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The Cultural Mosaic Under the Tesserae: Local Identity in the Iconography and Compositions of Roman Floor Mosaics

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THE CULTURAL MOSAIC UNDER THE TESSERAE: LOCAL IDENTITY IN THE
ICONOGRAPHY AND COMPOSITIONS OF ROMAN FLOOR MOSAICS

by

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SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS

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INTRODUCTION

Across the Roman empire, in cities that had very different histories and local traditions, the floors within the homes of local elites have something in common: they are decorated with lavish mosaic images, composed of carefully arranged tesserae, which tell stories of hunting triumphs, mythological legends, and more. Although such pavements existed across the empire and share some common themes and stylistic conventions, closer examination reveals that mosaics appear and function quite differently in different cities. Using the cities of Antioch in the Roman province of Syria (modern Antakya, Turkey) and Thysdrus in North Africa (modern El Djem, Tunisia) as case studies, this thesis compares the domestic mosaics of the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE in the Greek East and the Latin West of the Roman empire, looking specifically at how each city adapted this empire-wide art form locally.

These two cities both have distinctive local histories, were prosperous during this period, and have a comparable amount of evidence of domestic floor mosaics from the second and third centuries CE. Antioch’s mosaics show off the city’s rich Hellenistic heritage through the compositional strategy of emblemata (highly-detailed and individually framed rectangular scenes) and the classical mythology that these images portray.¹ These scenes appear as “pictures inserted in the floor” and represent an imaginary realm which is separate from the viewer.² They are arranged within rooms in a way which indicates that they were meant to be viewed for an extended period of time and it has been suggested that they functioned to spark conversation between different viewers.³ These scenes represent “snapshots” of myths: they draw upon their

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¹ Kondoleon 2000, 63-64.
² Dunbabin 1978, 3.
³ This is based on literary sources such as Plutarch’s Tabletalk and Athenaeus’ Deipnosophistae; Kondoleon 2000, 69; Newby 2007, 188.
viewer’s background knowledge and personal associations in order to convey more abstract morals or values or to provide entertainment and conversation topics through a single moment in a well-known story.

Unlike those at Antioch during this period, Thysdrus’s mosaics show an interest in realism and representations of daily life. This indicates a sharp distinction in the way the medium was conceptualized in each city. The mosaics of Thysdrus represent or allude to the city’s agriculture, hunt scenes, and gladiatorial games in addition to mythological scenes, whereas representations of daily life do not appear in Antioch until late antiquity. Additionally, there is much more variation in the compositions of the mosaics of Thysdrus. For example, some mosaics are arranged into registers, others have a circular format, and many appear as a part of an “all-over design,” which covers the entire floor rather than just a single section (like an emblema). In general, these compositions suggest that the floor was often conceived of as a whole, rather than as separate scenes, and these mosaics are more conducive to being viewed from multiple angles. The figural mosaics from Thysdrus also appear to have a more ornamental function than those from Antioch; many display motifs integrated into a geometric or vegetal design, rather than a narrative scene from a particular myth.

Mosaics are often studied in terms of regional characteristics; Katherine Dunbabin’s Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World is an example of one such study. Although this approach allows for a broad examination of many examples, local interests and identities can get lost. While mosaics in different parts of the Roman world share some similar characteristics,

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4 Most famously in the late fifth century Megalopsychia mosaic from Yakto, a suburb of Antioch (Figure 17).
5 Dunbabin 1978, 23.
6 Dunbabin 1999.
regional studies can ignore major cultural, historical, or visual differences which distinguish each city.

This is especially problematic for the study of North African mosaics. The African provinces were never a singular entity: different areas experienced “Romanization” in vastly different ways and at different rates.\(^7\) The area controlled by Carthage, for example, was urbanized prior to Roman conquest and remained the most densely settled part of North Africa throughout the Roman period. In Numidia, flourishing cities developed under the Romans, and further inland, there are areas where tribes remained virtually untouched by Roman civilization.\(^8\) These vast cultural differences are not accounted for in regional mosaic studies which consider all North African mosaics together.\(^9\)

Much of the scholarship of Antioch, on the other hand, often focuses on its mosaics. Doro Levi’s *Antioch Mosaic Pavements* still serves as the most comprehensive study and analysis of the mosaics of Antioch.\(^10\) This attention to mosaics is due, at least in part, to the way the city was excavated. In 1932, Antioch and its surrounding areas were excavated by Princeton University and the Musées Nationaux de France.\(^11\) Archaeologists set out in search of the monumental architecture described by literary sources like the fourth-century orations of Libanius or the sixth-century descriptions written by the ancient historian Malalas, like the octagonal golden

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\(^7\) Dunbabin 1978, 15.
\(^8\) Dunbabin 1978, 15.
\(^9\) For example, both Blanchard-Lemée et al. 1996 and Fantar 2009 discuss the mosaics of Roman Tunisia together, even though the region of modern Tunisia formed a large section of the province and included many different cities with different circumstances and histories. Dunbabin (1978 and 1999) considers all the mosaics of Roman North Africa at once and even though she points out that these cities were not unified (Dunbabin 1978, 15), she studies the iconography of all North African mosaics together.
\(^10\) Levi 1947.
\(^11\) Kondoleon 2000, 3.
church of Constantine and Forum of Valens. However, these remains have not been found by archaeologists.

The 1932 team also faced a variety of other unexpected problems, including the fact that the city was covered in several feet of silt which made excavation very difficult. Lack of funding, torrential downpours, and poor management also impacted excavations and the way the site and its mosaics are interpreted today. Pressure from sponsoring institutions to collect antiquities, combined with the lack of success in finding remains of monumental architecture, created a shift in the excavations to a “treasure-hunt” for mosaics. When excavations suddenly halted in 1939 due to the second World War and a changing political climate in Turkey, the Antioch mosaics were hastily divided up by sponsoring institutions and sold, resulting in their dispersal across the world.

Most, if not all, of these pavements were lifted without adequate documentation of their physical, cultural, and topographical contexts. A focus on these mosaics as objets d’art and the lack of records of their original surroundings has led to them often being considered individually, rather than within the context of the decorative program of a house or their contemporary cultural and political circumstances.

This is not a problem unique to Antioch, as mosaics are often studied apart from their context. Although I consider the historical and political circumstances of each city as closely

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12 Kondoleon 2000, 7; De Giorgi 2016, 31.
13 Kondoleon 2000, 7.
15 Kondoleon 2000, 5; De Giorgi 2016, 28; see also Barsanti 2012 for an account and a critique of how and why this distribution occurred.
16 De Giorgi 2016, 28.
17 This is particularly evident in the way mosaics are presented in museums. De Giorgi 2016, 28; Barsanti 2012.
related to my analysis of these mosaics, because of the focus and scope of this thesis, as well as the nature of the evidence available to me, many of my analyses also fall into this trap of looking at the mosaics as separate from their immediate physical surroundings of the house. Where possible and relevant, I consider the other mosaic decorations in a house, such as the third-century House of the Menander and House of the Boat of the Psyches at Daphne (see chapter two). Additionally, I try to consider the mosaics of a single room as a whole, rather than considering individual panels as individual works.

It is often difficult to establish a connection between room function and a particular mosaic image. However, *triclinium* mosaics have a recognizable form—a T-shaped arrangement of figural panels surrounded by a U-shape of decorative pattern on which the three couches would have been laid—which allows for easy identification. In chapter one, I focus on mosaics from *triclinia* which relate, thematically, to the rooms’ function; they depict drinking parties, dining, and food similar to what their viewers would have been eating.

Domestic mosaics of the high imperial period demonstrate a broadly legible visual language across the Roman empire. That is, people from Antioch would have been able to recognize common iconography and cultural symbols in a dining room of Thysdrus; they would have known why images of Dionysos were relevant in this setting. Simon Ellis makes a case for elite houses in the Roman empire as one of the unifying sources of the Roman world.\(^\text{18}\) Characteristic of these houses are architectural features like a peristyle, lavish decorations like mosaics, and the use of these houses as their owners’ place of business.\(^\text{19}\)

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\(^{18}\) Ellis 2000, 23.
\(^{19}\) Ellis 2000, 22-23; 71.
Because of this function, domestic decoration is often interpreted as a medium through which its owner presented himself, and as representative of his identity. Although these mosaics were commissioned and certain scenes were selected over others—suggesting that they were at least somewhat illustrative of a patron’s personal interests—the fact that mosaics from across the empire represent the same scenes complicates this idea and demonstrates a body of broadly acceptable iconography. Additionally, these mosaics existed in houses for long periods of time; even as houses were otherwise renovated mosaic floors were often left in place.²⁰ It has been suggested that there were pattern books, or some sort of stock repertory distributed throughout the Roman world, based on the clear recurrence of identical motifs in widely separated sites.²¹

These common motifs were, however, adapted to fit local visual culture. One way this occurred was through local mosaic workshops which allowed for the creation and dissemination of locally specific iconography.²² There was a local workshop in Thysdrus but it is still unclear exactly how mosaic workshops functioned within Antioch.²³ However, similarities in style and subject matter have linked Antioch’s mosaics to those in Cilicia and Cyprus and there is evidence that Antiochene mosaicists worked outside of the region.²⁴ In addition to pattern books, workshops, and mosaicists who worked outside of their own region, a culture of cosmopolitan elites also contributed to the spread of mosaic styles throughout the Roman empire.

