late Antique period.

⁶³ Dunbabin, *MRNA*, 10. Dunbabin, *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World*, 342, defines an emblem as 'a self-contained panel worked separately and set into the centre of mosaic or other form of pavement.'

⁶⁴ Dunbabin, *MRNA*, 10.

⁶⁵ Dunbabin, *MRNA*, 196.

⁶⁶ Dunbabin, *MRNA*, passim, especially 196-222.

North African mosaics, Dunbabin believes that it was the weakness of the tradition in Rome and the West that led to their early rejection of the emblema-type mosaic, experimentation with other solutions, and eventual acceptance, at the end of the third century, of the new style.⁶⁷ In the East, where the Hellenistic principles of emblema-type panel composition and the logical, pictorial treatment of space were deeply rooted, change came later. She agrees with Levi and Lavin that the changes evident in the fourth century mosaics of Antioch are not the product of influences from the Near East but, rather, fit within the context of contemporaneous developments in Greco-Roman art throughout the Mediterranean world. However, she rejects Levi's notion that Rome was the ultimate source for the hunting mosaics, 'The place of origin is certainly not Rome, which Levi regards as the principal centre for the diffusion of the Late Antique style, since it was never a centre for mosaic art or an innovator of new methods.'⁶⁸

Dunbabin agrees with Lavin's theory that the origin of the methods and compositional devices employed in the fifth century hunting mosaics of Antioch are to be found in North Africa. Yet, she does not share his broader view that there was a sharp break in the style between the earlier (pre-fifth century) and later Antioch mosaics, which Lavin sees as representative of similar changes that must have occurred in other Eastern cities, and could be traced to the influence of North African mosaics.⁶⁹ Dunbabin envisions a linear evolution, consistent with her views concerning the whole development of the Roman mosaic tradition, for the changes that Lavin observed in the Antioch pavements. Significantly, she believes that the transformations begin to appear at an earlier date than Lavin claimed; she asserts that it is in the fourth century that a new approach to the floor is first witnessed in the mosaics.⁷⁰ The acceptance of the floor as a two-dimensional, unified surface is expressed in the new popularity of the carpet-pattern composition in floor mosaics. She believes that this development was unrelated, stylistically and thematically, to the North African mosaics and was likely an indigenous innovation. In Dunbabin's view, these changes are not the result of external influence but the result of an internal impetus. Later, as the East began to look for additional solutions to meet their new attitudes towards the floor, it was open to ideas from elsewhere, including North Africa.

Lavin theorizes that the North African trends, which significantly influenced the pavements in the East, were introduced to this region by more than one method, including direct transmission from Africa; the general diffusion of the new style throughout the Empire; and, particularly, its acceptance into the realm of official art.⁷¹ Dunbabin discusses the problems with Lavin's theory that mosaicists from North Africa migrated to the East, carrying the new style of mosaics with them. The date (mid-fifth century) of the appearance of the new type of figural mosaic in Antioch coincides with

⁶⁷Dunbabin, *MRNA*, 224-25.

⁶⁸ Dunbabin, *MRNA*, 224-25.

⁶⁹ Lavin, 'The Hunting Mosaics of Antioch and their Sources', 266-74.

⁷⁰ Dunbabin, *MRNA*, 227.

⁷¹ Lavin, 'The Hunting Mosaics of Antioch and their Sources', 266.

the Vandal invasion of Africa. In the face of imminent danger, many Africans fled from the region, creating an African diaspora of sorts. It is possible that some communities relocated to Syria and Palestine. However, it is problematic for Lavin's assertion of direct influence that the mosaic tradition of Africa throughout the fifth and sixth centuries was in a definite decline, in terms of the disintegration of form and composition as well as a paucity of innovation. Dunbabin identifies other difficulties with Lavin's theory. Foremost among them are the stylistic discrepancies in the treatment of the figures; the figure style in the East adheres to Hellenistic traditions while in Africa, by the late 4th century, figures had lost much of their organic coherence.⁷² Moreover, she argues that while related methods of composition are used, they are not entirely similar. Thus, Dunbabin concludes that there is no evidence of a workshop of African immigrants in Syria in the middle of the fifth century that produced mosaics in the style current in their homeland and that, 'an overwhelming current of direct African influence on the Antioch mosaics seems as improbable as a similar current of Oriental influence.'⁷³

Dunbabin admits the possibility that there was some specific yet undiscovered intermediary school that was responsible for the transmission of the North African style to the East. However, she rejects Lavin's notion that its early acceptance among imperial circles was a primary source for the diffusion of the new style. As she observes, there is no evidence in imperial buildings in the East or West for the early adoption of the new style.⁷⁴ The only imperial building with mosaics of the new type is the Great Palace in Constantinople. The date of the mosaic pavement of the peristyle in the palace complex has been a source of debate among scholars, although there seems to be consensus that it cannot antedate the reign of Justinian I. Thus, it is too late to have exerted any influence upon the adoption of a new style in the East.

Dunbabin concludes that regions in the eastern Mediterranean, when finally prepared to look beyond the immediate area for decorative options to meet their new conception of the floor, benefited enormously from the diffusion of the new style along with its various manifestations throughout the Mediterranean. This presented many different choices for the easternmost provinces. She proposes that the force behind the acceptance of the new style was the patron, whom, she assumes, is identical to patrons in the West: local aristocrats, concerned with their status, reputation, and things of their world.⁷⁵ She suggests that as the new style won wide acceptance in the East, it was no longer confined to the class which first adopted it, and began to meet with the approval of the imperial class. Dunbabin states the mosaic floors which paved churches and synagogues were far beyond the reach of direct African influence. However, she claims that they employed concepts and techniques found in contemporary eastern secular floors; according to Dunbabin, these concepts and techniques originated in North

⁷² Dunbabin, *MRNA*, 226.

⁷³ Dunbabin, *MRNA*, 226.

⁷⁴ Dunbabin, *MRNA*, 227.

⁷⁵ Dunbabin, *MRNA*, 229.

Africa.⁷⁶ Her views concerning the importance of the developments in the mosaics of North Africa for the mosaic tradition in subsequent centuries is summarized in the following statement, 'In the field of floor mosaics, it may be said that it was the African magnates who made the decisive contribution to the evolution of the early Byzantine style, through their early renunciation of classicism and their experimentation with new ideas.'⁷⁷

Antioch

The excavation of a large group of Roman and Late Antique mosaic pavements in Antioch and its environs from 1932 until 1936 was significant for the study of floor mosaics.⁷⁸ This was the first group of pavements to be systematically excavated and methodically examined in the eastern Mediterranean. As a result, the Antioch mosaics have become a benchmark for scholars interested in tracing the development of mosaic pavements in the eastern Empire, as well as forming the standard for the dating of mosaics in other regions, but this has not been without its problems.⁷⁹ Interpretations of the style and composition of the mosaics differ greatly among the two scholars who undertook the earliest evaluations of the pavements.

In *The Mosaics of Antioch*, Charles Rufus Morey proposed that the dramatic changes in the layout and style of the mosaics of the fourth and fifth centuries were a result of the re-emergence of 'Oriental' influence, which he viewed as an artistic decline. As an adherent to the Eastern School, he argued that Antioch was never really Hellenized beyond a superficial veneer and that, below the surface, the city retained a marked undercurrent of 'Oriental' (Sasanian Persian) culture and influence. Morey described the subtle changes in the style and composition of the third century pavements, which foreshadowed the new trends that fully emerged in the fourth and fifth centuries, as follows: 'the grip of Greek culture on the Orient is seen by such examples to be loosening, and the naturalism of Greek art to be submerged in a resurgence of age-old ways of seeing things which the East had never forgotten. From this comes the frontality of the face and figure, the lack of articulation of the limbs, the simplification of forms.'⁸⁰ According to Morey, the naturalistic rendering of the beasts placed within an unnatural setting in the hunting pavements at Antioch, the occasional use of ribbons around the necks of animals and birds, and the all-over carpet

⁷⁶ Dunbabin, *MRNA*, 233.

⁷⁷ Dunbabin, *MRNA*, 233.

⁷⁸ The reports appear in four volumes: *Antioch on the Orontes*, vol. 1, George Wicker Elderkin, ed., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1934; vols. 2 and 3, Richard Stillwell, ed., 1938-41; vol. 5, Jean Lassus, ed., 1972.

⁷⁹ As Sheila Campbell noted in the preface to her catalogue, *The Mosaics of Antioch*. *Subsidia Mediaevalia* 15, Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1988, the dating for the Antioch pavements in the excavation reports and studies of the mosaics are often convoluted. It is not always clear whether a pavement has been dated by archaeological or stylistic evidence, and when the mosaic is used as comparative material for stylistic dating, dating becomes problematic.

⁸⁰ Morey, *Mosaics of Antioch*, 36.

composition, which gained favour in the fifth century, are all elements of 'Oriental' influence.⁸¹ For him, the importance of the Antioch mosaic pavements in the history of the mosaic tradition was the record that they provided for each stage in the transformation from the Hellenistic to the Late Antique style and the evidence they offer that the same process occurred in Asia Minor, Greece, Italy, and the Latin West due to the influence of Antioch. Morey believed that the Late Antique style, which was heavily influenced by eastern artistic trends and aesthetic ideals, originated in Syria and was subsequently diffused throughout the Empire. His approach was primarily formal analysis, although he included iconography when it corresponded with his goal of illustrating the Eastern origin of the new style in Antioch. He believed that the mosaics reflect the new mood of Late Antiquity: uneasiness, economic upheaval, and fear concerning the future. This approach is essentially Hegelian: a definite break causes the change, not a continuous evolution. However, contrary to Morey's suppositions, the archaeological evidence indicates that Antioch was thoroughly Hellenized and, while it is possible that a few motifs were adopted from Persian art, the Late Antique style as a whole did not originate in the East.

Doro Levi's *Antioch Mosaic Pavements* is the fundamental study of the floor mosaics of the city.⁸² His methodology and views concerning the evolution of the mosaic tradition and the origin of the Late Antique style as exemplified in the mosaics of Antioch differ dramatically from Morey's. His method of investigation makes use primarily of formal analysis but also incorporates studies of the iconography. His work is divided into two parts: the first section is a catalogue, arranged chronologically, that includes a description of each mosaic found in the excavations along with any evidence which may be useful for understanding, classifying, and dating them. Each catalogue entry is accompanied by an examination of the iconography of the pavement in relation to objects and monuments in other categories of art. The second section provides an intensive stylistic analysis of the geometric, floral, and vegetal decoration; the figural style; the animal, bird and fish styles; and the compositions used in the pavements. Each of these categories is further subdivided, chronologically, into pre-Constantinian and post-Constantinian pavements. For each category of decoration, Levi undertook a detailed examination of the individual motifs and identified parallels (earlier, contemporary, and later) in the East and West.

