

## An Analytical Study of the Roman Mosaic in the Pisidian Antioch Theater

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**Abstract:** Under Mehmet Taşlıalan's direction, excavations in 1991 uncovered the orchestra, spectator seats, and the theatrical façade. Ünal Demirer carried on with the excavations, paying special attention to the orchestra and stage area. There hasn't been any analytical analysis or interpretation of the mosaic's elements since it was discovered in the stage area of the Antioch Theater and published in the theater excavation reports. For this reason, this research paper aims to determine why the mosaic is there and decorates the stage floor of the Antioch Theater, which is located in the Pisidia region, apart from elucidating the symbolic meaning of birds and the supplementary elements in the scene, this analysis will also translate and interpret the panel's text and its significance to the scene as portrayed. Furthermore, the panel's relationship to its discovery site and the broader study area will be explored. The study used an analytical, comparative, and descriptive methodology.

**Keywords:** mosaics, Antioch Theater, Antinous, Dionysus, birds.

### دراسة تحليلية للفسيفساء الرومانية بمسرح أنطاكيا البيسيديّة

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**المخلص:** كشفت حفائر عام 1991 بقيادة مهمت تاشليلان عن الواجهة المسرحية، ومقاعد المشاهدين، والأوركسترا، واصل أونال ديميرير التنقيب مع التركيز بصفة خاصة على منطقتي الأوركسترا وخشبة المسرح، وتم الكشف عن لوحة من الفسيفساء بمسرح أنطاكيا بمنطقة خشبة المسرح ونُشرت هذه اللوحة ضمن تقارير حفائر المسرح، ولم تحظ هذه اللوحة بأي دراسة تحليلية أو تفسير لعناصرها حتى الآن، لذا تسعى هذه الورقة البحثية إلى معرفة سبب وجود اللوحة الفسيفسائية المزينة لأرضية خشبة مسرح مدينة أنطاكيا الواقعة بإقليم بيبيديا، بالإضافة إلى توضيح رمزية الطيور والعناصر المصاحبة للمشهد، فضلاً عن ترجمة النص باللوحة وتفسيره وعلاقته بالمشهد المصور، وكذلك محاولة تفسير علاقة اللوحة بمكان اكتشافها، أو بالموقع المكتشفة فيه، ومنطقة الدراسة بشكل عام. وانتهجت الورقة البحثية في الوصول إلى ذلك عدة مناهج: الوصفي والتحليلي والمقارن.

**الكلمات الدالة:** الفسيفساء، مسرح أنطاكيا، أنطينوس، ديونيسوس، الطيور.

## Introduction:

The goal of the research is to clarify the mosaic that was found in Antioch's theater, which is situated in Asia Minor's Pisidia region. Currently, the city of Yalvaç is a part of the Isparta Province in Asia Minor's Mediterranean area. In 25 BC, Antioch was formally incorporated into the Roman Empire. The Antioch Pisidian Theater faces west and is situated near to the Decumanus Maximus, the primary thoroughfare that connects east and west<sup>1</sup>. Like other theaters in the Greek and Roman civilizations, Antioch's theater served various purposes, including political gatherings, religious rites, and amusement including dramatic performances and animal fights<sup>2</sup>.