²⁰ Dobbins 2000, 52.
²¹ Dunbabin 1978, 29.
²² For example, the spread of iconography of the personification of Winter with a hoe or olives as identifying features from local workshops in Thysdrus (see chapter two).
²⁴ Inscriptions from Chania in Crete record the work of an artist from Daphne and stylistic features in Bishapur in Iran suggests that Sapor I took captive mosaicists to work for him when he sacked Antioch in 253 and 256 CE. See Huskinson 2004, 136.
Decorative mosaics probably originated in Greece and the popular form of mosaics composed of *tesserae* set in mortar was developed during the Hellenistic period.\(^{25}\) As Hellenistic art works, adopted by the Romans, which appear all across the Roman empire, mosaics show a wide range of artistic influences. The earliest mosaics of North Africa, for example, closely resemble a Punic tradition of decorative pavements and many of the later North African mosaics resemble the Italian black and white technique stylistically, here adopted in polychromy.\(^{26}\)

Looking at the mosaics in each city, it is tempting to find similarities and to label them as evidence of a single visual culture across the empire; or, alternatively, to pull apart different influences, labeling certain elements as “Greek” and others as “Roman.” Janet Huskinson argues, for example, that the mosaics of Antioch are Greek in subject matter because of their mythological content and reference to Greek *paideia* (cultural education), while the hunt or gladiatorial scenes from North Africa are depictions of “Roman” activities.\(^{27}\) Dunbabin argues that the mosaics of Roman North Africa allowed for greater freedom in subject matter and composition—in part because of a greater degree of patrons’ influence—and that the images displayed in these mosaics more closely resemble a patron’s personal interests.\(^{28}\) On the other hand, the *emblemata* technique of Antioch is characterized as more traditional, and the Greek East, in general, is described as being more resistant to Roman culture and traditions.\(^{29}\) I argue in this thesis, however, that these characteristics are neither “Greek” nor “Roman” nor “Punic” in character, but, rather, locally specific responses to all of these influences.

\(^{25}\) Dunbabin 1999, 1.

\(^{26}\) Dunbabin 1978, 16-17.

\(^{27}\) Huskinson 2004, 141.


\(^{29}\) Hales 2003, 172.
The domestic mosaics in Antioch and Thysdrus, as with provincial art more generally, can be used to understand the ways that Roman imperialism was experienced in these cities and how it was represented visually to their inhabitants. Recently, there has been a push to study this exchange of visual cultures through a post-colonial lens and the concept of “Romanization”—or the direct imposition of “Roman-ness” through laws and architecture in the provinces by the center—has been challenged. D.J. Mattingly, in particular, has been influential in this shift and he looks critically at conceptions of power and identity under Roman rule, arguing that there were many different types of “Roman” lived experiences and discussing the problems associated with determining Roman-ness by the amount of Roman “stuff” in a province.30 Instead of looking at material culture as evidence for Roman domination, we can look at it in terms of a complex interaction between different cultures and the presence of multiple, plural identities. I apply these ideas about Romanization to the study of domestic mosaics in the provinces during the second and third centuries CE; by contextualizing these mosaics within their contemporary social and political climate, I consider how they reflect and contribute to it.

Another factor impacting the study of Roman provincial art is the historical biases against provincial art stemming from a nineteenth-century view of Roman imperialism which saw the center as the defining force.31 By starting with the domestic mosaics of provincial cities, I look at the way the inhabitants of these cities used the medium to define their position within the broader context of the Roman empire to themselves as well as to outsiders.

Antioch and Thysdrus had very different relationships with the empire; however, by the second and third centuries CE, both cities had been part of the empire for quite a while. Roman

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30 See Mattingly 2014.
31 Scott 2003, 3-4.
North Africa was conquered in two parts: Africa Vetus (roughly modern Tunisia) at the end of the Third Punic War in 146 BCE and Africa Nova (part of modern Algeria) in 46 BCE with Julius Caesar’s victory over Pompey (Figure 1).\(^{32}\) During the reign of Augustus (r. 27 BCE-14 CE) these two provinces were combined and renamed Africa Proconsularis.\(^{33}\) There was little large-scale immigration of Romans to North Africa at the end of the Roman republic and it was not until the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian (second /early third centuries CE) that monumental architecture—which is often used as evidence of the “Romanization” of a city—appeared in most North African cities.\(^{34}\) However, in the time between the conquest of Africa Proconsularis and the second and third centuries CE, Roman presence in the region was exhibited militarily and through the exploitation of the region’s resources.\(^{35}\) North Africa was an important source of grain and oil for the Roman empire.\(^{36}\)

Thysdrus was originally a small market town and it remained fairly insignificant until the second century CE, when it experienced rapid growth due to its position at the center of a huge olive-growing area (Figure 2).\(^{37}\) Thysdrus was large and prosperous during the second and third centuries CE. It had a large amphitheater, baths, a circus, and a forum.\(^{38}\)

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\(^{34}\) Dunbabin 1978, 12-13.
\(^{35}\) See Mattingly 1997.
\(^{36}\) Mattingly 1997, 122-123; Olive oil was included in the monthly handouts of cereals in Rome beginning in the third century CE; however, African olive oil imports were regulated by the state even before that, beginning in the second century CE and perhaps earlier which suggests a substantial tie between Africa and Rome, creating different opportunities for agricultural growth. Mattingly 1997, 130.
\(^{37}\) Slim 1996.
\(^{38}\) Slim 1996.
Roman presence was felt very differently in Antioch, which was one of the great cosmopolitan cities of the east (Figure 3). Antioch was culturally diverse, an important point of trade between the east and the west (situated between the Euphrates and the ports of the Mediterranean) the seat of the governor of the province of Syria, and an important administrative and military center. Antioch became a part of the Roman empire when Pompey annexed the province of Syria in 64 BCE. It was founded by Hellenistic king Seleukos I, who settled a large number of Greeks in the area. Julius Caesar, Augustus, and subsequent emperors donated buildings, theaters, and temples, as well as an aqueduct and a grand colonnaded street. The city was also given the honor of hosting Olympic Games every five years, which became one of the most celebrated festivals of the Roman world. Antioch was a prosperous city, which was due in part to the fact that it was located in the fertile Amuk plain, had a mild climate, and abundant water in the area due to local springs.

These political and cultural circumstances are reflected in the domestic mosaics of Antioch and Thysdrus. In chapter one, I look at the compositional differences in the mosaics of each city and argue that each city had a different conception of the medium of mosaics which is related to difference in each city’s unique cultural and historical background. In chapter two, I argue that locally specific iconography in the domestic mosaics of both cities is used to situate the city, its value, and its significance, within the broader context of the Roman empire to both outsiders as well as the city’s own inhabitants. These locally specific images are closely related

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40 Maas 2000, 14.
41 Maas 2000, 14.
42 Maas 2000, 15-16.
43 Maas 2000, 16.
44 Kondoleon 2000, 3.
to each city’s unique position within the empire and demonstrate some of the ways imperialism was experienced locally. In both cities, examples allude to the local topography and, in particular, the way the landscape is used to leverage the city’s cultural or economic value within the imperial system. I argue that the use of the landscape—and its visual representation—is inherently political. I also look at these mosaics as representations of social memory, and the way they are used to construct a particular narrative of the city and its importance. I draw on textual sources from each city in order to draw a link between civic pride and contemporary politics and the way they are represented visually.

These mosaics displayed images that were important to their patrons. Although they existed in elite homes, and therefore serve as a representation of the ideas and values of this class—not the entire city or the entire region—the layering of artistic styles, traditions, and subject matter can illuminate which aspects of each city’s local culture were seen as worthy of remembering and thus of being preserved in a careful arrangement of tesserae.
CHAPTER ONE
Local Conceptions of the Medium

Introduction: Exchange of Visual Culture

Certain subjects were popular for mosaics across the Roman empire, including images of food and dining as well as particular mythological figures like Dionysos, demonstrating an exchange of visual and cultural traditions across the empire. As cosmopolitan elites travelled between cities, they were greeted by a broadly legible visual language which is visible in high imperial domestic mosaics. *Triclinium* mosaics, for example, indicate some functional similarities in each city as well as iconographical connections. However, the presence of these similarities does not mean that mosaics appear in the same ways or serve the same function in all provincial cities. Mosaics that display common Greco-Roman iconography demonstrate the different ways each city adapts this broadly popular subject matter to suit local needs and interests. Distinctions in compositional strategies and different ways of engaging the viewer suggest that—despite iconographical and functional similarities—each city had a different conception of the medium of mosaics.

The way these subjects are presented compositionally impacts the way viewers interacted with these images. Antioch’s mosaics may have prompted conversations, encouraged viewers to imagine themselves within the mythological world depicted before them, or to consider the stories in relation to their own lives. Antioch’s mosaics display this subject matter in *emblemata*, which use framing devices to convey a contained scene and indicate a visual realm separate from the viewer. These scenes have an ideal position from which to be viewed. Thysdrus’s mosaics,

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45 As Mattingly points out, material objects which appear throughout the empire probably had different meanings or were used and/or valued differently by people in different provinces. See Mattingly 2014, especially 40-42.
on the other hand, present their subjects in a manner more conducive to being viewed from multiple perspectives. Much of the popular Greco-Roman iconography is presented as motifs in Thysdrus’s mosaics, rather than as figural scenes, and they are often integrated into geometric or vegetal designs. The figures in those mosaics often face multiple directions and cover the floor with the same theme or an “all-over” design. This suggests that the floor was conceived as a whole, rather than a series of single pictures which may or may not have to do with each other.\textsuperscript{46}

Although Antioch’s houses also contain non-figural mosaics, the figural mosaics are often featured more prominently and the figures are almost always presented in enclosed scenes or frames.