Levi is clear from the outset concerning his views that the mosaics in the eastern Mediterranean were influenced by the artistic conventions of Rome and the West, not by the East: 'Paintings and mosaics show their evident derivation from models of Greek classical and Hellenistic art down to later antiquity. This may be said for the entire Roman world. For Syria and Palestine, particularly, it has been established for a long time that such imitation persists through the advanced Middle Ages as far as painting is

⁸¹ Morey, *Mosaics of Antioch*, 41-45.

⁸² Doro Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*. (hereafter, AMP), 2 vols., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947.

concerned., and it was recently confirmed for mosaics.⁸³ His views differed from those of his contemporaries, which favoured eastern Mediterranean influence on Late Antique mosaics. Whereas Morey posited a definite break between the classical and Late Antique styles, Levi asserted a continuous evolution in the stylistic development of mosaics. In Roman art, he traced 'an ascending parabola, an uninterrupted effort' until the end of the Antonine period, when the apex of the parabola was reached.⁸⁴ From this period on, new aesthetic ideals changed and surpassed the previous style, and the Hellenistic heritage accumulated by previous technical experience, either deliberately or unconsciously was abandoned. In the Constantinian age, all of these manifestations of a new artistic ideal and stylistic manner, which had appeared sporadically in the preceding phase, were organized into a new style. Levi envisioned the transmission of compositions and motifs in painting and mosaics via cartoon and pattern books, which exported the style of the capital (Rome) to artists in all of the provinces of the Roman Empire.⁸⁵ He steadfastly refused to admit the possibility of eastern influence for any of the motifs that occur in the mosaics; he asserted that even if a motif had its origin in the East, it was first diffused in the West before it was used in pavements of the eastern Mediterranean.⁸⁶ In other words, everything passed through the Hellenistic filter of the West before returning to the provinces. If he were not wedded to the ideals of the Western School, this matter would be an unnecessary struggle for him. While it is certainly true that the majority of the motifs are Hellenistic, it is only natural, and does not alter his premise to admit the possibility of influence from adjacent regions lying just outside the provinces.

The only shortcoming of this thorough work turns out to be an important one: Levi's failure to come to terms with the layout of the mosaic pavement of the entire floor as opposed to simply addressing figure compositions. From the beginning, Levi espoused sound principles concerning the importance of the entire composition and the methods for its examination in the mosaic pavements but, unfortunately, he failed to adhere to his own guidelines. He emphasized the importance of geometric decoration in the determination of provenance and date but correctly asserted that the use of individual geometric motifs in this effort is futile: it is only the examination of '...the whole ornamental decoration of a mosaic, the association of geometric motifs and their distribution in space...' that will provide reliable indications of place of origin and chronology.⁸⁷ However, Levi became mired in the individual motifs and scenes in the Antioch pavements and neglected the manner in which the individual elements fit into

⁸³Levi, *AMP*, 8. Also, D. Levi, 'L'arte romana', *Annuario della Scuola Archeologica di Atene (ASAt)* 24-26 (n.s. 8-10), 1946-48, 229-303.

⁸⁴ Levi, *AMP*, 536.

⁸⁵ Levi, *AMP*, 8-9. That Rome was the creative centre of the new style was proven, according to Levi, by the sarcophagi from the Severan period onwards and the catacomb paintings (536-48). Levi hypothesized that part of the new style, reflected in the Constantinian and post-Constantinian mosaics of Antioch, derived from triumphal paintings, a group of Late Roman art for which there is no extant evidence. (559)

⁸⁶ Levi, *AMP*, 432.

⁸⁷ Levi, *AMP*, 373.

the overall mosaic program, including how the pavements were intended to be viewed and how the composition corresponded to the function and use of the space, i.e., the relationship between the architecture and the architectural decoration.⁸⁸ In the final chapter, entitled 'Composition', Levi was concerned exclusively with figure compositions of the fourth century and, as the new style took hold in the fifth century, he gave up on carpet pavements with filling motifs and hunting scenes as offering any value for the study of composition. Instead he concentrated on topographical compositions, which is perplexing since this theme never formed a significant part of the subject matter preferred in the mosaics of Antioch.⁸⁹

Levi's premise that the provinces were completely reliant upon the artistic trends of Rome is flawed. While it is true that the majority of the motifs and themes incorporated in the Antioch mosaics already existed in the Mediterranean, the manner in which they are first used is unique. In the fourth century, when the stylistic and compositional changes affecting the art of the entire Roman Empire becomes evident in the mosaics of Antioch, the Antiochenes first formulated their own innovative response in the creation of large, abstract pavements before displaying an openness to the solutions used in other regions.

Near East: Syria, Lebanon and Jordan

Janine Balty's extensive knowledge of the Roman and Byzantine mosaics of Syria is derived from years of archaeological work in that country, particularly at Apamea.⁹⁰ Her publication, *Mosaïques antiques du Proche-Orient. Chronologie, iconographie, interpretation*, draws heavily upon her previous experience while expanding the scope of her research to include Lebanon, Jordan, and to a far lesser degree, Israel.⁹¹ Each chapter is devoted to an investigation of one of the approaches to the study of the floor in each of the countries from the Roman through the Byzantine period. While there is much worthwhile material in these chapters, the first chapter is particularly valuable for its discussion of the parameters and limits of the various methods for the study of floor mosaics as well as some of the pitfalls that should be avoided.

⁸⁸ The only exceptions are his discussions of Roman triclinia (esp. 373-412) in which he pointed out that the layout of the pavements takes into consideration the placement of the couches, and the pavement of the ambulatory of the Martyrium of Seleucia (614).

⁸⁹ In this short chapter of twenty-four pages, Levi devoted nine pages (614-22) to topographical compositions.

⁹⁰ Balty's decision to focus on Apamea is related to the fact that her husband, Jean-Charles Balty, was the excavator of Syrian Apamea. *Mosaïques antiques de Syrie*, Brussels: Centre belge de recherches archéologiques à Apamée de Syrie, 1977; *Guide d'Apamée*, Brussels: Centre belge de recherches archéologiques à Apamée, 1981; 'Les mosaïques de Syrie au Ve siècle et leur repertoire', *Byzantion* 54, 1984, 437-68; 'Nouvelles mosaïques d' Apamée: fortune et déclin d'une demeure (Ve-VIe siècles)', in *VI Coloquio Internacional Sobre Mosaico Antiguo, Palencia-Mérida, Octubre 1990*, Guadalajara: Asociación Española de I Mosaico, 1994, 187-99.

⁹¹ Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1995.

Balty addresses the criteria required for the establishment of various types of chronological classification and some of the problems associated with them. She maintains that, in order to employ relative chronology in a meaningful manner, the corpus of mosaics for a particular area must be sufficient to make valid comparisons. The only place in the Near East where this is possible, according to Balty, is Antioch.⁹² As she indicates, the use of epigraphy in dating floor mosaics is particularly tricky and must be treated with caution.⁹³ A mosaic inscription may furnish the date of the renovation of a building, not the original date of construction. Alternatively, a mosaic may have been installed after the completion of a structure; therefore an inscription that records the completion of a building does not necessarily record the date of the mosaic. Her observations on the use of stylistic criteria for the establishment of chronology are particularly significant. It is erroneous, in her opinion, to consider the evolution of art as a linear phenomenon, 'progressing with regularity from the point of pictorial Hellenistic illusionism to the hieratic, two-dimensional style of the Byzantine period.'⁹⁴ She asserts that different stylistic tendencies can co-exist at the same moment, contrary to the conclusions of some scholars, among them André Grabar. The political climate played an influential role in matters of style, particularly in the event of a return to an older, more classicizing style. According to Balty, the most common mistake in the use of the stylistic method is the adoption of a linear approach to a series of disparate documents often originating far apart and in very different social contexts.⁹⁵ In most cases, a broad date can be established only through an investigation of the archaeological context in conjunction with the examination of a mosaic from a variety of perspectives.

Balty suggests that iconographical research is not a fruitful approach for the establishment of chronology. She maintains that iconography rarely furnishes dating criteria that cannot be determined by other methodologies. For the author, the primary value of the study of iconography is to gather information concerning related motifs and the manner in which they were transmitted in an effort to gain insights into the formation and evolution of the subject matter depicted., in this case, in the mosaic pavements.⁹⁶ Her views concerning copy books and their role in the transmission of motifs are controversial.⁹⁷ Interestingly, Balty proposes that the hunting scenes, which appear in the pavements of the fifth century in Syria, were a result of the influence exerted by the East, specifically Sasanian art, in the provinces.⁹⁸ She connects a reintroduction of the human figure in pavement compositions to this development, but

⁹² Balty, *Mosaïques antiques du Proche-Orient*, 15.

⁹³ Balty, *Mosaïques antiques du Proche-Orient*, 15.

⁹⁴ Balty, *Mosaïques antiques du Proche-Orient*, 22: '... progressant avec régularité du stade du illusionisme pictural hellénistique à celui du hiératisme bidimensionnel de l'époque byzantine.'

⁹⁵ Balty, *Mosaïques antiques du Proche-Orient*, 24.

⁹⁶ Balty, *Mosaïques antiques du Proche-Orient*, 35.

⁹⁷ Balty, *Mosaïques antiques du Proche-Orient*, 36. She is in agreement with the thesis of Phillipe Bruneau, 'Les mosaïstes antiques avaient-ils des cahiers de modèles?', *Revue archéologique* 2, 1984, 241-72.

⁹⁸ Balty, *Mosaïques antiques du Proche-Orient*, 31. This suggestion directly contradicts the assertions of Levi, Lavin, Dunbabin, and others.

it is unclear at what time or for what reason she assumes its disappearance. It is disappointing that she does not elaborate upon her views concerning the broader influence of the art of the East upon the artistic trends in the provinces at the eastern edge of the Empire.