The study relies on a descriptive and analytical approach in an attempt to date and compare the mosaic with similar findings from other architectural structures such as houses and churches. Then the research ends with a conclusion in which the study reaches the possible objectives behind the presence of the mosaic floor at the theater site. The study's main issue is that the theater is essentially ruined. The building's artistic and sculptural pieces were damaged, making it difficult to identify the original locations where most of the sculptures were placed. As a result, dating the structure became extremely difficult. All that is left are the ruins of the spectator seats, the stage has vanished completely, and the features of the orchestra square have been destroyed (See Fig. 1)<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Pisidian Antioch is located in the inner lake region of western Asia Minor, at the foot of Mount Sultan Dağ, the largest mountain in the vicinity of southern Phrygia, on the road linking Apamea (Celaenae) to the Syrian capital Antioch. It was originally established as a Seleucid colony in the third century BC. It was founded by the Seleucid dynasty, and it is one of several cities bearing the same name, currently located in central Turkey. Nazan Kuter, Elmas Erdogan, "yalvaç, pisidia antiocheia antik kenti ve çevresinin peyzaj özellikleri ve turizm açısından değerlendirilmesi", *Turkish Journal of Forestry* Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi Orman Fakültesi Dergisi, Cilt: 7 Sayı: 1, (2006): 112; Rubin Benjamin, "(Re)presenting empire: The Roman imperial cult in Asia Minor, 31 BC–AD 68," (Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 2008) 27; Ossi Adrian, "The Roman Honorific Arches of Pisidian Antioch: Reconstruction and Contextualization" (Unpublished PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2009), 2; Adrian Ossi, "Architectural Reconstruction Drawings of Pisidian Antioch by Frederick J. Woodbridge", *Bulletin*, Vol.16, (2005): 6; According to Strabo, those who settled in Antioch were Hellenistic settlers descended from the city of Magnesia, who joined the Ionians and mixed with the pre-existing local population of Phrygians and Pisidians, who lived in the area and worshipped the local deity Mên Askaenos Ἀσκαηνός, before the arrival of Seleucid colonists in the third century BC. For more on the cult of Mên Askaenus see Aitor Pérez, "Mên Askaenos and the Native Cults of Antioch by Pisidia", *Colloquia Antiqua* 17, Peeters, (2016): 119-150.

<sup>2</sup> Hima Mallampati, Ünal Demirer, "Architecture, Entertainment and Civic Life: The Theater at Pisidian Antioch" in *Building A New Rome: The Imperial Colony of Pisidian Antioch*, ed. E. K. Gazda – D. Y. Ng – Ü. Demirer, (Ann Arbor: Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, Mich. 2011), 61; The city occupied a strategic location on the main road network of Asia Minor. Emperor Augustus re-established Antioch as a Roman colony called Colonia Caesarea Antiocheia in the province of Galatia in 25 BC. The Augusteum, a sacred temple dedicated to worshipping Emperor Augustus and his family, was erected shortly after the colony was re-established. Rubin, "(Re)presenting empire", 28; Roman rule brought major public building projects and improvements to the substructure. Antioch was named the capital of the newly formed province of Pisidia. Ossi, "Architectural Reconstruction Drawings of Pisidian Antioch," 6.

<sup>3</sup> Mallampati, Demirer, "Architecture, Entertainment and Civic Life," 64, fig. 4.3.



Figure 1: The current ruins of the Pisidian Theater of Antioch.

There is disagreement over when the theater was originally built. Taşlıalan affirms that it was constructed during the Hellenistic era, considering the theater's horseshoe-shaped seating arrangements (see Figure 2: Theater Layout)<sup>1</sup> and the hill's natural incline<sup>2</sup>. or in the year 25 BC, when the Roman colony was established. However, according to Demirer, the theater was initially constructed in the first century AD and may have undergone renovations in the latter part of the second century. The attempt to determine the primary stages of construction and use has been hampered by the modifications made to the architectural and decorative elements throughout the theater's existence. It is clear from the differences in the materials and shapes of the seats that new spectator seats were built, most likely in the second century AD. The stage, which now measures 55 by 25.50 meters, was also reconstructed. In the late third or early fourth century AD, the orchestra was transformed into an arena. Similar to many theaters in Asia Minor, including Ephesus, Myra, Perge, and Side, the arena was surrounded by a wall for the safety of the audience, or occasionally the first rows of seats were taken out to create rooms beneath the stage or the seats themselves to house animals. In this particular theater, the rooms were situated beneath the stage<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Sear, *Roman Theaters: An Architectural Study*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 363, pl. 376.

<sup>2</sup> Mehmet Taşlıalan, *Pisidia Antiocheia'sı 1995 Yılı çalışmaları*. (Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı Millî Kütüphane Basımevi, 1997), 325

<sup>3</sup> Mallampati, Demirer, "Architecture, Entertainment and Civic Life," 62, 63-65, 67.