The mosaics of Antioch have been characterized as Hellenistic in subject matter and style because of their use of classical subjects, their representations of interiors and landscapes, and their use of multiple borders, making them reminiscent of Hellenistic \textit{emblemata}.\textsuperscript{47} This integration of Hellenistic subject matter, style, and composition, is evidence of the ancient Antiochene’s claims to this history and identity. The city of Antioch had been part of Alexander the Great’s kingdom, which was divided up after his death, and was an important city throughout the Hellenistic period.

\textsuperscript{46} Dunbabin argues (citing the Atrium House at Antioch as her main example) that there is no need for a common theme among different \textit{emblemata} scenes; although this may be true in certain instances, this is not always the case. I would suggest that their presence together indicates some sort of connection (even if that is only the patron’s personal interests or preferences, or viewer-created connections as a result of their proximity). That being said, the relationship between many of the scenes presented in \textit{emblemata} in a \textit{triclinium} at Antioch is more uncertain than the dispersal of multiple Dionysian motifs across mosaic sections in a \textit{triclinium} at Thysdrus. Dunbabin 1978, 4.

\textsuperscript{47} Kondoleon 2000, 63-64.
Thysdrus had a Punic heritage and the city had little connection to classical Greek culture before Roman conquest, primarily adopting it through its connections with Italy.\textsuperscript{48} Thysdrus’s mosaics show much more variation in compositions and Dunbabin argues that this freedom allowed for the introduction of new subject matter (such as representations of contemporary life) and the reinterpretation of old subjects (like more traditional mythological scenes).\textsuperscript{49} However, instead of seeing the \textit{emblema} technique as restrictive and their subjects as traditional, we can look at these differences as revealing distinct ways of viewing and using floor mosaics.

\textbf{Artistic License and Representations of Dionysos}

Dionysos was a popular figure for mosaic decoration throughout the empire.\textsuperscript{50} No other town has a comparable concentration of Dionysian mosaics to Thysdrus, where Dionysos appears on at least fourteen mosaics and related Dionysian iconography appears on even more.\textsuperscript{51} Dionysos was also a popular subject for the mosaics of Antioch, particularly in relation to wine drinking and dinner parties.\textsuperscript{52} Although Dionysos and the mythological figures associated with him appear across the empire, the use of these figures in different provinces is discussed quite differently by scholars. Antioch’s mosaics, for example, are used as evidence for the city’s rich cultural past and a patron’s education and cultural interests, while it has been argued that the mythological images in the region of North Africa demonstrate less knowledge of or interest in these myths.\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{48} Dunbabin 1978, 16.
\textsuperscript{49} Dunbabin 1978, 10.
\textsuperscript{50} Kondoleon 2000, 65.
\textsuperscript{51} Dunbabin 1978, 173.
\textsuperscript{52} Kondoleon 2000, 65.
\textsuperscript{53} Dunbabin 1978, 39.
The distinctions in the way these scenes are displayed should be ascribed to local preferences rather than to a lack of mythological knowledge in North Africa, or a deeper cultural ties to mythology as a result of Antioch’s Hellenistic past. The evidence given for this lack of knowledge is that there is not much variation in the mythological scenes displayed in North Africa.54 I would argue, however, that this demonstrates a more pronounced interest in certain aspects of the myth, and/or different motives for displaying the myth, rather than reflecting the patron or mosaicist’s level of knowledge or interest in mythology.

For example, the figure Silenus—the older drunken companion/tutor of Dionysos—was especially popular at Thysdrus.55 Most mosaics at Thysdrus that display Dionysian themes include Silenus, and the mid-third century Maison de Silène depicts Silenus as the main figure (Figure 4).56 This large mosaic is decorated with a Dionysian iconography and displays Silenus being tied down by three children at the center of the mosaic, making him its focal point (Figure 4). Related iconography covers the whole pavement, rather than just the central scene. The outer border of this mosaic is composed of vegetal designs and plants extend out of vases, angled from each of the four corners towards the central scene of Silenus, which is set off from the rest of the mosaic by a hexagon-shaped border. Putti play and pick grapes, surrounded by vines and animals that move around the border of the composition.

Images of the infant Dionysos were also popular at Thysdrus, such as the mosaic representation of the child Dionysos riding a tigress from the mid-second century House of the Dionysian Procession (Figure 5-6). Dionysian triumph scenes also appear throughout Thysdrus

54 Dunbabin 1978, 39.
and the region of North Africa more generally, with twelve different works depicting the triumph of Dionysos found in North Africa, four of which are from Thysdrus. In a study of the iconography of the triumph of Dionysos in North Africa, Dunbabin argues that the similarities between nine different pavements displaying the triumph suggest common influences, but not a singular model for these mosaics. This study demonstrates the freedom with which mosaicists composed these scenes, using their judgement to combine different groups of the same figures. This freedom, in addition to the popularity of certain scenes over others, demonstrates local interests in relation to the broadly popular iconography of Dionysos, both iconographically and compositionally.

Dionysos in Triclinia of Antioch and Thysdrus

A comparison of two different mosaic representations of Dionysos—both from triclinia—reveals some of the major differences in composition and viewer engagement between Antioch and Thysdrus. The Antioch example is composed in a way which encourages prolonged, attentive viewing and demonstrates the ways in which a single moment from a myth can convey broader themes or morals. The example from Thysdrus shows a single theme across multiple mosaic sections, and appears to be more decorative than the Antioch emblema, with the figures displayed as motifs, rather than appearing in a contained, mythological world separate from the viewer.

The third-century House of the Drinking Contest at Seleucia Pieria, Antioch’s nearby port city, is so-named for an emblema depicting a drinking contest between Dionysos and

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58 Dunbabin 1971.
Herakles (Figures 7 and 8). The drinking contest *emblema* is oriented toward the back wall in the *triclinium*. Surrounding the *emblema* on three sides is a complex geometric pattern. The *emblema* is set off from this pattern by a section of white *tesserae* that extends above the scene and around the mosaic as a whole.

The two male gods with bare torsos recline on couches. Dionysos is on the right of the composition, with an orange and red mantle covering his legs.\(^6^0\) He raises his glass with his right arm as he balances himself with his left. Herakles faces him, on his knees—as if attempting to stand—with his cup lifted to his lips. He is identified by his lion’s skin, which slips off his body, and his club, which leans against the couch. The third figure, a maenad, is dancing and playing the tambourine in the foreground.\(^6^1\) These figures are framed within a complex architectural space. Two white pillars behind two gold Corinthian columns are on either side of the scene, with cornice with an entablature and a coffered arch above them.\(^6^2\) The figures stand on a high base and curtains drape within this scene, inside their architectural surroundings.

Space is represented in an interesting way in this *emblema*. The scene of the drinking contest is framed in multiple iterations: the architectural details which surround the figures in the scene, a border of white *tesserae* which separates the *emblema* from the geometric mosaic, and the geometric mosaic which covered the rest of the room. The multiple frames create a sense of looking down into another space, rather than simply at the scene. Carefully rendered perspective enhances this experience. The columns cast shadows on the pillars and the entablature—which extends on either side of the scene—casts a shadow on the front part of the entablature. Not all of the *emblemata* in Antioch display such deep space as this mosaic; however, they often still

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\(^6^0\) Levi 1947, 157.  
\(^6^1\) Levi 1947, 157.  
render these scenes as “snapshots” of a particular myth and use a single moment to stand for the whole story.

This mosaic was a centerpiece for the dining activities that took place around it. The fact that it is oriented toward the couches where the diners would recline, rather than the entrance to the room, suggest that this mosaic was meant to be seen and reflected on during the dinner, as opposed to briefly upon entry. When the viewer entered the room, this image would appear upside-down. His or her attention would be drawn to other things in the room, such as the furniture or something on the back wall; it is not until the viewer takes his or her position as a diner that the scene becomes fully legible. This image is meant for extended viewing and meditation and as a part of the dinner conversation.

This scene depends on the viewer’s prior knowledge and associations to spark conversation and add to the mosaic’s interpretation. The nature of this conversation could have been moralizing, perhaps serving as a reminder to the patron and his guests to drink in moderation. Herakles—a mortal—is clearly losing the drinking contest to the immortal god of wine Dionysos. This scene engages the viewer as a conversation starter, a spectacle, and a means to convey a particular characteristic of the patron. This *emblema* may have served as a representation of the patron’s morals or household rules.

The House of the Dionysian Procession at Thysdrus (c. 140-160 CE), located near the southwest quadrant of the city, also features Dionysian iconography in its *triclinium* (Figures 5 and 9). This mosaic is arranged with a U-shape of geometric pattern around the outer edge and a central section composed of a complex vegetal design. A border depicting animals framed by

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63 Kondoleon 2000, 68.
64 Kondoleon 2000, 68.
leaves forming circles, with two female figures in the top left and right side, separates the main section from the U-shape of geometric pattern. At the entrance to the room is the Dionysian Procession mosaic with two panels depicting animal fights on either side (Figures 10 and 11).