Based upon her observation of consistency in the stylistic developments in the Near East, Balty posits the existence of a *koiné* in the region during the Byzantine period which did not exist in the western provinces.⁹⁹ The theory is based upon her perception of the creation of a new repertoire at the end of the fourth century, which was progressively enriched throughout the fifth century in the pavements discovered from Cilicia down to Palestine. She asserts that the close contact among cities/villages in the region led to the development of a unified style that continued until the southern zone diverged from the prevailing principles of composition and hence, style in the sixth century. Her identification of such regional differences in the floors in the sixth century raises important questions concerning the factors that would have led the southern provinces to adopt different formal principles in the sixth century.

Concerning the interpretation of floor mosaics, Balty believes that some pavements are deliberately rendered with symbolic significance. She argues for the presence of a school of Neoplatonic philosophy in Apamea, which exerted some influence upon the subject matter represented in some of the mosaics in the city.¹⁰⁰ However, she cautions against attempts to identify an overall coherent program in the pavements of a building or an entire complex, which she states is fraught with the danger of an unconscious manipulation of the evidence to ensure the coherence of the chosen program.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, the author appears to contradict this premise in a section of chapter two entitled, 'La Place des Mosaïques de Jordanie au Sein de la Production Orientale.' Here, Balty stresses the importance of addressing the overall decorative program of a church, not simply the isolated pavements, because each element of the overall program complements the others and was chosen with balance and harmony in mind.¹⁰² In terms of the pavements in churches, Balty states, 'I cannot, for my part, formulate some empirical remarks based more upon the use of classical iconography than upon Christian iconography. One will recognize at once that the ancient mentality was particularly open to symbolism and allegory and I cannot see why the advent of Christianity would have effected important changes in this regard.'¹⁰³ She concedes that symbolic meaning cannot be assigned to every animal or plant but states that if there is textual corroboration of the image's significance, such an interpretation

⁹⁹ Balty, *Mosaïques antiques du Proche-Orient*, 32.

¹⁰⁰ Balty, *Mosaïques antiques du Proche-Orient*, 44-45.

¹⁰¹ Balty, *Mosaïques antiques du Proche-Orient*, 41.

¹⁰² Balty, *Mosaïques antiques du Proche-Orient*, 133.

¹⁰³ Balty, *Mosaïques antiques du Proche-Orient*, 46: 'Je ne puis, pour ma part, que formuler quelques remarques empiriques, fondée davantage sur la pratique de l'iconographie classique que sur celle de l'iconographie chrétienne. On reconnaît d'emblée que la mentalité antique était l'avènement du christianisme aurait amené des changements importants à cet regard.'

should be considered. Most importantly, Balty maintains that the same image can have one meaning in a civic context and another in a religious setting.

Balty explores the connection between mosaics and their architectural placement and mosaics and society. In the first category, she considers the manner in which the mosaic was adapted to the structure and the function it played in the building. Balty argues that, aside from their decorative nature, the motifs and compositions contained in some mosaics can indicate the function of a space.¹⁰⁴ For example, certain motifs appear near altars and baptismal fonts. Moreover, the shape of a pavement or a panel within a pavement often reveals the placement of the bema or liturgical furniture. The author maintains that mosaics are a reflection of the economic conditions as well as the cultural and philosophical aspirations present in society.¹⁰⁵ Mosaics, like architecture, are potentially powerful agents of propaganda. While Balty limits her discussion to political propaganda, clearly they could also function as vehicles for the display of ecclesiastical propaganda. Her methodology is best characterized as sociological. She recommends a multi-faceted approach to the study of mosaics predicated on her conclusion that, 'It is the 'total' study of mosaics which enables them to be viewed as a 'mirror' of the society that produced them. Their meaning is lost when they are viewed in a vacuum, even if they are minutely described and analyzed. To have real meaning they must be inserted into a system of polyvalent connections (their place in the history of art, of ideas, of architecture and of society): only then will they be a part of the fabric of the history of a region.'¹⁰⁶

In his analysis of a recently discovered mosaic pavement in Palmyra, Polish archaeologist, Michel Galikowski, follows Balty's path by interpreting the subject matter of the pavement as a reflection of contemporary—and locally specific—realities.¹⁰⁷ His discussion focuses on the two center panels (of equal size and oriented perpendicularly to each other). In one of the panels, the Greek mythological hero Bellerophon, riding Pegasus, spears the Chimera with a lance. In the other, a soldier on horseback, dressed like Bellerophon, shoots an arrow at a tiger that rears up on its back legs while another, smaller tiger lies beneath the hooves of the horse. What distinguishes the Bellerophon depicted in the panels from other depictions of the hero is his dress: instead of the heroic nudity of classical Greek art, he wears eastern (Persian) royal attire. Galikowski proposes that, in these panels, Bellerophon represents the Palmyrene nobleman Odeianthus, who sided with the Romans, after the Persian capture of the emperor

¹⁰⁴ Balty, *Mosaïques antiques du Proche-Orient*, 48.

¹⁰⁵ Balty, *Mosaïques antiques du Proche-Orient*, 51-55.

¹⁰⁶ Balty, *Mosaïques antiques du Proche-Orient*, 56: 'C'est cette etude 'totale' qui finalement permet de caractériser la mosaïque comme le 'miroir' de la société qui la produit. Un document qui reste isolé est perdu, même s'il a été minutieusement décrit et analysé en soi. Pour qu'il serve vraiment, il doit être inséré dans un système de connections polyvalent (au plan de l'histoire de l'art, des idées, de l'architecture, de la société): ainsi, fera-t-il partie du tissu même de l'histoire d'une region.'

¹⁰⁷ 'L'apothéose d'Odeinat sur un mosaïque récemment découverte à Palmyre', *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles lettres*, 149: 4, 2005, 1293-1304.

Valerian.¹⁰⁸ His unexpected victory over Shapur I (260CE) and subsequent re-conquest of Mesopotamia for Rome gained him the favor of the Emperor Gallienus, who bestowed upon him the title *dux Romanorum*.¹⁰⁹ Galikowski suggests that the Hyrcanian tigers would have been viewed as representing the Persians in a general way. On the other hand, the Chimera, he asserts, directly referred to Shapur I.¹¹⁰ While it is important to bear in mind that the original architectural context of the pavement is uncertain and its proposed date based upon stylistic evidence, Galikowski's multivalent interpretation of the pavement demonstrates not simply the potential for highly individual subjects to appear in the pavements, but also the sophisticated manner in which these local subjects and events could be referenced in them.

The locally referential nature of the Palmyrene Odeianthus mosaic is not an isolated occurrence in Syria: it is found also in the cave-tombs of Edessa.¹¹¹ The subject matter of the funerary mosaics in those tombs that contain pavements is decidedly local: portraits of deceased Edessenes with their families. A small number of caves have inscriptions in Syriac, either in mosaic or carved on the walls; of these, some bear dates but all are in a script which permits them to be dated to the early third century CE, the period of the monarchy or shortly afterwards.¹¹² According to Judah Benzion Segal, the people depicted in the mosaic portraits were pagans.¹¹³ Problematically, Segal bases his assertion solely on negative evidence: if the occupants of the tombs were Jewish or Christian, the mosaics would contain symbols or inscriptions that would have said as much. Setting aside the faith of the occupants, the mosaic pavements show local Edessene traditions of portraiture executed in the distinctively hellenistic medium of mosaic. Both men and women are attired in Persian garments and head-dresses. All of the figures are rendered frontally, a device used to directly engage the viewer, which some scholars attribute to eastern Persian artistic trends although it is found in late Roman art, too. However, the figure style is eastern: static, flat and hieratic. All attempts at the modelling of the figures are accomplished by using lines of various thicknesses.

¹⁰⁸ Galikowski, 'L'apothéose d'Odeinat', 1302-1304.

¹⁰⁹ Galikowski, 'L' apothéose d'Odeinat', 1301-1302, identification of Odeianthus with Bellerophon is predicated upon his association of the inscription in the panel with another inscription located on a monumental arch on the Grand Colonnade in Palmyra. See Patricia Southern, *Empress Zenobia: Palmyra's Queen*, London: Continuum, 2009, 63-67, for a discussion of the ambiguity in the literary sources concerning the precise title of Odeianthus and whether emperor Gallienus conferred the title upon him, confirmed it, or played any role in his use of the title at all.

¹¹⁰ Galikowski, 'L'apothéose d'Odeinat', 1303, association of the Shapur I with the Chimera is based on his reading of the 13th Sibylline Oracle, a poem written in Syria during the lifetime of Odeianthus.

¹¹¹ Hans Drijvers and John Healey, *The Old Syriac Inscriptions of Edessa and Osrhoene*, HdO, vol. 42:1, Leiden: Brill, 1999; Steven Ross, *Roman Edessa: politics and culture on the eastern fringes of the Roman Empire, 114-242 C.E.*, London and New York: Routledge, 2001; Judah Benzion Segal, *Edessa: the Blessed City*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970.

¹¹² For one slightly earlier exception, see John Healey, 'A New Syriac Mosaic Inscription', *Journal of Semitic Studies* 51, 2006, 313-27.

¹¹³ Segal, *Edessa: the Blessed City*, 41.

There are also a few non-funerary mosaics which appear to come from villas and these *are* thoroughly hellenistic in inspiration, containing mythological and legendary scenes. One of these, from outside Edessa and dated to 227 CE, depicts the river Euphrates and contains bilingual Syriac and Greek inscription.¹¹⁴ However, these more westernized mosaics give the impression of being prestige items created by non-native craftsmen for the new Roman citizens of the third century and should not be interpreted as an indication of earlier hellenization.

Pauline Donceel-Voûte followed her publication of the mosaics in churches in Syria and Lebanon, which is based upon her doctoral thesis, with a series of articles that are offshoots of this study.¹¹⁵ Approximately seventy-five percent of the volume, *Les pavements des églises Byzantines de Syrie et du Liban. Décor, archéologie et liturgie* is devoted to cataloguing the mosaics found in sixty-two churches in Syria and fifteen in Lebanon. The final section is a synthesis and analysis of the data in the catalogue entries. This section is subdivided into two parts: one addresses the pavements as decoration (formal and iconographical analysis) and the other presents the evidence for the liturgy as reflected in the pavements.