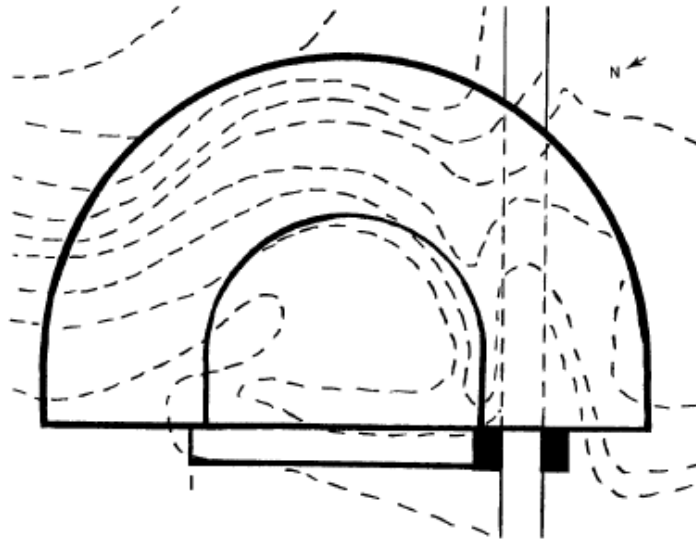


Figure 2: the layout of the Antioch Pisidian Theater.

Based on a mosaic floor found decorating the stage that resembled the floors of churches both inside and outside the region, Demirer suggested that the theater was converted into a small church in the late fourth century AD before the building was completely abandoned in the eighth century AD. Maybe because of its proximity and closeness to the church, the theater was converted into an annex. (See figure: 3)<sup>1</sup>.

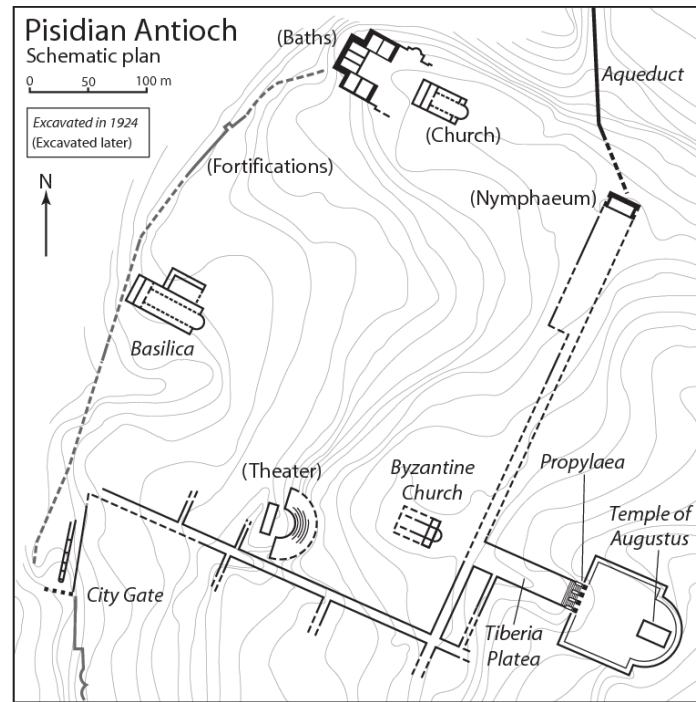


Figure 3: Location of the theater in the city of Antioch in Pisidia.

<sup>1</sup> Kuter, Erdogan, *yalvaç, pisidia antiocheia anlık kenti ve çevresinin peyzaj Özellikleri ve turizm açısından değerlendirilmesi*, 2006, 113, Şekil 3.1; Rubin, "(Re)presenting empire", 2008, 146, fig. 8; Ossi "The Roman Honorific Arches of Pisidian Antioch", 237, fig. 1; Mallampati, Demirer, "Architecture, Entertainment and Civic Life", 63, fig. 4.2.