The procession panel of the mosaic depicts Dionysos riding a lion and surrounded by followers in a rustic setting (Figure 10). A tambourine-playing maenad leads the procession, followed by a satyr who reaches back to lead the young Dionysos.65 All three of these figures are moving to the left of the composition, but turn their heads back towards the right, facing the other figures in the procession. Dionysos leads the lion with reins in one hand and extends his other, which holds a large crater, out to the satyr who follows him. This satyr is the only figure facing in the direction of the procession’s movement in this panel. Behind this satyr is Silenus, who is precariously balanced on a camel, and Mystis (nurse-teacher of Dionysos) who walks behind him alongside a leopard.66 This is the first mosaic example depicting Silenus on a camel (he is usually depicted riding a donkey), suggesting that this scene references local North African life specifically.67 This locally specific iconography indicates the artistic freedom mosaicists in North Africa had when composing popular mythological scenes and an interest in displaying images of local life within these scenes.

Additionally, this triclinium demonstrates how a theme extends from a single scene into a whole room. Although this mosaic floor is made up of distinct sections, its composition and consistent subject matter suggests that it was conceived of as an integrated whole. As Foucher points out, for example, the border of the animal motif extends beyond the largest central section

of the mosaic all the way to the front of the room and surrounds the Dionysian Procession section on two sides.\(^{68}\)

The two scenes of animals fighting display subject matter which is related to the rest of the floor, with animal imagery echoed elsewhere in the composition. As individual scenes framed multiple times, these images appear quite similar to Hellenistic *emblemata*. However, the orientation of this scenes—facing in, towards the central panel, rather than towards the entrance of the room or the diners on couches—suggests a major distinction in the way these images were meant to be viewed. Because of their orientation, the viewer would have had to turn immediately upon entering the room to face the scenes, suggesting that they functioned as a part of the floor as a whole. In comparison, the second-century Atrium House at Antioch features five *emblema* which have an ideal viewpoint that is obvious in relation to a viewer’s expected movement (Figure 12). Compared to the orientation of the *emblemata* of the Atrium House *triclinium*, the animal scenes near the entrance of the *triclinium* of the House of the Dionysian Procession face an awkward direction from the perspective of a viewer moving through the room starting at the entrance. Because of their orientation, perpendicular to the Dionysian Procession panel and the entrance to the room, the viewer would have had to turn immediately upon entering the room to face the scenes. This orientation suggests a different interaction between viewer and image than the *emblema* at the entrance to the Atrium House *triclinium*.

The central section of the mosaic is composed in a way which does not require a particular perspective for ideal viewing, which is characteristic of many of the mosaic designs of Thysdrus. While a viewer of the drinking contest scene at Antioch would look down into the space of the mythological figures, the Dionysian figures which decorate the central panel of this

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\(^{68}\) Foucher 1963, 52.
mosaic serve a much more ornamental purpose. The main section of this room includes intersecting red and green leaves, creating a kaleidoscope-like effect and a pattern of diamonds inside circles; the negative space between these leaves features busts of the seasons and multiple Dionysian motifs. Since these figures are integrated into the non-figural design as motifs, rather than representing a particular scene, they have a more decorative than narrative purpose. Moreover, since they face multiple directions, they maintain their function as the viewer moves around the room. Instead of encouraging an extending viewing into a mythological space, this mosaic—particularly the largest central section—decorates the *triclinium* with various mythological images and encourages the viewer’s eye to move around the room and recognize the relationships between the different sections of the floor.

**Dinner and a Show: Viewer Engagement in Mosaic Representations of Dining**

Both cities contain mosaics which are thematically related to the function of the rooms they decorate; however, the way these images engage the viewer and convey this theme is distinct. This difference is evident in the way food is represented in *triclinia* in both cities, such as the third-century Maison des Mois at Thysdrus and the third-century House of the Buffet Supper at Daphne, a suburb of Antioch. Both examples portray similar food to what would have been served in these rooms and play with this representation of reality to directly engage their viewers’ actions. The Buffet Supper mosaic uses the representation of food to invite the viewer to imagine themselves within the mythological realm it depicts. The Maison des Mois *triclinium*, on the other hand, presents the food more directly and plays with representations of the real at different points during the meal.
The Buffet Supper mosaic from the third-century House of the Buffet Supper at Daphne is from a triclinium which is apsidal in shape (Figure 14).\(^{69}\) The mosaic contains two emblemata bordered by multiple decorative frames. A semi-circular emblema contains Ganymede watering an eagle and surrounded by a curved table filled with food. This food is depicted cooked, which is unusual in Roman art.\(^{70}\) The types of food presented in this mosaic are consistent with what other sources have suggested Romans would have eaten at dinner parties, although it would have been served in a sequence, rather than displayed buffet-style like in this mosaic.\(^{71}\) The other emblema is in the shape of a rectangle and features birds—referring to aucupium (bird hunting)—with a large peacock at the center, surrounded by putti shoving birds into cages, and a crater at the center of the base.\(^{72}\)

Ganymede was a young, beautiful Trojan prince captured by Zeus who took the form of an eagle and made him his immortally youthful cupbearer. In this mosaic, Ganymede is presented to the viewer mostly nude, wearing a Phyrgian cap and a mantle tied around his shoulders.\(^{73}\) Ganymede was the main attendant to the gods and his presence in front of the food evokes banquets of Olympus, connecting the viewers’ meal with that of the gods.\(^{74}\)

\(^{69}\) Curved stibadium couches would have been used to accommodate this shape. Levi points out, however, that at some point the room may have been renovated to make it into a rectangular shape, in which case this mosaic may have been partially covered during the meal. Levi 1947, 127-129.

\(^{70}\) In fact, this is one of the earliest known representations of identifiably cooked foods in private banqueting imagery. D’Arms 2004, 438.

\(^{71}\) Knudsen 2000, 182; Ancient sources include Macrobius (Saturnal. III.13.12), Apicius (De arte coquinaria III, 19), and Pliny (N.H. XIX.152-3) among others. See Levi 1947, 133-136.

\(^{72}\) Levi 1947, 129.

\(^{73}\) Levi 1947, 130.

\(^{74}\) Levi 1947, 130.
The *triclinium* in the third-century Maison des Mois at Thysdrus, on the other hand, depicts food in a way more closely related to the realities of everyday life. It displays a *xenia*-motif in the T-section of the pavement, partially surrounded by an *asaroto oikos* (unswept floor) border, and a U-shaped section which is decorated with a simple geometric pattern (Figure 13).\(^\text{75}\)

The T-shaped section of this pavement is not symmetrical; however, Foucher explains this anomaly, proposing that it may not have been evident when the couches were in place.\(^\text{76}\) *Xenia* (hospitality) mosaics derive from Hellenistic painting and depict still-life representations of food.\(^\text{77}\) These images were especially popular in North Africa, where they are often presented within the framework of vegetal or geometric designs.\(^\text{78}\) In the Maison des Mois mosaic, a geometric pattern of ovals and diamonds creates frames for foodstuff including fruits, vegetables, a gazelle, and a flamingo, among other food, and several Dionysian motifs including masks and a tambourine.\(^\text{79}\)

The combination of the *xenia* section of this mosaic with the unswept floor border draws a direct connection to the viewers surroundings and actions at multiple points in the meal. The neat, careful, presentation of food in the central section of the mosaic stands in sharp contrast with the detritus which is positioned near the viewer, below the couches, and exactly where food scraps would have landed during the meal. This floor simultaneously presents foodstuff before and after it has been eaten, and the transition between these two states is embodied in the

\(^{75}\) Foucher 1961.

\(^{76}\) Foucher 1961, 292.

\(^{77}\) Blanchard-Lemée et al. 1996, 65. These paintings were often given as gifts to guests in the Greek world and may have retained some of their associations with hospitality in Roman art. D’Arms 2004, 437.


\(^{79}\) Foucher 1961, 295.
viewers’ actions. Emily Gowers proposes that still-life images like xenia take their meaning from what they exclude and mark the transitions between raw and cooked and ripe and rotten.  

This mosaic similarly plays with what is not represented as a way to engage viewers through their actions.

The triclinium mosaics from the Maison des Mois at Thysdrus and the Buffet Supper mosaic at Daphne both draw connections between the viewer’s dining experience and the representation of the food; however, they demand a different kind of viewer engagement through this mirroring. The Thysdrus mosaic uses images of food more decoratively and in relation to the real experience, while the Antioch mosaics draw connections between the reality of dining and mythology. At Antioch, Ganymede presents the food and invites viewers to imagine themselves dining with the gods. At Thysdrus, on the other hand, the mosaic literally engages with the viewers’ actions in the dining room, particularly through the unswept floor border which may have become covered with many of the same food scraps that it depicts.

Conclusion

As cosmopolitan elites travelled between different provincial cities and entered the houses of elite citizens, they were greeted by a familiar visual language which allowed them to negotiate certain practices and operate in unfamiliar cities. This broadly legible visual language is evident in the common Greco-Roman iconography displayed in the mosaics of both Antioch and Thysdrus, most notably in triclinia. These similarities demonstrate the exchange of visual and cultural traditions across provincial cities.