The catalog entries are not simply descriptive records; when the evidence permits, the author includes a brief analysis of the style and iconography of the individual pavements along with comparanda. Donceel-Voûte displays a keen interest in the developments in compositional principles and the evolution of pavement style in her publications, elements squarely in the realm of formal analysis. She displays less concern for iconography. The author attempts to establish regional trends or groupings rather than a chronological framework for the floor mosaics. What distinguishes her work from that of other scholars is the investigation of the relationship between the church building, and its decoration, and liturgical practices.¹¹⁶ Based upon an examination of the literary sources, Donceel-Voûte accepts a correspondence between the physical evidence and the textual evidence (Syrian) that describe the church interior

¹¹⁴ John Healey, 'The Edessan Milieu and the Birth of Syriac.' This paper was delivered at a plenary session of the fourth North American Syriac Symposium, held at Princeton Theological Seminary, 9-12 July 2003. The mosaics are now in the Bible Lands Museum in Jerusalem depicting Achilles, Patroclus and Briseis. See Drijvers and Healey, *Old Syriac Inscriptions of Edessa and Osrhoene*, Cm3, Cm4, Bm1.

¹¹⁵ Louvain-la-Neuve: Publications d'Archéologie et d'Histoire de l'Art de l'Université Catholique de Louvain 69, 1988. 'Le VIIe siècle dans les mosaïques du Proche Orient', in *VI Coloquio Internacional Sobre Mosaico Antiguo, Palencia-Mérida, Octubre 1990*, Guadalajara: Asociación Española de I Mosaico, 207-20. 'Le Vème siècle dans les mosaïques syriennes', in *La mosaïque gréco-romaine IV*, Jean-Pierre Darmon and Alain Rebourg, eds, Paris: Association internationale pour l'Étude de la Mosaïque Antique, 1984, 205-10; 'Il mosaico pavimentale di Giordania come fonte storica di un'epoca: III (1985-1987)', in *Fifth International Colloquium on Ancient Mosaics. Bath, England. September 5-12, 1987.*, R. Ling, ed., Ann Arbor, MI: Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary 9:2, 1995, 88-100; 'La mise en scène de la liturgie au Proche Orient IVE-IXe s.: les 'provinces liturgiques'', *Orientalia Cristiana Analecta* 251, 1996, 313-38.

¹¹⁶ Donceel-Voûte, *Les pavements des églises Byzantines de Syrie et du Liban*, 492-541; 'Provinces Ecclésiastiques et Provinces Liturgiques en Syrie et Phénicie Byzantines', *Géographie Historique Au Proche-Orient. Notes et Monographies Techniques* 23, 1988, 213-17. This approach has been taken with Byzantine churches in Constantinople by T. Mathews, *Early Churches of Constantinople: Architecture and Liturgy*, University Park and London: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971.

as a microcosm of the earth.¹¹⁷ She acknowledges the presence of symbolism in the mosaic pavements of churches; however, the symbolic meaning is broadly interpreted and unchanging since Donceel-Voûte maintains that the themes of the pavements are always best interpreted in general terms. For example, the subject matter of the mosaics in the nave and aisles always represents the terrestrial zone (the inhabited world) in accordance with textual descriptions while the chancel, viewed as a transitional zone, often contains representations of Paradise.

The author argues that analysis of floor mosaics has the potential to elucidate aspects of the liturgy performed in the building. She declares, 'It is not without significance that these observations [internal and external signs provided by the pavements] are recounted here in order to integrate them with what is known of the religious edifice, supporting the reconstruction of a more complete image of the *locus liturgicus*, the setting and the performance of cult.'¹¹⁸ For example, floor mosaics in churches often bear markings from the installation of liturgical furnishings, such as ambone, altars, and barriers. These markings permit a reconstruction of the placement of these objects, which are rarely in situ or completely intact. It is also noteworthy that, occasionally, mosaics were designed with the division of space and liturgical furnishing in mind as reflected by the decorative mosaic borders, which surrounded the furniture or preceded the transition from one space to another. Donceel-Voûte views the liturgy as a theatrical performance, which, she believes, had regional characteristics. Her conceptualization of the liturgy as a theatrical performance builds upon recent trends in liturgical studies which have theories of performativity at their centre.¹¹⁹ In sum, Donceel-Voûte's approach is intrinsic; she does not address extrinsic considerations such as the role of social, economic or intellectual factors in the creation of the floor mosaics in the churches of the Near East.

Michele Piccirillo was an archaeologist and professor of Biblical geography and history at the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum in Jerusalem.¹²⁰ From 1973-2008, he directed excavations in Jordan on behalf of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land at Madaba, Umm al-Rasas, and Mt. Nebo. Piccirillo documented all of the churches and mosaics discovered in Jordan, and maintained a corpus of the mosaics until his death.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Donceel-Voûte, *Les pavements des églises Byzantines de Syrie et du Liban*, 485-88.

¹¹⁸ Donceel-Voûte, *Les pavements des églises Byzantines de Syrie et du Liban*, 492. 'Il n'est pas sans intérêt de récapituler ici ces observations, de les intégrer à ce que l'on sait de l'édifice religieux, tenant ainsi de reconstituer une image plus complète du *locus liturgicus*, du lieu et de la mise en scène du culte.'

¹¹⁹ Donceel-Voûte, *Les pavements des églises Byzantines de Syrie et du Liban*, 507-540.

¹²⁰ Michele Piccirillo was part of a long tradition of members of Roman Catholic religious orders working as archaeologists in this region. The Franciscan friars of Studium Biblicum Franciscanum and the Dominican friars of École Biblique have been very active. They are talented archaeologists whose research has made an invaluable contribution to scholarship. Their work has primarily been the publication of the results of their excavations; only Piccirillo distinguished himself as a specialist in a particular aspect of the art and architecture that was discovered. In general, their scholarship is documentary and, while attempts at interpretation are minimal, they have on occasion adopted a theological approach to the material.

¹²¹ M. Piccirillo, *Chiese e mosaici della Giordania Settentrionale*, Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1981; *Chiese e mosaici di Madaba*, Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1987; *I Mosaici di Giordania dal I all' VIII sec. d.*

As an archaeologist, many of his publications are necessarily excavation reports of a purely documentary nature. However, his methodology in the study and interpretation of mosaic pavements tended to be a correlation of formal analysis with iconographical investigation, although his publications are more heavily weighted toward aspects of style. He believed, with certain qualifications, that some pavements contained symbolic meaning. For Piccirillo, the composition had to be accompanied by a Biblical verse or quotation that literally provided an interpretation of the scene.¹²² Piccirillo was careful to include epigraphy and other supporting archaeological data with stylistic analyses in his determination of the dates of pavements. He avoided dating mosaics based solely upon formal criteria.¹²³ Piccirillo made extensive use of historical and other literary sources as well as epigraphic evidence in his efforts to discern what political, social, and economic factors led to the explosion of church building and decoration in the region during the Byzantine period.¹²⁴ On the other hand, he argued that the pavements themselves, particularly mosaic inscriptions, are invaluable historical sources which can provide crucial information about periods in the region for which textual documentation is lacking.¹²⁵ This is particularly true for the century following the Muslim conquest of Arabia and Palestina. Scholars have traditionally believed the collapse of the Byzantine Empire on the eastern frontier was accompanied by a cessation of Christian church building and decoration in the region. However, the discoveries of the continued building and execution of mosaic pavements in churches at Umm al-Rasas, Rihab, Bostra, and elsewhere attest to a normalization of relations between the local population and the Muslim conquerors.¹²⁶

Unlike much of the scholarship on mosaics in Israel, Piccirillo was interested in the regional trends and stylistic differences that are observable in the pavements within Jordan.¹²⁷ However, his insular approach to the investigation of the pavements was consistent with that of his Israeli counterparts. Aside from vague and unsubstantiated references to the influence of Constantinople upon the Byzantine mosaic tradition, he rarely attempted to place the mosaics within the wider context of the mosaic pavements

C., Rome: Il Vetro, 1982; *I Mosaici di Giordania*, Rome: Quasar, 1986; *The Mosaics of Jordan*, Amman: American Center of Oriental Studies, 1992.

¹²² Piccirillo, *Mosaics of Jordan*, 40.

¹²³ For his approach to dating pavements, see his analyses of the Madaba Map mosaic and the acropolis church at Ma'in in *The Mosaics of Jordan*, 29 and 36, respectively.

¹²⁴ For example, 'Umm al-Rasas. A Byzantine Mosaic Center in the Jordanian Desert', *Minerva* 4:3, 1993, 22; 'The Activity of the Mosaicists of the Diocese of Madaba at the Time of Bishop Sergius in the Second Half of the Sixth Century A.D.', *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan* 5, 1995, 395; and, especially, 'The Jerusalem-Esbus Road and its Sanctuaries in Transjordan', *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan* 3, 1987, 165-72.

¹²⁵ Piccirillo, *Mosaics of Jordan*, 43-45.

¹²⁶ Piccirillo, *Mosaics of Jordan*, 43-45; see also Michele Piccirillo, 'The Christians in Palestine during a Time of Transition: 7th-9th Centuries', in *The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land*, Anthony O'Mahony, Goran Gunner and Kevork Hintlian, London: Scorpion Cavendish, 1995, 47-56. Another good treatment of this liminal period is Robert Schick, *Fate of the Christians in Palestine during the Byzantine-Umayyad Transition, A.D. 600-750*, Princeton: Darwin Press, 1995.

¹²⁷ Piccirillo, *Mosaics of Jordan*, 20-21.

in the eastern Mediterranean. According to Piccirillo, a golden age of mosaics in Jordan began around 530 C.E., which he linked with an Empire-wide 'Justinianic Renaissance.'¹²⁸ He maintained that the appearance of new classical motifs and the use of new techniques were the result of the arrival of a pattern book in the area, which was inspired by classical representations. Moreover, 'Because a similar change is evident in other regions of the Byzantine Empire at the time of the Emperor Justinian, even as far away as Tripolitania, we can only conclude that the impetus for the change came from Constantinople, the capital city, and that this was part of a general tendency rather than a spontaneous evolution by the local mosaicists.'¹²⁹ Piccirillo's view is not radical, as this is a commonly held assumption in the scholarship on early Byzantine art. However, at least in the case of the mosaics in the Near East, there is no evidence that Constantinople played a direct role in the transmission of artistic trends.¹³⁰ Piccirillo specifically mentioned the presence of classical influence upon the floor mosaics in the representations of personifications and topographical themes for which, he argued, the mosaicists likely employed cartoons from the capital.¹³¹ The best precedents for both categories of subject matter are found in Antioch and, in the case of the personifications, Piccirillo drew parallels with mosaics in that metropolis.¹³² Nonetheless, he was part of a group of scholars (and that group continues to exist) invested in the notion that artistic movements flowed in one direction, from the capital to the provinces, without considering the possibility that innovations might, in fact, originate outside the capital and over time migrate to other areas of the Empire, including the capital.