## Description:

Excavations by Demirer in the stage area uncovered embellishments that were used at a later time. One of these is a mosaic floor made of colored stone cubes called tesserae in a variety of hues, including black, white, red, green, blue, and brown. The opus tessellatum technique was used to arrange the cubes<sup>1</sup>. In the mosaic, several birds, including partridge, peacock, duck, and gallinule, are portrayed within a central panel that features the emblem ἔμβλημα, which represents five birds in ascending order. The gallinule on the far right is eating from a tree and the peacock facing it on the far left. The damaged portion of the panel obscures the peacock, which is crouching down and eating from another tree. Taking into account the symmetry of the landscape, two birds appeared with two trees in front of them. A duck is perched over the gallinule bird on the right, and a cage, which looks to be open, is situated just above the peacock on the left. In the center of the panel, between the cage and the duck, is a two-handled vase kantharos. An inscription in three lines enclosed in a decorative frame, known as Tabula ansata, is written in ancient Greek above the vessel. At the top of the scene, is depicted a partridge on the left, and another bird on the right but a large part of which has been missing. The panel is not complete, so it may depict more than one bird. The birds are depicted on a white background, and the mosaic is surrounded by a braided frame guilloche. (See Figure 4)<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The mosaic itself is made up of multiple layers of preparation that hold the Tesserae decorative layer in place. The first layer of preparation, known as statumen, is composed of huge stones that are buried or mixed with a coarse mortar to level the surface and stabilize the soil to prevent settlement and distortion. Rudus: The second layer of preparation placed on top of the statumen. Large aggregates in a lime mortar make up this layer. Nucleus: The third layer of preparation that covers the rudus. This layer, composed of fine-grained lime mortar, is thinner than the preceding one. Bedding layer: A thin layer of mortar, put in small layers over the nucleus that is extremely rich in lime. This layer contains tesserae. In practice, not every mosaic exhibits this entire strata. Opus Tessellatum Pavement composed of tiny, uniformly formed, typically quadrangular pieces that are arranged in rows and typically measure between 4 and 20 millimeters in width. These components, known as tesserae, are made by cutting various materials, including glass, ceramic, and stone (often marble or limestone). Illustrated Glossary – Technician Training for the Maintenance of In Situ Mosaics – Getty Conservation Institute/Institut National du Patrimoine, Tunis – 2013, 2-3.

<sup>2</sup> Mallampati, Demirer, "Architecture, Entertainment and Civic Life," 71, fig. 4.14.



Figure 4: Mosaic panel discovered in the Theater of Antioch.

### Analysis:

#### Firstly: the inscription

The text was written in ancient Greek within a decorative frame, *tabula ansata*, in the middle of the panel. There can be some spelling mistakes in it.

The text reads as follows:

"ΕΥΧΗ ΚΩΣ Ι ΑΝΤΙΝΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΔΙΟΝΥΣΙΟΥ"

" εὐχή κῶσι Ἀντίνου καὶ Διονυσίου"

It can be translated as follows: "Dedicated to Antinous and Dionysus"<sup>1</sup>

That is, it is dedicated to Antinous, Hadrian's lover and Dionysus, the god of theater.

This frame is similar to a mosaic panel from the fourth century AD that was found in the Kom el-Dikka in Alexandria and showed Dionysus clutching a *kantharos*.<sup>2</sup> The frame resembles that of the Theater of Antioch and was designed in the shape of a *tabula ansata*. According to Dio Cassius (165-235 AD), Antinous was born in Bithynia<sup>3</sup>. Hadrian may have encountered Antinous in 123 AD while traveling through the

<sup>1</sup> Henry Liddell, Robert Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1883), 620.

<sup>2</sup> See fig. Heba Said, Sara Kitat, "Evaluating Virtual Interfaces of Archaeological Sites; Case Study of the Roman Sites in Alexandria", *Journal of Association of Arab Universities for Tourism and Hospitality*, Vol.23 No. 2, (2022): 81.

<sup>3</sup>"ἐν δὲ τῇ Αἰγύπτῳ καὶ τὴν Ἀντινόου ὀνομασμένην ἀνφοδόμησε πόλιν. ὁ γὰρ Ἀντίνοος ἦν μὲν ἐκ Βιθυνίης πόλεως Βιθυνίδος, ἦν καὶ Κλαυδιούπολιν καλοῦμεν", 69.11.2.

Bithynia region of Asia Minor<sup>1</sup>, and this could have contributed to his memory being preserved at the location of the theater in Asia Minor. Regarding his connection with Dionysus, Pausanias (c. 110–180 AD) noted that the statues of Antinous and the god Dionysus had certain similarities<sup>2</sup>.