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80 Gowers makes this claim in her analysis of two descriptions by Philostratus (Imagines 1.31; 2.26), stating that these ekphrases represent the passage from nature to culture, raw to cooked, and ripe to rotten, much like the still-lives themselves. Gowers 1993, 34.
Compositional differences, however, suggest a different functional conception of the medium of floor mosaics in these two cities. In Thysdrus, they are more decorative and represent the realities of daily life, while in Antioch, they function to stimulate intellectual consideration. At Antioch, the use of mythological images links to the city’s Hellenistic past. Even examples of “real” images—like the Buffet Supper mosaic—incorporate mythological scenes. At Thysdrus, on the other hand, mosaics demonstrate an interest in daily life and present motifs in the same realm as the same plane as the viewer, rather than in an entirely different mythological world. This common Greco-Roman iconography is presented in a very different way at Thysdrus where the rooms display an “all-over” design, featuring a single theme or composition that is expressed across the entire room. They are not oriented toward a specific viewpoint, and function from multiple perspectives as the viewer moves across the room.
CHAPTER TWO

Presenting the City through Locally Specific Iconography

Introduction: Social Memory and the Ancient Viewer

Many of the mosaics from Antioch and Thysdrus prominently display locally specific iconography. They engage with each city directly, either through a reference to its natural resources or geography or by representing the way the city existed in the popular imagination of its inhabitants. Both Antioch and Thysdrus celebrate their local natural features in ways which are particular to their cultural context and the nature of each city’s relationship to the broader empire. These mosaics can be used to better understand the way the local elite of Antioch and Thysdrus envisioned themselves and their cities. In this chapter, I examine mosaics which display locally specific imagery and argue that they demonstrate civic pride and the patron’s interest in presenting himself and his relationship with the city to a local audience.

The intended audience is important to consider in relation to the way these mosaics functioned in the elite houses of Antioch and Thysdrus. Zahra Newby argues that the mosaics of Antioch served as a way to promote the city to the broader Roman empire by giving their patrons the opportunity to show off their hospitality, culture, and status to other Romans.\footnote{Newby 2007.} Newby uses evidence of Antioch’s cosmopolitan character and the fact that influential Romans would have travelled through the city and stayed in the houses of local elites to make this argument.\footnote{Newby 2007.} The same can be said for the mosaics of Thysdrus because it was an important market town situated at the edge of coastal zones and the hinterlands, making it a meeting point for the transport of
goods. People would have come to Thysdrus for market days, feast days, and major games at the amphitheater.

Although Newby’s argument is compelling, it overlooks the prominence of locally specific images in these mosaics. While presenting themselves and their city to outsiders may have been important to the owners of these houses, on a day-to-day basis the majority of viewers would have been local. Additionally, the local significance of these images is often very specific and may have been overlooked by outsiders. For example, a non-Antiochene viewer of the Judgement of Paris mosaic in the second-century Atrium House, may have known the mythological story, but missed that Antiochens believed that it took place locally (Figure 19). However, these images’ dependence on local cultural knowledge suggest that these images represented and constructed local identities by inviting viewers to discuss their city’s significance.

Each city was conceptualized by its inhabitants in a distinct way: the local aspect of these images are alluded to in the mosaics of Antioch, whereas the mosaics of Thysdrus represent these local features directly. Thysdrus’s mosaics demonstrate an interest in realism and representations of daily life and make a direct connection between agricultural labor—such as olive cultivation—and the city’s prosperity. Images from everyday life do not appear in Antioch until much later, and most famously in the late fifth-century Megalopsychia mosaic from Yakto (Figure 17). The second and third century mosaics of Antioch draw upon the viewer’s local, mythological, and cultural knowledge using images of local topography to connect divine figures, the city’s cultural heritage, and its prosperity.

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These images draw on and engage with the viewer’s knowledge of local culture and can be interpreted as visual representations of social memory, a type of shared remembrance which defines social and cultural groups and constructs communities in relation to a common past.\textsuperscript{86} Susan Alcock’s ideas about social memory can be applied to the high imperial mosaics of Antioch and Thysdrus.\textsuperscript{87} Because the local features in these mosaics were closely associated with each city’s position in relation to the broader empire—and functioned as a way to define this position in relation to local elites—the ways in which these images are presented demonstrate how the city’s value to the rest of the empire was imagined locally.

The mosaics from both cities demonstrate what their citizens remembered, valued, and used to define and construct their communities. For example, Antioch’s mosaics locate mythological stories in and around the city of Antioch and provide a visual representation of these stories, giving evidence for them and inviting viewers to comment on their significance and the community’s shared past. In Thysdrus, this common past is represented through the juxtaposition of the city’s unique resources and broadly popular Greco-Roman iconography—like the personifications of the seasons—providing evidence for the city’s position within the empire and constructing local identity in relation to the economic resources of the region. In both Antioch and Thysdrus, these images are then used to leverage their city’s importance within the broader Roman empire.

\textsuperscript{86} Alcock 2002, 1.
\textsuperscript{87} Alcock studies social memory and the ways Greeks and Romans remembered and imagined their pasts and how that is conveyed through and embodied within monuments and the landscape. Although she focuses on social space and monuments in Greece, many of her ideas about the coexistence of distinct social memories and the dominance of certain memories over others are applicable here. Alcock 2002.
The Value of the Landscape

Many of these connections are made through representations of the local landscape. W.J.T. Mitchell argues that landscape is a cultural practice and an artistic medium, rather than a genre of art, and that it carries symbolic and cultural value, making it integrally connected to imperialism. Mitchell’s arguments center around modern imperialism; however, a similar phenomenon is visible in the mosaics of Antioch and Thysdrus, where the landscape is used to leverage each city’s unique value to the rest of the empire. This is expressed in the mosaics of Thysdrus through the emphasis on the natural resources which made the region profitable to Rome. Mosaic representations of the landscape in Antioch, on the other hand, emphasize the city’s cultural heritage and function as evidence for locating significant and widely-known Greco-Roman myths in Antioch and its surrounding areas.

In Antioch, these famous mythological stories were embedded into the physical landscape. As discussed above, the mythological mosaics of Antioch rely on the viewer to recall and fill in the details about a mythological scene displayed in a single frame on the floor. In general, comprehension of these images relies on the viewer’s education and cultural knowledge. Mythological scenes with local significance would have sparked conversations regarding this significance between local viewers who were prompted by representations of local topography as evidence. These local interests are supported textually, in particular in the fourth-century orations of Libanius, who locates several mythological stories in Antioch and its surrounding areas. Mosaic images which display mythology and their connections with physical places, function to emphasize the city’s importance and create a community of viewers who recognize and acknowledge this significance. Using the landscape to emphasize this social memory anchors

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88 Mitchell 2002.
these stories in the viewer’s physical surroundings. Antioch’s suburb of Daphne, in particular, was the famous location of several mythological stories, a belief which was stressed throughout the Greek East and especially by the citizens of Antioch.\textsuperscript{89}

For example, the Landon and Psalis mosaic from the third-century House of the Menander at Daphne uses mythological figures to refer to local water sources (Figure 18).\textsuperscript{90} Two figures recline in a panel, bordered with a wave motif, and are identified with Greek inscriptions in the upper-portion of the mosaic.\textsuperscript{91} The Landon River was near the Temple of Apollo at Daphne and the nymph representing Psalis may have referred to the springs at Daphne.\textsuperscript{92} The Temple of Apollo at Daphne was a popular attraction which brought people from across the empire to Antioch.\textsuperscript{93} According to Libanius, while Seleucus Nicator (who founded Antioch) was out hunting he found a golden arrowhead engraved with the name Phoebus, indicating that it belonged to Apollo and that the tree was the metamorphosed Daphne.\textsuperscript{94} To honor the god, Seleucus built him the Temple of Apollo at Daphne.\textsuperscript{95} By alluding to a popular tourist attraction, this image simultaneously conveys a foundation myth of the city of Antioch and illustrates a non-local interest in the city and its mythology, underlining the city’s cultural significance within the Greco-Roman world.

\textsuperscript{89} De Giorgi 2016, 152.
\textsuperscript{90} Levi 1947, 204-205.
\textsuperscript{91} Levi 1947, 205.
\textsuperscript{92} Landon was the name of a well-known river in Arcadia, near Olympia; however, it was also the name of a brook near Daphne and occurs repeatedly in the legend of Daphne. According to Pausanias (VIII.20.2), there was a second version of the story among Antiochenes, suggesting that the figures in this mosaic refer to the river at Daphne. Additionally, there may have been a deity or nymph of a spring in Antiochene legend called Psalis, which is otherwise unknown in Greek mythology. Levi 1947, 205.
\textsuperscript{93} Newby 2007, 191.
\textsuperscript{94} Lib. Or. 11.84-9; Newby 2007, 192.
\textsuperscript{95} Lib. Or. 11.84-9; Newby 2007, 192.
The Judgement of Paris *emblema* in the *triclinium* of the early second-century Atrium House in Antioch, also features a myth of local significance (Figures 12 and 19). This scene illustrates the mythological origins of the Trojan war and Libanius believed that the contest took place in Antioch.\(^96\) This is evidence of a local tradition of a connection between Antioch and this scene, suggesting that it could have sparked discussion related to the local significance of this myth.