Israel

Archaeologist Michael Avi-Yonah made the first attempt to systematically catalogue all of the mosaic pavements in Roman and Byzantine Palestine. The first instalment of the catalog appeared in the *Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities of Palestine* in 1933 and subsequent supplements were published in 1934 and 1935.¹³³ In the first publication, Avi-Yonah included a key to the geometric, floral and vegetal decorative motifs and compositions, organized according to an alpha-numeric classification system, which many Israeli archaeologists and scholars continue to use to the present day.¹³⁴ His method is essentially documentary. Avi-Yonah's approach is akin to the first science of

¹²⁸ Piccirillo, *Mosaics of Jordan*, 22-23; Kitzinger, *Byzantine Art in the Making*, also asserted the resurgence of classical motifs and subject matter in art produced during the reign of Justinian.

¹²⁹ Piccirillo, *Mosaics of Jordan*, 22.

¹³⁰ This is not intended to be a denial of the importance of the ideological, propagandistic, economic and political movements of the Justinianic program of reformation in creating an environment in which an intensification in church construction and decoration was possible.

¹³¹ Piccirillo, *Mosaics of Jordan*, 38.

¹³² Piccirillo, *Mosaics of Jordan*, 38.

¹³³ 'Mosaic Pavements in Palestine', *Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities of Palestine (hereafter, QDAP)* 2, 1933, 136-81; 3, 1934, 26-73; 4, 1935, 187-93.

¹³⁴ Michael Avi-Yonah, *QDAP* 2, 1933, 138-41. The development of a system of classification was an innovative approach at this time.

art defined by Hans Sedlmayr in his proposal that the study of art should be comprised of two avenues of scientific investigation (the second is based upon the first thereby making the first essential).¹³⁵ The task of the first science, to which Avi-Yonah's work corresponds, consists of the observation, documentation and organization of data. Each entry in his catalogue is purely descriptive, employing the established system of classification, and includes (when available) location, size, tesserae density, tesserae colours, inscription along with translation, date, and bibliography.

Avi-Yonah made no attempt at iconographical or stylistic analyses, interpretation, or the identification of parallels in the entries. A short summary at the end of the first supplement is his sole effort at synthesis of the material.¹³⁶ Here, he summarized the data presented in the catalogue (the total number of plain white pavements, the total number of patterned pavements, dating, the contexts in which mosaics are found, and so forth). He noted in passing that certain motifs, such as the peacock and stag, take on symbolic value in the Byzantine period. In a section on geometric decoration, he provides earlier iconographical precedents for the motifs, which he divided into two types: Hellenistic origin and 'Oriental' origin. In a later publication, Avi-Yonah elaborated upon the differences in style between Roman and Byzantine mosaics: 'There are signs of the increasing orientalizing of mosaic art. Influences from the Oriental world of the conceptual type of art infiltrated the illusionistic world of Greek art, which was based on perspective and the reproduction of the visual image. Such changes marked the beginning of the evolution of the Byzantine mosaic pavement, which was based on conceptions very different from those of the Greeks and Romans.'¹³⁷ The closest he comes to formal or iconographical analysis are enigmatic statements such as, 'It should be noted that the decoration of churches is always carefully made to fit the architectural disposition of the building'¹³⁸ and 'There are no subjects found in Palestine which cannot be matched from elsewhere in the Roman Empire',¹³⁹ which beg for further elaboration.

Most of the mosaic scholars in Israel have not progressed much beyond Sedlmayr's first science to the second science, the analysis and evaluation of the principles of composition. This is undoubtedly due to the fact that many of the mosaics are published only briefly as part of an excavation report by archaeologists, who are not specialists in mosaics and, therefore, are not equipped to move beyond the documentation stage. Nonetheless, the work of Avi-Yonah has been continued by the

¹³⁵ Succinctly described by Meyer Schapiro in 'The New Viennese School', his review of Otto Pächt, ed., *Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen*, II, (Berlin, 1933), in *Art Bulletin* 18:2, 1936, 258-266.

¹³⁶ *QDAP* 3, 1934, 60-73.

¹³⁷ Michael Avi-Yonah, *Ancient Mosaics*, London: Cassell, 1975. In two articles, 'Oriental Elements in Palestinian Art, Part I and Part II', *QDAP* 10, 1942, 105-51; 13, 1948, 128-65, Avi-Yonah posited an ever-present undercurrent of 'Orientalizing tendencies', which reflected the common popular spirit and under certain conditions were permitted to come to the fore. His study is not restricted to mosaics but addresses a variety of monuments in Palestine (including Transjordan).

¹³⁸ Avi-Yonah, *QDAP* 3, 1934, 63.

¹³⁹ Avi-Yonah, *QDAP* 3, 1934, 64.

Ovadiahs, who prepared a catalogue of the pavements discovered between 1935 and 1975.¹⁴⁰ The format of their work is modelled closely upon their predecessor's, but in certain respects does not live up to the standards he established and does not attempt to improve upon Avi-Yonah's methodology despite the advances made in the intervening years. Their publication is primarily documentary, in the form of a catalogue, with a short section entitled, 'Summary and Conclusions', which follows the same arrangement as that of Avi-Yonah. The catalogue entries follow the same format, and while the Ovadiahs insert map references, neither they nor Avi-Yonah included a map in their publications. The failure to include a map, or better yet, plot the pavements on the map, is representative of a larger problem: the lack of interest in studying the broader trends and implications revealed by an examination of the mosaics as a group. In Avi-Yonah's time there was insufficient material to evaluate regional trends and variations, but this was not the case when the Asher and Ruth Ovadiahs were working. The more serious problem with the Ovadiahs's entries is the frequency with which they assign a date to a pavement without reference to the source of the date. Avi-Yonah, on the other hand, nearly always states from whence the evidence for date came, whether the excavator's analysis of the stratigraphy or corroborating finds, epigraphy, or style. Also problematic is the incomplete nature of many of the entries and illustrations. Since the Ovadiahs depended largely upon published reports, these lacunae may be a reflection of the often inconsistent and unskilled collection of mosaic data by archaeologists.¹⁴¹

The Summary and Conclusions that follows the catalogue takes the same format used by Avi-Yonah and address some of the same topics.¹⁴² New sections on the art of mosaic in ancient synagogues and early Byzantine churches are important additions, and, whereas, Avi-Yonah posited an eastern origin for Byzantine art, the Ovadiahs assume a synthesis of eastern and western elements in their publication: 'On the other hand, Byzantine art in general, and that of Eretz Israel in particular, retained the values and basic elements of the Greek-Roman heritage which in turn acts as the point of departure for various further developments. Thus one can see how Oriental trends compete with the Classical tradition resulting in a struggle between aesthetic contrasts. These trends lead ultimately to a certain integration, a new synthesis which constitutes the essence of Byzantine art.'¹⁴³ This statement indicates an acceptance that mosaics in

¹⁴⁰ Ruth and Asher Ovadiahs, *Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine Mosaic Pavements in Israel*, (hereafter, *MPI*) Rome: L'erna di Bretschneider, 1987.

¹⁴¹ This has been a particularly vexing problem in my research. Because of the expense involved in lifting pavements and conserving them, excavators often opt to remove sections deemed significant (inscriptions, motifs considered unusual or of high quality) and backfill the remainder. For these reasons, scholars are forced to rely upon publications for documentation and illustration of many mosaics. When there is little consistency among the data collected by archaeologists (some record meticulously, measure carefully, count tesserae density in different areas of the floor and have the pavements drawn, others do none of these and still others fall somewhere in the middle), it is difficult to make meaningful comparisons and draw conclusions with confidence.

¹⁴² Ovadiahs, *MPI*, 147-84.

¹⁴³ Ovadiahs, *MPI*, 152-53.

particular, and Byzantine art in general, contain a blend of stylistic principles, which originate in both the East and West. Yet, an insularity in approach to the study of mosaics is reflected by the absence in the Ovadiah's catalogue of an analysis of the evolution of composition, ornamental or figural, as well as the regional trends and characteristics in the pavements of Israel and their place within the larger context of the mosaic tradition throughout the Empire.¹⁴⁴

Asher Ovadiah's position concerning the potential for symbolic content in mosaic pavements is unclear. In a December 2000 meeting, he was adamant about his view that mosaic pavements (he did not make a distinction between sacred and secular, public and private) have no symbolic value. When I inquired whether he thought that pavements could be vehicles for the expression of religious theology or doctrine, he rejected this concept with the exception of one pavement, the 'Mona Lisa' of the Galilee in the Villa of Dionysus at Sepphoris, which he thinks reflects Neoplatonic philosophy. However, in their section on mosaics in ancient synagogues, the Ovadias express a different view: 'We feel that to the extent that symbolism is to be found in the biblical scenes or in other motifs decorating synagogue mosaics, this symbolism must equally be distinctly expressed and clearly reflected in Jewish literary sources. Should there be no such correlation between the written and the visual representations, it is rather the educational aspect of the mosaic pictures, with the notion they are meant to convey, that should be studied. If, however, the symbol can be perceived as expressing an abstract idea, the biblical scenes appearing in synagogues may to a certain extent be regarded as symbolizing the ways of Divine Providence—forgiveness and redemption.'¹⁴⁵ While he does not make a similar statement concerning symbolism in the pavements of early Byzantine churches, he does refer a few times to certain motifs as symbols, or possessing symbolic significance, and it seems likely that he has adopted a similar position for pavements in churches.¹⁴⁶ Despite a few shortcomings with their corpus, the Ovadias' efforts in the compilation of data on mosaics, often from sources available only in Hebrew, are considerable and increase the amount of material easily accessible to scholars.

In 1993 the discovery of a synagogue paved in mosaic in the Galilean town of Sepphoris attracted attention to a site that had already gained notoriety for the *triclinium* mosaic of the Drinking Contest of Herakles and Dionysos found there during the excavation of the acropolis.¹⁴⁷ The synagogue pavement has been described and

¹⁴⁴ For example, in our December 2000 meeting, he offered the opinion that the study of geometric patterns for signs of change/transformation and an examination of regional variation are not worthwhile in an effort to discern trends in mosaic design. I am grateful to Professor Ovadiah for his generosity in meeting with me in his office at Tel Aviv University to discuss our mutual interest in mosaics.