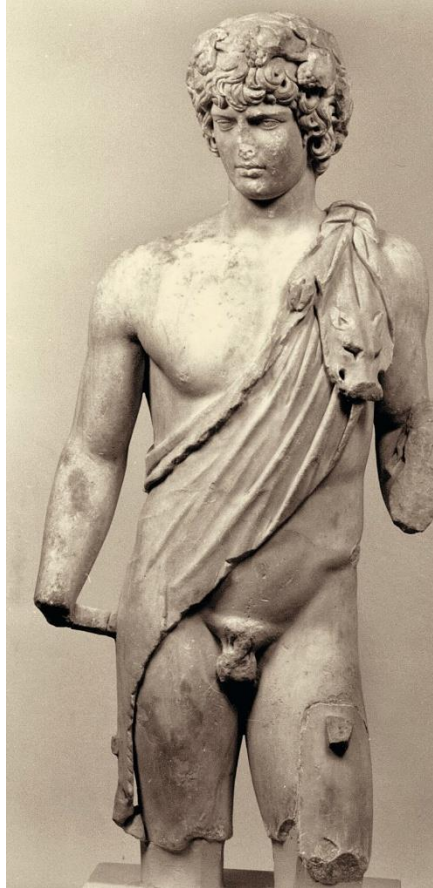


Figure 5: The Statue of Antinous from Chalcis in a pose similar to Dionysus, from public baths at Aedepsus. Dated to the 2nd century CE. New Archaeological Museum of Chalcis "Arethousa", the statue's legs and part of its hands are missing.

As an illustration of Chalcis (Figure 5)<sup>3</sup>, Antinous is depicted with a fawnskin νεβρίς/ nebris tied on his left shoulder, resembling Dionysus, and a crown made of grapes and ivy. The kind of Antinous statue known as the Mondragone type is frequently compared to representations of Dionysus. Through several indications such as the fact that Antinous was given a hairstyle, having his hair parted in the center, that is connected to Dionysus from the Hellenistic period. In addition, he wraps a crown of ivy leaves around his head, from which occasionally ponderous clusters of grapes dangle. Nebris, the skin of the fawn, and the staff of Thyrsus are all symbols of

<sup>1</sup> Jamshidi Niayesh, "Building a God: The Cult of Antinous and Identity in the Eastern Roman Empire", (Unpublished MA. diss., University of Oregon, Eugene, 2018), 7.

<sup>2</sup> "οἶκος δέ ἐστιν ἐν τῷ γυμνασίῳ Μαντινεῦσιν ἀγάλματα ἔχων Ἀντίνου καὶ ἐς τὰλλα θεᾶς ἄξιος λίθων ἔνεκα οἷς κεκόσμηται καὶ ἀπιδόντι ἐς τὰς γραφάς: αἱ δὲ Ἀντίνου εἰσὶν αἱ πολλαί, Διονύσῳ μάλιστα εἰκασμένοι". Paus. 8.9.

<sup>3</sup> James Fleming, "The Image of Antinous and Imperial Ideology", (Unpublished MA. diss., University of Ottawa, Canada, 2019), 104, fig. 6.

Dionysus. In addition, the pedestal is embellished with grapes, and the god's upward stare and thrown-back chin are all present.



Figure 6: A statue of Antinous in the form of Osiris, made of white marble, dating between 131 and 138 AD. It was found in Antinoeion, Hadrian's villa and is currently preserved in the Vatican.

Other depictions portray Antinous as the god Osiris (Figure: 6)<sup>1</sup>. The boy appears with curls of hair poking out from under his nemes cap. The schenti furthermore dons a skirt that covers his hips to the middle of his thighs. These statues also have a distinctive posture: rather than standing contrapposto or counterpoise, where he balances mostly on one foot, keeps his shoulders and arms off his thighs and legs, and looks away, we see him standing upright, facing forward, with his shoulders square, his hands balled into fists by his sides, and one leg extended forward. It is a hybrid of Greek and Egyptian art, with its Egyptian form, nemes headdress, and shendyt skirt, as well as the Egyptian stance indicated by the left foot. The raw material quality, the emphasis on anatomical features, and the polishing quality all demonstrate the extent of the Greek influence that dominated Hadrian's day. Depicted in a flowing Egyptian manner during the Roman era, as seen in the statue of Doryphoros wielding the spear created by Polykleitos the sculptor<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Fleming, "The Image of Antinous and Imperial Ideology", 106, fig. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Another example From Hadrian's Villa in Tivoli is a bust of Antinous in the form of Osiris, wearing a headdress surmounted by uraeus. The nemes cover his hair and ears then fall over his shoulders. Some