The mosaics from Thysdrus also represent the landscape and its relationship to the city’s prosperity and Roman imperialism; however, the use of local topography in the Thysdrus mosaics functions very differently. North Africa experienced immense growth in agricultural production and rural population between the second and fourth centuries CE, which was not experienced in other parts of the empire.\(^97\) During the late second and early third centuries CE, Thysdrus was one of the most important cities in the province and its prosperity was specifically linked to its position as “the oil capital of the empire.”\(^98\) Olive production was one of the main sources of the city’s wealth, and aerial photographs, in which remains of numerous farms and villages are visible in the area, provide evidence for immense olive tree cultivation in the area surrounding Thysdrus.\(^99\)

Olive cultivation is also closely related to the way the city functioned within the broader Roman empire. In addition to its widespread local use, olive oil was distributed by the emperor to the rest of the empire.\(^100\) Terracotta jar stoppers marked with the stamp of an oil producer from

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\(^97\) Mattingly 2014, 146.
\(^98\) Slim 1996, 21; 34.
\(^100\) Slim 1996, 33.
the region of Thysdrus serve as evidence for Roman colonists sending oil to Carthage and Rome. By highlighting these resources, the mosaics in the homes of local elites use the landscape to position the city’s significance within the context of the empire.

In addition to valuing the landscape in a distinct way, the mosaic images of local topography in Thysdrus are also represented differently than those at Antioch. For example, a mosaic from the mid-third century at the Maison de la Chasse à Courre at Thysdrus depicts a rabbit hunt and demonstrates a major difference in the way narrative action is conveyed to the viewer (Figure 20). Unlike the “snapshot” images of Antiochene emblemata, this mosaic displays a visual progression of narrative action through registers created in the mosaic composition.

In this scene, hunters appear on foot, led by hounds, and on horseback. The composition is organized into several registers, with figures standing on different patches of earth indicated by shapes of off-white tesserae, darker and slightly more brown that the background of the scene, but not resembling real space at all. They are legible as solid ground only because the figures are standing on them. In some cases, the shape of this earth vaguely resembles a shadow. Plants and tree stumps emerge from these pieces of earth and float in the background. The realistically-rendered olive trees in the top of the composition locate this hunt in an olive grove.

This is an action scene and the viewer is let in on the excitement. In the middle section of the composition, on the far right-hand side, a rabbit is encircled by greenery which indicates that—although it is visible to the viewer—it is perhaps hidden from the figures in the scene. The figures’ movement becomes more rapid as the scene progresses. If it is read from left to right and top to bottom: the first hunter is on a horse, who is alert but only walking; the other figures in

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101 Slim 1996, 34.
this register look back to this hunter but lean forward with their bodies, indicating the direction of their movement. The fourth figure in the scene, in the middle register of the composition, leans back to brace himself against the dogs that he holds on leashes, but his cape billows behind him indicating that he is being pulled forward, rather than pulling the dogs backward. The other, leash-less dogs in front of him bark to alert the hunters of the rabbit in the bush that they are approaching. In the bottom register, the horses are galloping, and the dogs dash forward towards a rabbit in the bottom right of the composition—the brown dog in the bottom center of the composition is just inches away from catching it.

This scene indicates a very different kind of viewer engagement than the mosaic representations of landscape in Antioch. Rather than representing and elaborating an already-known story, this scene illustrates action within a familiar local landscape. Although the details of this particular narrative were probably invented, it represents a common, everyday action which encourages social connections between viewers who participate in similar hunts in the same landscape.

**Politics, Olive Oil, and Elite Power in Thysdrus**

The exploitation of the agricultural resources is directly related to the experience of Roman imperialism in North Africa and the mosaic representations of these resources in Thysdrus are inherently political. By presenting the agricultural landscape of Thysdrus in their iconography, domestic decoration highlights the source of elite wealth and emphasizes the city’s economic importance to the rest of the empire. The elite citizens of Thysdrus—who decorated their houses with these images—benefited both economically and politically from the exploitation of the local landscape.
As the city of Thysdrus grew as a result of olive cultivation, the city’s wealth and its elites’ associated power stood in sharp contrast to the majority of the empire and in January 238 CE, a revolt began in Thysdrus, overthrowing emperor Maximinus and replacing him the proconsul Gordian.\textsuperscript{102} This revolt started in response to a raise in taxes by Emperor Maximinus on the major landowners in the most prosperous regions of the empire to finance his campaigns against the Germans. Young elite men in Thysdrus stabbed a tax collector in response and the rebellion spread throughout the province, eventually ending Maximinus’ reign.\textsuperscript{103} This event had empire-wide repercussions, illustrating immense power associated with Thysdrus’s landscape.

These elite citizens were instrumental in establishing the city’s economy and its infrastructures in relation to Rome. Mattingly points out, for example, that a group of African-born senators played an important role in the development of rural infrastructures—such as estates, minor roads, irrigation schemes, etcetera—within a political framework that was dependent on the state.\textsuperscript{104} This is significant because it highlights the interdependency between local landowners and the emperor; Pliny states in his \textit{Natural History} that the emperor controlled half the lands of Africa following Nero’s confiscation of the estates of six prominent senators.\textsuperscript{105}

As the relationship between the empire and Thysdrus’s elites soured, with heavy taxes imposed by Maximinus and the confiscation of goods and property to cover the deficit of unpaid taxes, the elite citizens of Thysdrus used their city’s recent rise to prominence and power—gained

\begin{thebibliography}{10}
\bibitem{102} These events are described in the fourth-century \textit{Historia Augusta}; Slim 1996, 23-26.
\bibitem{103} Slim 1996, 24-26.
\bibitem{104} Mattingly 2014, 152.
\bibitem{105} Mattingly points out that this number is clearly exaggerated but states that emperors viewed Africa as a vital source of food for Rome and that they made changes to the organization of these estates to increase productivity which impacted private estates. Pliny, \textit{Natural History}, 18.35; Mattingly 2014, 151.
\end{thebibliography}
through the landscape—to challenge these imperial forces. Inscriptions discovers at Thysdrus and elsewhere in Africa, Italy, and Gaul document the rise in power of the city. During the reign of Septimus Severus (r. 193-211), Thysdrus was granted the status of *civitas libera*, making it a full Roman municipality with all of the associated privileges and freedoms, such as sovereignty of the people’s assembly. In the middle of the third century, Thysdrus was elevated to an honorary colony, making all of the city’s free-born inhabitants Roman citizens and allowing the elite to rise to the highest political posts in the empire. This change in status made the city more closely associated with the exercise of Roman power; for example, Thysdrus’s citizens were able to participate in the elections for the capital’s magistrates when they were present in Rome.

Mitchell proposes that the landscape is “an emblem of the social relations it conceals.” When represented in the domestic decoration of Thysdrus’s elite, the landscape signifies its associated economic, cultural, and political value. Representations of the landscape in Thysdrus’s mosaics had both empire-wide and local significance. Within the homes of Thysdrus’s elite, mosaics emphasize olive cultivation, agricultural production, and labor. The patrons of these mosaics highlight their role in this cultivation by drawing a connection between

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107 Latin inscriptions indicate that the municipal institutions of the city were fully functioning bodies. For example, the municipal council is mentioned as honoring L. Catitus Severus (the proconsul of Africa) and emperor Antoninus Pius. Various other inscriptions record the city’s status as a free city and a colony. Slim 1996, 23.
108 This shift in status is attested by a Latin inscription at Arles. Slim 1996, 22.
109 This shift is also attested by Latin inscriptions on a number of occasions, such as an inscription documenting that P. Iulius Liberatis was elected priest of the official religion of the empire and was responsible for offering sacrifices in the name of the Thysdritan colony on the altars of Rome and Augustus. Slim 1996, 23.
Thysdrus’ local harvest and their own prosperity. This is especially evident in the mosaic representations of the seasons. In season mosaics, the general prosperity associated with this iconography is made locally specific through references to the olive harvest during the winter season. However, the experience of agricultural production in North Africa was very different for peasant farmers and laborers than for wealthy landowners.\textsuperscript{112} The representations of agricultural labor, then, in the homes of these wealthy landowners provides evidence for how this class viewed and valued the agricultural resources that were the source of their wealth.

In North Africa, it was not uncommon for absentee landowners to depend on tenet labor and sharecropping.\textsuperscript{113} The late fifth-century Albertini Tablets document the sale of sharecropping plots and indicate the sale of olive trees and leasing of cultivation rights of individual fields of the estate.\textsuperscript{114} Although this evidence is much later that the mosaics, it illustrates a separation between ownership of the crops placed on a patch of the earth and ownership of the land itself, which is unique to this region.\textsuperscript{115} This separation is significant in the mosaic representation of agricultural production which alludes to prosperity through representations of the seasons alongside agricultural tools, rather than presenting labor—and laborers—directly.

For example, a mosaic from the Maison des Muses at Thysdrus, dated to the Severan period, presents all three of the preserved seasons as busts of human figures with farm tools as identifying attributes (Figure 21). Although this particular agricultural iconography is unique to this house, it indicates an interest in representing the agricultural aspects of the seasons which is found elsewhere in Thysdrus.\textsuperscript{116} This square mosaic has multiple borders created by a woven

\textsuperscript{112} Mattingly 2014, 154.
\textsuperscript{113} Mattingly 2014, 154.
\textsuperscript{114} Mattingly 2014, 154.
\textsuperscript{115} Mattingly 2014, 154.
\textsuperscript{116} Parrish 1984, 15; 179.
guilloche pattern framing the circles and the busts of the seasons. All three surviving seasons face in the same direction and birds appear between the guilloche and around the busts of the seasons. Parrish proposes that the farm tools indicate a particular interest in agriculture on the part of this patron and points out that the personification of Autumn is the earliest of only two examples which depict Autumn with a pruning knife.  