¹⁴⁵ Ovadiah, *MPI*, 160-61.

¹⁴⁶ Ovadiah, *MPI*, 161-65.

¹⁴⁷ For the early Roman Sepphoris, see Rebecca Nagy, Carol Meyers, Eric Meyers, Ze'ev Weiss, eds, *Sepphoris in Galilee: Crosscurrents of Culture*, Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996. Also, Leonard Rutgers, 'Some Reflections on the Archaeological Finds from the Domestic Quarter on the Acropolis of Sepphoris', in *Religious and Ethnic Communities in Late Roman Palestine*, Hayim Lapin, ed., Baltimore: University Press of Maryland, 1998, 179-95; and Jonathan Reed., *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, Harrisburg: Trinity Press

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analyzed in a number of publications co-authored by the principal excavators, Ehud Netzer and Ze'ev Weiss.¹⁴⁸ In *Promise and Redemption: a Synagogue Mosaic from Sepphoris*, Netzer and Weiss state that:

The synagogue's main importance lies in the range of depictions in its mosaic and in their iconographic richness, as well as their narrative and conceptual sequence...Jews used to decorate their synagogues with narrative depictions from the Bible. The selection of the scenes...with three foci was intended to convey a single clear message: God, who stands at the centre of creation, has chosen the Jewish people, and because of this promise to Abraham...he will rebuild the temple in the future and redeem Abraham's descendants.¹⁴⁹

Concerning the use of the zodiac at the centre of the pavement—imagery which has engendered great debate among scholars—the authors describe it as an 'allegorical symbol of God's omnipotence' in an environment in which it would have been inappropriate to represent God in human terms.¹⁵⁰ Weiss contributes significantly to scholarship on the Sepphoris pavement as well as other synagogues in the region with his publication, *The Sepphoris Synagogue: Deciphering an Ancient Message through its Archaeological and Socio-Historical Contexts*.¹⁵¹ He expands upon his allegorical interpretation of the Helios-Zodiac motif by advancing an explanation of the iconography at Sepphoris that is grounded in local contemporary history and can be applied broadly to synagogues in the region:

The Jews, like their Christian counterparts, were exposed to Roman art in late antiquity and used it to express their needs. This was not simply the case of borrowing the motif of an unknown and insignificant god, but one of internalizing the understood and well-known terminology that originated and was used at the time by the pagan population.¹⁵²

He goes on to state:

International, 2000. For the triclinium mosaic, Eric Meyers, Ehud Netzer, & Carol Meyers, 'Artistry in Stone: the Mosaics of Ancient Sepphoris', *Biblical Archaeologist* 50, 1987, 223-31; Carol Meyers, Eric Meyers, Ehud Netzer, and Ze'ev Weiss, 'The Dionysos Mosaic', in Nagy, et al, eds, *Sepphoris in Galilee*, 111-115.

¹⁴⁸ For example, 'The Sepphoris Synagogue: A New Look at Synagogue Art and Architecture in the Byzantine Period', in *Galilee through the Centuries: Confluence of Cultures*, E. Meyers, ed., Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999, 199-226.

¹⁴⁹ Jerusalem: Israel Museum Publication, 1998, 43.

¹⁵⁰ Netzer and Weiss, *Promise and Redemption*, 36.

¹⁵¹ Ze'ev Weiss, *Sepphoris Synagogue: Deciphering an Ancient message through its Archaeological and Socio-Historical Contexts*, Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2005.

¹⁵² Weiss, *Sepphoris Synagogue*, 234.

The choice of a certain model was intentional, but in copying it they shed its original significance and instead suffuse it with another interpretation, more suitable to their internal needs.¹⁵³

By the fifth century, the struggle between Judaism and Christianity reached a new level intensity, '...with the Christianization of the empire, it soon became a hateful conflict involving issues regarding the identification of the 'Chosen People', the rebuilding of the future Temple, and the identity of the Messiah...'¹⁵⁴ According to Weiss, the choice of subject matter for the synagogue mosaics at Sepphoris reflects this struggle and, therefore, the pavement should be understood in light of these local circumstances.¹⁵⁵ Like some scholars working on Syrian pavements, Weiss holds that mosaics were potential vehicles for the expression of highly charged messages that pertained to local political, social and religious realities.

Aside from the many archaeologists who have discovered mosaics during the course of excavation and published the pavements from their sites, Claudine Dauphin is the only one to extensively consider broader questions concerning the mosaic pavements found in Israel, namely, how they fit within the wider context of the Near East, in addition to her more documentary work on mosaics from specific sites in the country. Her publications on mosaics over the course of more than two decades reveal her to be a methodological chameleon and demonstrate her development as a scholar.¹⁵⁶ Many of Dauphin's publications evolved from her doctoral dissertation, which examined the ubiquitous 'inhabited scroll' motif and composition in sculpture and mosaic in the Byzantine East.¹⁵⁷ Her earliest article was published in 1976, a period in history that was marked by an unprecedented interest in science, scientific technology (when the potential of computers was just beginning to be realized), and subjecting nearly every field of scholarship to what was perceived as objective, scientific analysis.¹⁵⁸ It is against this historical background that her article must be viewed. She states at the outset that her approach is a reaction against the dominant method for the study of mosaics, aesthetics, in which stylistic comparisons are the sole criterion for the attribution of pavements to various 'workshops' and 'schools'.¹⁵⁹ Dauphin describes an elaborate system, which she has formulated, for the categorization of mosaic pavements and how it differs from and is an improvement over the systems of classification devised

¹⁵³ Weiss, *Sepphoris Synagogue*, 234.

¹⁵⁴ Weiss, *Sepphoris Synagogue*, 250.

¹⁵⁵ Weiss, *Sepphoris Synagogue*, 250-254; Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 199-205, agrees with Weiss that the zodiac became a symbol of Jewish struggle with Christianity although his interpretation of the imagery differs.

¹⁵⁶ Well illustrated in her *La Palestine byzantine: peuplement et populations*, vol. 1-3, BAR International Series 726, Oxford: Archaeopress, 1998.

¹⁵⁷ 'Inhabited Scrolls' from the IVth to the VIIth century A.D. in *Asia Minor and the Eastern Provinces of the Byzantine Empire*, vols. I-IV, Unpublished PhD thesis, Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 1974.

¹⁵⁸ C. Dauphin, 'A New Method of Studying Early Byzantine Mosaic Pavements (Coding and a Computed Cluster Analysis) with Special Reference to the Levant', *Levant* 8, 1976, 113-49.

¹⁵⁹ Dauphin, 'A New Method', 13. This sort of analytical, objective approach was favoured by the exponents of the New Archaeology movement.

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by Avi-Yonah, CADA and AIEMA.¹⁶⁰ Her code attempts to classify the attributes of one motif, the inhabited scroll, for the purpose of organizing the data into groups, and producing a typology. The code does not take into account either chronology or style. Dauphin maintains that such a code condenses information and simplifies description. However, while the complicated alpha-numeric system with subscripts may be easily read by a computer, it is cumbersome and unwieldy for humans to use and interpret.¹⁶¹

One of the important contributions of Dauphin's study is her evaluation of the implications of the geographical clusters of coded attributes. For example, she asserts that the code proves that certain attributes cluster in specific geographical regions and this, in turn, makes it possible to attempt to identify 'schools' or 'workshops'. Cluster analysis reveals, according to the author, eight centres of mosaic production, which should be considered 'schools' insofar as data indicate that mosaicists in these regions favoured certain decorative elements over others.¹⁶² Moreover, she proposes that a number of workshops could be active contemporaneously within the same regional group or 'school'. Significantly, she claims that cluster analysis reveals a connection between the mosaics of some of the regional groups that coincide with the Roman-Byzantine network of roads.¹⁶³ In sum, these were the routes along which mosaicists and artistic trends and techniques travelled. This is an important contribution to the effort to discern the nature of the artistic relationship between various cities/regions and the patterns of transmission of style and iconography.

There are a few problems associated with some of Dauphin's conclusions and her methodology. First, the conclusions: Dauphin asserts that the introduction of chronology into the scheme of regional clusters makes it possible to determine the directions in which the mosaicists or ideas moved and to estimate the length of time required for the propagation of artistic traits.¹⁶⁴ This hypothesis is an oversimplification of the evidence that is necessary to make such determinations, as is illustrated by another conclusion she draws: Antioch and Jerusalem were mosaic centres with a common craftsmanship (entirely possible), which was likely a product of their similar religious importance. Dauphin theorizes that mosaicists likely travelled with the retinue of important church figures both by land and over sea. The largest problem with this theory is her assertion that the mosaic tradition in Jerusalem has precedence, chronologically, over Antioch, and that trends in Jerusalem may have influenced the

¹⁶⁰ Avi-Yonah, 'Mosaic Pavements in Palestine'; code established by the Centre d'Analyse Documentaire pour L'Archéologie (CADA) in Paris, 1967; the Association Internationale pour l'étude de la Mosaïque Antique (AIEMA) published the *Répertoire graphique du décor géométrique dans la mosaïque antique*. Paris: AIEMA, 1973.

¹⁶¹ Dauphin, 'A New Method', 118.

¹⁶² Dauphin, 'A New Method', 130. Balty, *Mosaïques antiques du Proche-Orient*, is critical of Dauphin's conclusion that several workshops were responsible for the promulgation of the inhabited scroll motif. She argues that this motif was one of the most common in antiquity and that any workshop would have been capable of its execution. She maintains that it is not necessary to postulate longevity of the mosaicists or long voyages.

¹⁶³ Dauphin, 'A New Method', 135.

¹⁶⁴ Dauphin, 'A New Method', 136.

craft in the Syrian metropolis.¹⁶⁵ Her hypothesis contradicts the prevailing scholarship in which Antioch is presumed to be the earlier centre of mosaics. Finally, she challenges Avi-Yonah's theory, based upon stylistic grounds, that a school of mosaics existed in Gaza and concludes, based upon the cluster analysis, that the mosaics of Gaza are related to the 'Jerusalem school' while other mosaics in the area around Gaza, which Avi-Yonah attributed to a school in Gaza, she suggests were influenced by a yet unidentified school in the *limes*.¹⁶⁶ The last example accentuates the larger problems associated with an approach that excludes stylistic analysis, for the fact of the matter is that the observations of stylistic similarities made by Avi-Yonah are valid and to argue instead for the existence of a more geographically distant school with which there were closer affinities from a complete absence of evidence is problematical.