Osiris was referred to as the Lord of Wine in the Pyramid Texts  $\text{𓂏𓏏𓏏𓏏𓏏𓏏}$  *nb in p m wAx* as he is the god of the underworld and wine<sup>1</sup>. The role of Osiris as a wine god was clarified by Diodorus (c. 60–30 BC). Because he taught the ancient Egyptians how to create wine, they revered him as a god of viticulture<sup>2</sup>. Osiris is only Dionysus' Egyptian name, and there have been similarities between the two gods from the time of Herodotus (484–425 BC). Osiris and Dionysus were two gods connected to death and rebirth. They both died in horrific ways, albeit different, and were then brought back to life. Dionysus was born prematurely from the womb of Semele, who died after seeing Zeus in his true form. So, she descended to the underworld, and to save the fetus, Zeus cut his thigh to deposit the fetus until its growth was complete it came out to life in a second birth. He is born from his mortal mother, then he is born again from his divine father, and after that, he becomes a god until the giants tear him apart, then Demeter reassembles him and brings him back to life. Regarding Osiris, he was killed by his brother Set, and his body was torn apart and scattered across the Nile. Until Isis collected his pieces and brought him back to life. Although Antinous did not experience anything as horrifying as this, his drowning death in the Nile makes him comparable to Osiris's death in the same river. Which made him deified in the same location; Antinous depicted as Dionysus is most likely so widely found because of Dionysus's connection to Osiris. Because of the connection between Osiris and Dionysus and the spread of civilizations, Hadrian was able to introduce the deified Antinous to the Greek regions of the empire<sup>3</sup>.

According to studies, Dionysus could bring the dead back to life. This was deduced from his title, Lyaeus, Lyaios/Λυαῖος, which means "the liberator" or "savior," and is, therefore, a clear allusion to bringing the dead back to life and bestowing happiness upon them. They also deduced this from the great spring festivals, such as Anthestēria, which is regarded as one of the oldest unique Dionysian celebrations with funeral rites. Taking part in these celebrations granted them a happy, eternal life after death, afterward, the underworld's doors were opened for a few days to allow Dionysus to ascend from the underworld and bring the souls of the deceased out alongside him. Among the festivities was a representation of Dionysus coming back to life. These festivities most likely originated in Ionia, Asia Minor<sup>4</sup>.

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front and side hair strands show that a drill was used, which is a Greek feature. These patterns are known as Egyptian images, see Fleming, "The Image of Antinous and Imperial Ideology", 107, fig. 11.

<sup>1</sup> James Allen, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 183.

<sup>2</sup> "γενέσθαι δὲ καὶ φιλογέωργον τὸν Ὅσιριν, καὶ τραφεῖναι μὲν τῆς εὐδαίμονος Ἀραβίας ἐν Νύσῃ πλησίον Αἰγύπτου Διὸς ὄντα παῖδα, καὶ τὴν προσηγορίαν ἔχειν παρὰ τοῖς Ἑλλήσιν ἀπὸ τε τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ τύπου Διόνυσον ὀνομασθέντα".

"εὐρετὴν δ' αὐτὸν γενέσθαι φασὶ τῆς ἀμπέλου περὶ τὴν Νῦσαν, καὶ τὴν κατεργασίαν τοῦ ταύτης καρποῦ προσεπινοήσαντα πρῶτον οἴνω χρήσασθαι, καὶ διδάξαι τοὺς ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους τὴν τε φυτείαν τῆς ἀμπέλου καὶ τὴν χρῆσιν τοῦ οἴνου καὶ τὴν συγκομιδὴν αὐτοῦ καὶ τήρησιν", Diod. 1.15.6, 8.