In North Africa, the seasons appear in several different ways, although they most commonly appear as female personifications—as complete figures as well as busts. Iconography of the seasons was popular throughout the Roman empire and the concept of four seasons personified was originally a Hellenistic concept. Personifications of the seasons were especially popular in Thysdrus; almost one-third of the season mosaics in North Africa come from Thysdrus. Seasons mosaics at Thysdrus emphasize the winter season and the olive harvest. The earliest images of Winter featuring olive harvests are from North Africa, suggesting that this iconography originated in the mosaics of this region. This iconography was then disseminated from the models created at Thysdrus throughout Roman North Africa during the Severan period.

The mosaic of Saturnus, Sol, Luna, and the seasons from the Masion de Silène from the mid-third century also emphasizes agriculture and olive production (Figure 22). Additionally,

\[\text{References:} \quad \text{Parrish 1984, 179.} \]
\[\text{Parrish 1984, 13-14.} \]
\[\text{Parish 1984, 11.} \]
\[\text{Parrish 1984, 17.} \]
\[\text{Parrish 1984, 15.} \]
\[\text{Parrish 1984, 83.} \]
this mosaic also carries local religious significance. Saturnus, who is closely associated with natural prosperity throughout the year, was the chief deity in the religion of Roman Africa.\(^{123}\)

This mosaic decorates a room of unknown use. It covers two-thirds of the floor; the rest of the space is paved with a contemporary geometric designed mosaic on one end.\(^{124}\) At the center of this mosaic is a bust of Saturnus; forming a circle around him are busts of the seasons, Sol, and Luna, who are bordered by circular frames and face each of the four sides of the mosaic, with the exception of Winter in the top left corner who is distinguished by her diagonal orientation. Winter is identified by the crown of olive branches around her head. A guilloche pattern frames these figures and other sections of ornamental vegetal design, creating a pattern of circles and geometric shapes.

Seasons mosaics also appear in Antioch, but are rendered differently than in Thysdrus. In Antioch, the seasons’ identifying characteristics do not refer to local harvests like those of Thysdrus and they often are presented as winged putti. They also appear in Antioch in the forms of winged or wingless women, and are even more commonly presented as busts.\(^{125}\) Additionally, while the seasons mosaics of Thysdrus serve as the main subject of a room, in Antioch they are used more often as decorative elements and in more transitional spaces in a house.

The third-century House of the Drinking Contest at Seleucia Pieria displays mosaic panels featuring the four Seasons in one of its porticos where viewers would have moved in and out, rather than spending an extended period of time focused on one image (Figures 7 and 23).

Spring wears a flower crown and holds a plate of flowers, Summer holds grain in one hand and a

\(^{123}\) Parrish 1984, 170-171.

\(^{124}\) Parrish 1984, 168.

\(^{125}\) Levi 1947, 85-86.
sickle in the other, Autumn holds a basket of fruit and blade or pruning hook (an iconography which probably originated in North Africa), and Winter wears thick clothes, all of which are typical Greco-Roman identifying characteristics of the Seasons. These mosaics are rendered in a simple way, especially in comparison to some of the other mosaics in the same house—particularly the Drinking Contest *emblema* in the *triclinium*—indicating that they were not meant to be contemplated at length but to be read easily by passers-by.

In the House of the Drinking Contest, viewers would have been able to see these season mosaics from the *triclinium* and as they moved through the house. Dobbins argues that the houses of Antioch create a link between the spaces of the *triclinium*, portico, and the *nymphaeum* through lines of sight. The season mosaics were not a focal point in this house. Viewers in the *triclinium* would have also had their eyes drawn to the courtyard and the surrounding landscape of Antioch. This view was made much more prominent than the seasonal mosaics, which laid between it and the *triclinium*. While the Thysdrus’s seasons iconography was emphasized and made locally specific, the seasons mosaics in the House of the Drinking Contest decorated an intermediary space and are secondary to the impressive panoramic view of the local landscape.

**Real and Imagined Water in Antioch**

Like those at Thysdrus, the domestic mosaics of Antioch conveyed prosperity through references to local resources. In Antioch, water is depicted in mosaics and brought into the house for use in fountains and pools, demonstrating the city’s abundance and the patron’s access to this
natural resource. Many of these homes also featured personal fountains and *nymphaea* to display the water itself in addition to its mosaic representations.\(^{129}\) When viewers were invited into an ancient Antiochene’s house they expected to see water prominently featured in it and the ability to bring water into a house for personal use and pleasure was indicative of the status of the patron.\(^{130}\) The presence of actual water brought into the house from the city’s springs, in addition to the mosaic representation of water, creates a direct link between the real water and its mosaic counterpart, providing further evidence that the water imagery in these houses was meant to be associated directly with the city’s abundant water supply, not just water in general.

This water is presented in mythological images, suggesting that this city’s prosperity was divinely offered and highlighting the city’s long-standing cultural connection to Hellenic tradition. Springs in the area provided water for private and public buildings, which was further supplemented by systems of aqueducts, tunnels, and dams.\(^{131}\) The importance of this water and the residents’ pride in this resource was articulated by Libanius who discusses the water of Antioch at length in his address at the 356 CE Olympic Games.\(^{132}\) In his speech given in praise of Antioch, Libanius describes the freedom of the inhabitants of Antioch to take water for their own personal use without fear that the supply will run out.\(^{133}\) The prominence of water imagery in the second and third centuries CE suggests that this local pride associated with the water source existed well before the fourth century, when Libanius gave his speech. These images also would have had different connotations for local viewers than for outsiders. While an outsider may have understood the play between the real and mythological water in these houses, (s)he

\(^{129}\) Dobbins 2000, 55.
\(^{130}\) Kondoleon 2000, 75.
\(^{131}\) Kondoleon 2000, 3-4.
\(^{132}\) Lib. *Or.* 11.
\(^{133}\) Lib. *Or.* 11.244-246.
would not have derived the same source of civic pride from these representations that a local viewer would have.

The houses of Antioch used the natural landscape as well as the city’s abundant water to juxtapose these physical elements with their mythological mosaic counterparts, drawing a connection between the way these resources existed in the viewer’s reality and immediate vicinity and in mythology and the world of the gods. In addition to referencing the city’s natural prosperity through mosaic images, many of the houses in Antioch took advantage of impressive panoramic views of the surrounding landscape. In these instances, mosaic images—which were mythological in subject matter—worked together with the city’s actual topography to convey a sense of luxury as well as divinely given prosperity.

The third-century House of the Boat of the Psyches at Daphne has several water-related mosaics (Figure 15). Five of the eight excavated rooms of this house feature mosaics illustrating myths which take place in or near water.\textsuperscript{134} The main triclinium of the house contained busts of Oceanus and Tethys (Figure 24) at the entrance; another room has a mosaic of Eros driving the “boat of the Psyches” (Figure 25), and another shows Pegasus attended by nymphs beside a spring (Figure 26). These mosaics created an atmosphere in which the viewer is constantly reminded of water throughout the house.

The Pegasus scene takes place near a spring, which Pegasus was said to have created by stamping its hooves (Figure 26).\textsuperscript{135} This mosaic may have been a direct allusion to the springs in the surrounding area. A local viewer would have been aware of these springs and their

\textsuperscript{134} Kondoleon 2000, 71.
\textsuperscript{135} Kondoleon 2000, 71.
importance to the city, and this mythological representation of springs would have probably brought the local springs and the city’s natural prosperity to mind.

In addition to the large rooms decorated with water-themed mosaics, on the western end of the house there was a fountain composed of five semicircular niches which had a mosaic of erotes fishing from the back of dolphins at its bottom (Figure 27). This fountain serves as a direct link between the mythological images of water and the actual abundant water in the city which the patron of the house was able to bring in for his own pleasure and to animate this mosaic. The water is alluded to through blue and green *tesserae* in much of the house, the play between the fountain mosaic representation and the water that undoubtedly once covered it presents the patron as in control of or owning this water demonstrating the patron’s access to these luxurious mosaics as well as the water that they portray.