In reality, Dauphin's attempt to employ a strictly objective method for the study of an art historical subject is impossible. Her desire for a more quantifiable means for the analysis of mosaics is understandable; nevertheless, art history is not a science nor will it ever be—because of the subtle but ever so important nuances of style, there will always be a degree of subjectivity in the interpretation. Further, the coding and cluster analysis of floor mosaics cannot be entirely objective; after all, someone, archaeologist or programmer, must choose which attributes or details are relevant for the codification and analysis. Dauphin's work is fundamental for the study of mosaics in Israel not because the conclusions she reaches are always correct but because she has moved beyond documentation and classification to address broader questions of regional trends, patterns of artistic influence, and school and workshop structure.

In an article published two years later, Dauphin adopts a different approach to the analysis of the inhabited scroll motif. Her aim is to discover whether the inhabited scroll motif lost its pagan symbolic connotations and became purely decorative in the Christian period or whether it retained symbolic value in a new context.¹⁶⁷ She maintains that the use of the inhabited scroll in both religious and nonreligious contexts and in a variety of media (wall-painting, sculpture, ivory work, metalwork and textiles) precludes the attribution of one, universal meaning to this motif.¹⁶⁸ However, she does not draw the conclusion that the inhabited scroll is devoid of symbolic value due to the ubiquity of this motif. Rather, she asserts that, in the course of the transformation from pagan to Christian empire, the pagan connotations of some motifs were neutralized with the result that they could be adapted to a variety of contexts. Dauphin adopts a French structuralist approach when she states, 'An object need not necessarily be wholly symbolic or wholly decorative, nor is there of necessity a contradiction between symbolism and decoration. A symbol is a symbol only when it is 'read' as a symbol.'¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ Dauphin, 'A New Method', 137.

¹⁶⁶ M. Avi-Yonah, 'Une école de mosaïque à Gaza au sixième siècle', *La Mosaïque Gréco-Romaine* 2, 1975, 377-83; Dauphin, 'A New Method', 141-42.

¹⁶⁷ Dauphin, 'Symbolic or Decorative? The Inhabited Scroll as a Means of Studying Some Early Byzantine Mentalities', *Byzantion* 48 (1978): 10-34.

¹⁶⁸ Dauphin, 'Symbolic or Decorative?', 20.

¹⁶⁹ Dauphin, 'Symbolic or Decorative?', 20.

In order to translate the pavement symbolically, a ciphering grid must be laid upon it. She makes the crucial point that contemporary scholars must not retrodict their views and values into the interpretation of the mosaics. What is important is not that scholars 'read' the pavements but that they try to come to an understanding of how the Byzantines 'read' them. Thus a Jew and a Christian might have different responses to the same motif since each would read the image according to his own religious and cultural background. Further, a motif might be interpreted differently among several Jews or Christians based upon their levels of education. Dauphin's views, described above, are at odds with her assertion that Christians, who lived from the fourth to the seventh centuries, 'bothered little about the significance of the decorative elements set before their eyes during the liturgy.'¹⁷⁰ She bases this assumption upon the relative rarity of texts that accurately describe the decoration of churches. She argues that the prevalence in the pilgrimage accounts of simple expressions of amazement at the splendour of the buildings encountered and the inability of pilgrims to articulate their incredulity with descriptive analysis and accuracy instead of vague expressions of wonder demonstrates that cultured pilgrims were not interested in the decoration of their churches and its symbolic significance. Extrapolating from this view, she argues that if church decoration held little interest for the aristocratic classes, it is hardly likely that it would have mattered to a rural population.

Dauphin has incorrectly interpreted the sources. The pilgrims' expressions of such utter amazement at the beauty of the buildings that words fail them, and their subsequent descriptions of wonder, which Dauphin characterizes as vague, are well-established literary topoi. In her analysis of the sources, Dauphin falls into the very trap that she warns against: while these descriptions may appear frustratingly inexact and amateurish to the modern scholar who is accustomed to literal description, the educated Byzantine would have been familiar with the literary conventions of the day and understood the topoi, which were meaningful to the reader.¹⁷¹ The issue of the interpretation of images is complex. While in general agreement with Dauphin's assessment that the average farmer would not have been able to interpret images with the degree of sophistication of a member of clergy, this does not prove that they did not have symbolic value beyond factual depictions, which mirror scenes or activities of daily life. For example, did the faithful memorize verses from scripture, which may have been called to mind when viewing certain images?¹⁷² Further, she argues that rural churches and chapels would have been filled with standing worshipers, who would have been absorbed by the elaborate liturgy and, therefore, they had neither the time nor physical ability to analyze the significance of the pavement under their feet.¹⁷³ Her view

¹⁷⁰ Dauphin, 'Symbolic or Decorative?', 29.

¹⁷¹ On this subject, see the essays collected in Liz James, ed., *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

¹⁷² It is worth remembering that in the gospels Christ used familiar parables and imagery so that the use of everyday scenes in art may have been viewed as more than a simple reflection of the activities of the local populace.

¹⁷³ Dauphin, 'Symbolic or Decorative?', 31.

is inconsistent with the literary sources, which reveal a heightened awareness among early Christians and Byzantines to visual imagery. Also, Dauphin's assertion presumes that the only time the faithful entered the church was for the liturgy and that they did not spend time alone, or in the presence of a small number of people, inside the church building.

In a subsequent article, Dauphin explores whether the concentration of mosaic pavements, which stretches from Cilicia (south-eastern Turkey) down through the Levant in the early Byzantine period, provides an important index of the economic and artistic conditions in this area or is simply a case of accident of survival.¹⁷⁴ Due to the paucity of archaeological evidence for Asia Minor, her study focuses primarily upon Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine. Dauphin argues that the Levant experienced unprecedented economic growth from the fourth to the seventh century. She asserts that the prosperity was reflected in the similar pattern of demographic expansion throughout the entire region, which finds a direct correlation in the steady increase in the size of houses and the individual rooms within them. She argues that changes in domestic architecture provided the impetus for the change of attitude towards the floor during the late Antique period, 'The increased size of these rooms necessitated a change in the treatment of floor decoration. To increase the number of panels required a complicated layout, impossible to integrate into a unity. The use of a plain 'carpet pattern' with a border posed fewer problems.'¹⁷⁵ For this reason, geometric compositions, floral semis and the inhabited scroll gained new popularity. Dauphin understands the changes in mosaic programs primarily as a result of a new attitude towards the floor, which was predicated on architectural innovations and only secondarily as an artistic creation. However, in the sixth century, the desire for a central focus and an organizing vertical axis led to a return to an emblema-type composition,¹⁷⁶ for which Dauphin adopts a Hegelian explanation: 'The strictly limited nature of inventiveness in artistic forms is bound to produce such returns to earlier and forgotten standards. Art historians should perhaps give more thought to the possibility that artistic evolution is less a matter of sequential progression than a series of cycles within which the artist returns unaware to certain points of departure.'¹⁷⁷

Dauphin observes a marked difference between the iconography of mosaic pavements in Antioch and Palestine during this period, which she believes is linked to political as well as socio-economic factors. She maintains that the absence of Christian motifs or subjects in the art of the city and the continued presence of mythological themes are a result of the thoroughly Hellenized nature of Antioch. Further, she suggests that the centralization of the wealth in the hands of the aristocracy played an important role in the popularity of pagan themes and the decision to invest their funds

¹⁷⁴ Claudine Dauphin, 'Mosaic Pavements as an Index of Prosperity and Fashion', *Levant* 12, 1980, 112-34.

¹⁷⁵ Dauphin, 'Mosaic Pavements as an Index of Prosperity and Fashion', 117.

¹⁷⁶ Kitzinger referred to this innovation as a 'pseudo-emblema', see Kitzinger, 'Stylistic Developments in Pavement Mosaics in the Greek East from the Age of Constantine to the Age of Justinian', 349.

¹⁷⁷ Dauphin, 'Mosaic Pavements as an Index of Prosperity and Fashion', 133-34.

in the construction and decoration of secular public and private buildings rather than in ecclesiastical complexes, as evidenced by the dearth of archaeological evidence for churches.¹⁷⁸ The author depicts the atmosphere of Antioch during the early Byzantine period as wealthy, luxurious and not terribly devout.¹⁷⁹ On the other hand, she argues, the decentralization of wealth and the pride taken in their identity, which was derived from the religious significance of the region, led Palestinians to invest their capital in the construction and decoration of churches and chapels to the virtual exclusion of other building projects.¹⁸⁰ Dauphin links the increase in church building with the prosperity that the populace enjoyed as result of the agricultural and commercial explosion in Palestine during the early Byzantine period. The development of trade routes, pilgrimage and the influx of funds from imperial and private donors played an important role in the stimulation of the economy. She cites the preference for mosaic pavements over other forms of decoration as a result of the loss of the sculptural tradition¹⁸¹ as well as fashion, specifically a new attitude towards the surface of the floor. She speculates about the source of the fashion: 'From the fourth century onward, the prevalent taste in the eastern provinces shifted increasingly towards the mosaic pavement as an artistic idiom, perhaps as the result of influence from North Africa, or from Antioch where a long tradition of mosaic art had prevailed since Hellenistic time.'¹⁸²

In 1987, Dauphin returned once again to the study of the inhabited scroll.¹⁸³ In this essay, she aimed to define the evolution of the motif by employing the method of formal analysis used extensively by Doro Levi in *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*. At the beginning of her career, Dauphin eschewed traditional art historical methodologies but a decade later has adopted one of the most traditional approaches to the study of art thus displaying her great capacity for change and development as a scholar. The search for parallels for the inhabited scroll outside the Near East led Dauphin to posit an exchange of artistic trends between Syria-Palestine and North Africa. She suggests that trends in the use of the inhabited scroll in pavements in North Africa initially exerted an influence upon the mosaic tradition in Syria-Palestine.¹⁸⁴ However, by the fourth century, the inhabited scroll composition had undergone changes and evolved in the hands of mosaicists in the Levant. Dauphin asserts that the reinterpreted composition appears in North African pavements that date from the fourth to the seventh

¹⁷⁸ Dauphin, 'Mosaic Pavements as an Index of Prosperity and Fashion', 125.