<sup>3</sup> Fleming, "The Image of Antinous and Imperial Ideology", 2, 3, 18, 20, 21, 26, 29, 84.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Segal, "Dionysus and the Gold Tablets from Pelinna", *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 31, No. 4, (1990): 417

Therefore, the scene of the panel expresses the Dionysian religion and its similarity to the worship of Antinous, represented by death, resurrection, and the afterlife. He was regarded as one of the resurrection and death gods. After drowning in the Nile, he rose to the ranks of the gods and conquered death. An inscription on the Mantinea corroborates this by explaining his role in helping his followers reach a comparable afterlife by transporting souls between Earth and the afterlife. In it, a grieving father asks Antinous to transfer the soul of his deceased son Isochrysos to the afterlife to sit next to the gods. Here we find that he performed a similar function to the god Hermes, ψυχοπομπός/psychopompós, which may explain the depiction of Antinous as Hermes in some examples. Antinous answered prayers and healed the patients. His sick followers can pray at his temples, then he visits them in their dreams to cure their illnesses. He took care of them in this world and the hereafter. He was also able to afflict them with diseases as punishment; Therefore, we find similar models between Antinous and Asclepius, the god of medicine. Here he seems to participate and share many roles with the gods<sup>1</sup>.

### Secondly: birds

The peacock is called in the Greek language παγώνι, Ταός, while the Latin term is pavus, pavo<sup>2</sup>. The regular shape of the peacock or the scientific name of the bird is called pavo cristatus and it's prominent in art. The tail feathers were decorated with eye-shaped dots. Early Roman tombs were the most typical places to see the peacock as a decoration. Later, during the Byzantine era, peacocks were also frequently seen on the mosaic floors of basilicas<sup>3</sup>.

The peacock appeared more than once on mosaic floors, starting from the late second century AD until the sixth century AD. It decorated the rooms of the house of Dionysus in Nea Paphos in Cyprus and the Buffet Supper mosaic. It also appeared on the Antioch mosaic in the house of the Rinceau bird, Daphne, the boat of Psyche, and in the ancient port of Antioch Seleucia Pieria and portraits in profile and frontal position on the mosaics of the Striding Lion House<sup>4</sup>. Mosaic floors depicting peacocks were found in 2004 in the city of Osmaniye in the eastern part of the Cilicia Plain. A mosaic depicting a peacock was also found inside the church of the village of Cıvıklı in Adana Province, with the peacock depicted in profile on the floor of the apse, but is now lost. Mosaic of the church of the village of Konya and one of the floors of the basilica of the city of Perinthus in Tekirdağ Governorate in Turkey. The most important examples close to the one in Pisidian Theater of Antioch, which depicts a pair of peacocks in profile, along with a kantharos vessel. Mosaic floors decorated with peacocks were found in the Jewish church of Ma'on Nirim in Jerusalem, in Jordan Kastron Mefa'a, currently Umm

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<sup>1</sup> For examples see Fleming, "The Image of Antinous and Imperial Ideology", 29, 69, 118, fig. 34, p. 120, fig. 37

<sup>2</sup> Liddell, Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1531; Charlton Lewis, Charles Short, *A new Latin Dictionary*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891), 1319.

<sup>3</sup> Jelena Anđelkovic, Emilija, Dragana, "Peacock as a Sign in the Late Antique and Early Christian Art", *Arheologija i prirodne nauke*, 6, (2011): 232, 242.

<sup>4</sup> For examples see Elvin Dağlıer, "Late Antique floor mosaics in secular contexts from Anatolia", (Unpublished M.A. diss., Koç University, Istanbul, 2022), 520, cat. no. 284, 597, cat. no. 341.

al-Rasas, and in Khirbet al-Mukhayyat, as it appeared in El Djem or El Jem, Carthage in Tunisia, Justinian's Basilica in Sabratha, and Nicopolis in Greece<sup>1</sup>.

The partridge bird is called in Greek πέρδιξ and Latin Perdix<sup>2</sup>, and one of its species is also called κακκάβη — Kakkabē-Kakkabis, which was found in Greece. This species lived on the eastern side of Korydallos on the mountain between Salamis and Aigaleos, currently Skaramanga. There are numerous species of partridge birds, but the most significant is the chukar partridge, scientific name *Alectoris chukar*, native to the Aegean Islands, the northeastern tip of Greece, and Turkey<sup>3</sup>. It is called Mountain partridge<sup>4</sup>. The most well-known examples can be found in the frescoes in the House of the Golden Bracelet and the Labyrinth in Pompeii, the Villa of Poppaea in Oplontis, as well as on mosaics from Constantine's Villa at Daphne, the Oudna mosaic now in the Bardo Museum, and the Carthage mosaic now kept in the British Museum<sup>5</sup>.