The eponymous Boat of the Psyches mosaic appears in an *emblema* in room 3—probably a *triclinium*—on the reconstructed plan (Figures 15 and 25). This scene, of Eros riding a boat created by two nude female winged Psyches, is unique. These figures—who do not necessarily have an obvious association with water—are placed within this context in order to draw a fantastic connection with the city’s natural water source. The two Psyches swim through the water—their movement indicated through their outstretched arms—one half submerged and the other one-quarter submerged. Eros is shown standing on their wings and holding his torch and quiver, here used to steer the boat. The figures in the Boat of the Psyches mosaic takes up three-quarters of the composition, filling the right-hand side and extending across the bottom, leaving the upper left quadrant open to represent the water. The water is indicated through multi-

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137 Levi 1947, 176.
colored tesserae—which together look gray-blue—and ripples in the surface are indicated through stripes of darker colored tesserae. The significance of the water itself is indicated by the amount of the composition it occupies. Levi explains this unprecedented iconography by Eros’s association with Aphrodite and her birth from the sea.\textsuperscript{138} He also points out that the closest known counterpart of this image is a representation of Eros driving a chariot drawn by two Psyches represented on a gem in Berlin.\textsuperscript{139}

This house includes another unique scene, which also situates agriculture, prosperity, and banqueting within the realm of the mythological. A banquet scene displays three figures are identified with Greek labels as harvest, fields, and wine, a reference to the abundance of land in this agriculturally rich region (Opora, Argos, and Oinos; Room 8 on restored plan; Figures 15 and 16).\textsuperscript{140} This scene is also iconographically unique, suggesting that its artistic invention was related to the function of the room and the freedom with which the patron and mosaicists connected mythological figures to general themes of water and prosperity in this house.\textsuperscript{141}

The House of the Menander at Daphne, dated to the third century, also prominently displays water and water-themed mosaics in a similar way (Figure 28).\textsuperscript{142} In the House of Menander, water-themed mosaics appear near one of the house’s many pools; For example, room 13 contains a pool as well as a mosaic of water deities Landon and Psalis (Figure 18); the

\textsuperscript{138} Levi 1947, 178.
\textsuperscript{139} Levi 1947, 176.
\textsuperscript{140} Kondoleon 2000, 71.
\textsuperscript{141} Kondoleon 2000, 71.
\textsuperscript{142} The House of Menander is unique because of its size and multiple dining suites; in fact, Dobbins raises the possibility that it may not have been an entirely domestic space which raises problems for the interpretations of these mosaics and their functions; however, as it is usually interpreted as a house with multiple dining rooms and it will be treated similarly here; Dobbins 2000, 59.
courtyard in room 17 contains a pool as well as a mosaic of the busts of Oceanus and Tethys surrounded by a marine background (Figure 29); on the southeast corner of the house, there are two adjoining rooms divided into three parts: an atrium supported by two columns, a large central part with a mosaic depicting three erothes, two fishing and one in a boat and a pool (Figures 30). Additionally, there is a triclinium complex at the central part of the House of Menander which is composed of two rooms both aligned and open to the north and overlooking a wide reception pool which has a mosaic that displays Narcissus overlooking a brook (Figure 31).

This emblema is surrounded by multiple borders and Narcissus sits on a rock with an orange mantle covering his lower body while his upper body is nude. He wears high hunter’s boots and his right arm rests on his knees. He looks down and his expression is vacant, and there is a light brown-grey halo surrounding his head; a flower—probably a narcissus—is on the bank of the brook near the right edge of the panel. This mosaic depicting Narcissus looking at himself in a pool is oriented to face a nymphaeum—like is common of the arrangement of these spaces in Antioch—meaning that as diners ate and looked at Narcissus near a pool, water would have also been directly in their own line of sight but out of their reach. This position could have sparked discussions about the moral implications of the myth during dinner parties, with the link between the viewer and these implications made more obvious by the presence of water and multiple pools in their immediate surroundings.

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143 Levi 1947, 198-199.
144 Levi 1947, 200.
145 Levi 1947, 201.
146 Levi 1947, 201.
147 Levi 1947, 201.
148 Dobbins 2000, 54; Narcissus mosaic in room 2 see plan, figure 28.
In both of these houses real water and its mosaic counterpart are set against each other, inviting viewers to consider the city’s resources and natural prosperity alongside their cultural heritage, perhaps implying that these resources were divinely given, or simply highlighting the city’s value to its citizens and the rest of the empire. In either case, these associations would have been different for a local viewer, who could derive a sense of civic pride from these images, than for an outsider who might simply enjoy the play between real and imagined water, without familiarity with this social memory.

**Aquatic Images in Drought-Prone Thysdrus**

Water images also appeared in the mosaics of Thysdrus, but the context is different because these images do not reference a local water source. Thysdrus was not a coastal city, it had an arid climate and was prone to drought. Water mosaics at Thysdrus display water and sea life in a much more general way. In a mosaic from the third-century Maison des Dauphins, dolphin images are used to create a sinusoidal pattern (Figure 32). The dolphin pattern mosaic is displayed between two other panels, one which depicts amphitheater animals and putti amongst a diamond shape pattern, and a geometric pattern. Since these patterns are repeated and echo each other, the viewer’s eye is drawn to the shapes created by the the dolphins, leaves, and negative space, rather than the particular animals they represent. The dolphin and amphitheater animal mosaics are unique.

The large all-over mosaic designs of Thysdrus relate closely to their function as a decorative element of the floor. They are composed in a way which does not require a single

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149 Slim 1996, 58.
point of view to be legible, and—compared to the *emblema* of Antioch—exist in the same realm as the viewer. As repeated images, rather than narrative scenes, these mosaics indicate a different kind of viewing and encourage a viewer to move across the composition. Although Thysdrus also displayed water mosaics—and Antioch had some agricultural mosaics—there is an evident distinction between generally popular images of nature and prosperity and images with locally specific associations.

**Conclusion**

These mosaics rely on a viewer’s local knowledge and the way the city existed in the popular imagination of its inhabitants and related it directly to the city’s geography and natural resources. Additionally, they demonstrate the way the landscape itself functioned and was exploited by the empire by displaying the different cultural and economic values of the landscape. These images function on a different level for local viewers than for outsiders, and function to create connections between viewers who share these local associations.

In Antioch in particular, locally specific iconography depends on a distinct type of local knowledge. The Antioch mosaics draw viewers together by creating the opportunity to discuss local mythological stories and/or convey a sense of local pride. The Thysdrus examples also draw on a viewer’s local pride and associations, but they also serve as an illustration of the economic and political power which reside in the landscape.

As these mosaics existed within the homes of local elites, whose power within the broader context of the empire was related to their city’s prominence, they may have functioned as a way to assert this power to elites from elsewhere in the empire. However, they also articulate this power to themselves and the other inhabitants of their city—which is more
significant than the more broadly directed message—and indicates the way each city existed in
the social memory of its inhabitants.
CONCLUSION

The mosaics examined here were a product of their contemporary social, political, and historical landscapes. Not only did they tell stories of hunting triumphs and mythological legends, but they implicated the viewer and their city into these stories. Susan Alcock describes social memory, saying, “People derive identity from shared remembrance—from social memory—which in turn provides them with an image of their past and a design for their future.” These mosaics draw on specific local knowledge and experience to connect viewers to each other and to the images before them.

The people who commissioned and designed these pavements selected these images for a reason. The coexistence of broadly popular Greco-Roman imagery with locally specific characteristics is significant here; not only did these mosaics situate their patrons within the context of their cities, but they situated these cities within context of the Roman empire. What persists in each of these mosaics demonstrates the power of certain memories and evokes structures of political identity for each city responding to Roman rule.

Local histories and nearby mosaic workshops impacted the way these images were composed and the vast array of compositional styles demonstrates the versatility of the medium. Each city conceived of mosaics and their function differently and in a way which reflects each city’s unique visual culture and identity. Antioch’s mosaics evoke the city’s cultural heritage by employing the *emblemata* composition technique and using mythological imagery, while Thysdrus’ mosaics explore multiple compositional strategies and represent scenes from everyday life, in addition to mythology. The differences in subject matter, composition, and modes of viewer engagement in the mosaics of Antioch and Thysdrus demonstrate the different ways

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151 Alcock 2002, 1
mosaics function in each city. They reveal a locally-specific response to this particular marker of Roman presence.

These mosaics asserted the wealth and prosperity of their patrons through their physical form as well as images of abundance. The local content of these mosaics demonstrates civic pride and an interest in presenting the city closely connected to the patron. They allowed the patron to situate himself and his political power—which he derived from his position as a local elite—within the broader context of the Roman empire, giving these mosaics a political function. The intended audience of these messages, though, was probably more local than empire-wide.

The city, its topography, and its contemporary social and political climate played an important role in local visual culture of Antioch and Thysdrus. I focused on two cities as case studies here because mosaics functioned in distinctly local ways which often get left out of regional mosaic studies. By focusing on local topographic features, natural resources, and cultural heritage, this thesis explored the way the landscape functions as a political tool in Antioch and Thysdrus. As political tools and explanatory devices, these mosaics didn’t just represent their contemporary social and political landscapes, but they contributed to them.
WORKS CITED


ILLUSTRATIONS


ANCIENT CITY OF ANTIOCH
(Restored plan based on literary texts and the excavations, adapted from Downey 1961, fig. 11, after Wilber)

One Kilometer

1. Bath E
2. Hippodrome
3. Bath B
4. Amphitheater
5. Bath D
6. Bath A
7. Bath C
8. Byzantine Stadium
9. Martyrion of St. Babylas (Kaoussie)
10. Bath E
11. House of the Calendar
12. House of the Drunkard Dionysos
13. Charonion (rock-cut relief)
14. Theater
15. Amphitheater
16. Necropolis of Mnemosyne

(LOCATIONS ARE APPROXIMATE, BASED ON LEVI 1947, PL. I, G. POCCARD, MEFRA 106, P. 1022)
17. Megalopsychia mosaic and details of border, Yakto. Late-fifth century CE. Kondoleon 2000, 8; 114.
25. Eros driving the boat of the Psyches, House of the Boat of the Psyches, Daphne. Third century CE. Kondoleon 2000, 73.
Details of Dolphin pattern and amphitheater animal and putti mosaic (next page), Maison des Dauphins. Third century CE. Alexander et al. 1996, XLVII-XLVIII; Fantar 2009, 123.