¹⁷⁹ One must wonder about the validity of this characterization in light of Antioch's position as one of the two centers of Byzantine theology.

¹⁸⁰ Dauphin, 'Mosaic Pavements as an Index of Prosperity and Fashion', 125.

¹⁸¹ This theory was first put forth by John Winter Crowfoot, who asserted that the large amount of architectural decoration at builders' disposal from the multitude of buildings and monuments of the second and third centuries that had fallen into disuse precluded the need for sculpture *ex novo*. *Early Churches in Palestine*, London: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 1941, 147.

¹⁸² Dauphin 'Mosaic Pavements as an Index of Prosperity and Fashion', 126.

¹⁸³ Claudine Dauphin, 'The Development of the Inhabited Scroll in Architectural Sculpture and Mosaic Art from Late Imperial Times to the Seventh Century', *Levant* 19, 1987, 183-212.

¹⁸⁴ Dauphin, 'The Development of the Inhabited Scroll', 188.

centuries.¹⁸⁵ Reciprocal influence, particularly a west-east or east-west movement followed by a reflux, is an attractive explanation for the transmission of artistic trends. Further, it is illogical to assume a strict division of roles: one geographical region serves solely as sender and another as receiver. It is only natural that the receiver would make changes and adaptations rather than copying slavishly and, in turn, the sender would be receptive to new trends.

A slim volume by ancient historian, Glen Bowersock, provides a good introduction to the diversity in the multitude of mosaic pavements discovered in the Near East in the past twenty-five years and some of the problems associated with them.¹⁸⁶ His contribution to the scholarship on floor mosaics does not aim to be comprehensive; instead, the author focuses on a few pervasive themes in the imagery of the pavements. The author explains his approach to the material as well as the limits of his study in the preface: 'This is essentially a historical inquiry, not a stylistic or aesthetic one. It is meant to evoke a rich and varied fabric of society, religion, and culture that could legitimately be claimed as late antiquity's most potent legacy to Islam.'¹⁸⁷ Bowersock notes that at the end of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century mosaic pavements in the Near East were largely ignored by scholars of various disciplines, who readily assigned them to a category of decoration which was devoid of symbolism. By contrast, the author claims that 'These mosaics are historical documents that are no less precious and informative [about life and belief in Late Antiquity] than literary texts, inscriptions, coins, sculptures, and buildings.'¹⁸⁸ With this statement, Bowersock places himself squarely among scholars who have adopted an integrative approach to the interpretation and contextualization of floor mosaics within the last decade. While the results of this shift in methodology have been significant, it is important to bear in mind that floor mosaics were just one element in the overall decoration of the interiors of private and public buildings and, therefore, functioned as part of an ensemble. Because the decoration of the walls and ceilings of these buildings rarely survive, it is difficult to know what appeared on these surfaces. While these circumstances should not prevent scholars from working on floor mosaics, it is important to acknowledge that, in the absence of critical evidence, the pavements cannot be entirely understood

In the first chapter, the author observes a preoccupation with topographical imagery in the floor mosaics of the Late Antique Near East and considers the purpose of the maps, representations of walled cities, and tychai, which are prevalent in the pavements of Jordan. Bowersock examines the choice of cities depicted in mosaics, their status in the Late Antique world, and their placement within the pavements in an effort to reconstruct prevailing mentalities in the Near East concerning civic identity. The

¹⁸⁵ Dauphin, 'The Development of the Inhabited Scroll', 189.

¹⁸⁶ Glen Bowersock, *Mosaics as History. The Near East from Late Antiquity to Islam*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006.

¹⁸⁷ Bowersock, *Mosaics as History*, 2.

¹⁸⁸ Bowersock, *Mosaics as History*, 5.

author turns his attention to the frequent appearance of mythological subject matter in the Late Antique mosaics of the Near East. He correlates the physical evidence with contemporary literary sources which, he notes, 'abound in classical allusions that vividly illustrate, from the pagan and Christian side respectively, the vigour of myths in the daily life of the Near East.'¹⁸⁹ The author provides an excellent evaluation of the possible connection of the mythological mosaics with mime theatre, which flourished in late antiquity. His proposal that the pavement in the nave of the Church of the Apostles in Madaba represents a 'union of cartographic iconography with mythological representation' is less convincing.¹⁹⁰ It is clear that the author views the themes of the chapters as interconnected – and, to a degree, they are; however, his claim of a 'union' of myth and topography exceeds the limits of interpretation. Personifications of cartographic, topographic, and calendar phenomena were not viewed as mythological subjects and, therefore, permissible as church decoration.

There is a return to the subject of topography in chapter three, where the author focuses mainly on two topics: the iconography and compositional arrangement of walled cities in the border of the nave mosaic of the eighth century Church of St. Stephen at Umm al-Rasas and the identification of the three tychai in the Hippolytus Room, Madaba. In the Church of St. Stephen, the author concludes that the border of city vignettes, like the Madaba map, is related to the construction of identity and 'a lively interest in the neighbouring cities, a kind of union of Hellenized centres inside the Umayyad world.'¹⁹¹ His treatment of the St. Stephen's pavement highlights a common methodological shortcoming in research on Late Antique mosaics: little consideration is given to how the placement of the city vignettes in a church context might affect the manner in which they were interpreted. Another problem is the singling out of one element in a mosaic for discussion without considering how its meaning might be intrinsically linked to, or mediated by, other elements within a pavement.

Bowersock examines the controversial issue of iconoclastic damage to pavements in the Near East. The author agrees with scholars who connect the damage with a brief period of iconoclasm associated with the Umayyad caliph, Yazid II, and he offers an attractive explanation of the caliph's motives as well as a revised chronology which departs from conventional views. In the final chapter, Bowersock summarizes the value of the mosaics in the Near East as historical sources and reconstructs the social and historical framework within which the pavements were created. He concludes that the perception of a shared Hellenic culture was so firmly rooted among the peoples of the Near East that they continued to cling to their Greek heritage long after the Muslim conquest; moreover, the Umayyad rulers proved themselves savvy in their accommodation of these traditions. Few scholars possess Bowersock's command of the literary sources and deft ability to integrate them with the material culture; it is in the

¹⁸⁹ Bowersock, *Mosaics as History*, 32.

¹⁹⁰ Bowersock, *Mosaics as History*, 43.

¹⁹¹ Bowersock, *Mosaics as History*, 75.

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intersections between text and image that insightful reinterpretations and conclusions emerge.

Conclusions

This survey of the history of scholarship on Roman and early Byzantine floor mosaics reveals that many different approaches to their study have been adopted over the past century or so. As is always the case, certain methodologies have been more successful than others. Ernst Kitzinger's expert use of formal analysis in the study of floor mosaics led him to recognize important artistic transformations in the early Christian and Byzantine periods that he believes cannot be explained by linear stylistic evolution. In his opinion, these transformations could be either 'other-directed' or 'inner-directed'. He views stylistic change as a dialectical process in which periods of innovation were followed by retrospection and revival. Interestingly, Doro Levi's use of the formal analysis for the evaluation of floor mosaics at Antioch led him to the opposite conclusion, that the changes in the pavements were the result of a linear evolution of style. Irving Lavin adopts formal analysis to refute Levi's conclusion and argue that the marked stylistic shift visible in the Antioch pavements are best explained by the influence of North African floor mosaics. As a method, formal analysis can be useful in tracing the transmission of artistic trends within a broad region. In a smaller area, such as Byzantine Palestine, studies of formal elements in mosaic pavements aid in the identification of workshops and their spheres of operation.

Iconographical studies have also proven to be a fruitful avenue for research. André Grabar demonstrated the close iconographical connections between Greco-Roman and Christian art. He also addressed the nature of the symbolism present in Christian iconography. Katherine Dunbabin examined the link between patronage and iconography in the floor mosaics of North Africa. Her work proves that the use of traditional methods of art historical inquiry in combination with other approaches, in this case sociological, can immeasurably increase our understanding of the 'other-directed' circumstances involved in artistic trends. A similar traditional/non-traditional approach is adopted by Pauline Donceel-Voûte, who considers issues of formal analysis in the investigation of the relationship between church architecture and its decoration and liturgical practices. Janine Balty describes her own approach to the study of mosaics as 'totale'. She believes that the meaning of the floor pavements is lost when they are studied in a vacuum. In order to fully comprehend their meaning, she asserts that they must be viewed within the history of art, ideas, and society. In a similar vein, Piccirillo aimed for a complete understanding of the pavements which he attempted to achieve through the synthesis of archaeological data, epigraphy, and literary sources with the formal analysis. Claudine Dauphin takes the 'totale' approach espoused by Balty to another level. The methodologies used in her publications on mosaic pavements in the Near East include scientific analysis, French structuralism, sociological, and formal analysis. In contradistinction to the views of many of the

scholars discussed., which required textual corroboration for symbolic value, Goodenough asserted that literary evidence does not need to be a primary factor in the determination of symbolic value for motifs and compositions.

While the merits of the various approaches can be debated., the efforts made to better understand the material through the application of diverse methodologies and the discourse generated by them, benefit the study of Late Antique and early Byzantine mosaics. The documentary studies of archaeologists have been invaluable in enlarging the corpus of material available for study. The identification of regional patterns, workshop traditions and modes of transmission of artistic trends should be based upon a consideration of both the technical form and the content of a carefully designated group of pavements. Both the formal qualities and the iconography of mosaic pavements must be taken into consideration in any attempt that is made to interpret the meaning of the pavements as well as to establish whether a connection can be made between the pavements and the activities that would have occurred in the places where they are located. In the past decade, the work of scholars on mosaic pavements in the Near East acknowledges that in order to fully understand these aspects of mosaic pavements, their examination must be grounded in the religious, political, social and economic conditions in which they were produced. Thus, archaeological, epigraphic, and textual evidence must be entirely integrated in order to reconstruct as complete a picture as possible. Finally, and admittedly frustratingly, scholars must acknowledge that floor mosaics were only one element in a larger program of decoration and, in cases where there is an absence of physical or corroborating evidence for the other 'ingredients', recognize the limits of interpretation. Under the circumstances described., not only can these stones still speak; they can tell extraordinary stories.

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Byzantine mosaic pavements in the Eastern Mediterranean

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