The gallinule bird is called πορφυρίων / Porphyrion, which means Partridges purple, often known as moorhens, is a type of waterfowl since it is widely distributed close to rivers<sup>6</sup>. It is found abundantly in the Balearic Islands, southeast Turkey, and the Kingdom of Commagene<sup>7</sup>. It adorned the floors of Roman villas in Conimbriga, Portugal and houses in Cadiz and Alcúdia, Spain, the frescoes of the Villa Livia in the Prima Porta area, the Faunus house in Pompeii and the Morlupo tomb, Italy. The bird was also represented on the floors of houses in Alexandria and Volubilis, Morocco, and Cologne, Germany. With the villas and houses of Uthina- Oudna, Carthage, and El Djem, Tunisia, and Sarsina in Italy, and the Villa Leptis Magna in Libya, and the Villa del Casale and houses of Cagliari, Italy, and Harbiye-Dàphne, Turkey, and the Basilica of Aquileia, Italy, and the baptistery Stobi in Macedonia, and the Tomb of Pelagius in Tabarka, Tunisia and houses Antiochia and the shrine of the martyrdom of Misis in Turkey<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> See examples: Füsün Tülek, *A mosaic image of a peacock from Osmaniye (Plain Cilicia)*, the corpus of Cilician floor mosaics, Soma 2008 Proceedings of the XII Symposium on Mediterranean Archaeology, Edited by Hakan Oniz, (Famagusta, North Cyprus: British Archaeological Reports, 2009), 45, 47, fig. 1, 49, fig. 2, 50, fig. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Liddell, Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1179; Lewis, Short, *A new Latin Dictionary*, 1337, James Jobling, *Helm Dictionary of Scientific Bird Names*, (London: Christopher Helm, 2010), 297.

<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey Arnott, *Birds in the Ancient World from A to Z*, (New York: Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2007), 120-121, 254; See also, Jobling, *Helm Dictionary of Scientific Bird Names*, 82, 98, 341.

<sup>4</sup> Omer Pavel, Hiewa Bahjat, "Chukar partridge in northern Iraq, A review article", *Iraqi Journal of Veterinary Sciences*, Vol. 37, No. 2, (2023): 495.

<sup>5</sup> Arnott, *Birds in the Ancient World from A to Z*, 256.

<sup>6</sup> Lewis, Short, *A new Latin Dictionary*, 1899-1400.

<sup>7</sup> Pliny: *Natural History*, Translated by Rackham, H. (1940), Volume III: Books 8-11. Loeb Classical Library 353. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts book 10. Chapter 63; Ricardo Lopes, Juan, Alessandro, Maura, "Purple Swamphen or Gallinule (Porphyrio porphyrio) and humans: a forgotten history of past interactions", *Society & Animals*, 24, (2016): 575; Zlatozar Boev, "Bird images in the mosaics of Late Antique basilicas in the town of Sandanski, Blagoevgrad Region, SW Bulgaria", *Historia naturalis bulgarica*, 41, (2020): 14, fig. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Ricardo Lopes, Gómez, Andreotti, Andreoni, "Purple Swamphen or Gallinule": 581.

The Greek word for wild ducks is *νήττα*, while the Latin word is *ānās*, *ānātis*<sup>1</sup>. Ducks appear on a large mosaic at the Villa de la Olmeida in Pedrosa de la Vega near Palencia in Spain a row of ducks appears with their tails transformed into dolphin heads, as depicted on a Parabagio silver platter shows a boy holding two ducks and another with two partially hidden in the folds of his cloak<sup>2</sup>.

### The symbolism of depicting birds:

The presence of the partridge bird in the panel confirms its importance, as it is one of the bird's famous for intelligence, nobility, inspiration, and strength, and it was often used to indicate these noble meanings<sup>3</sup>. According to certain sources, partridges played a part in the war of the Pygmies / Πυγμαῖοι and the sect of Cranes birds, Menicles claims that the Pygmies battled against both partridges and cranes, but Basilis asserts that in India, the Pygmies rode partridges in their conflicts. As stated in the myth of Perdix, the twelve-year-old nephew of Daedalus. After receiving training from his uncle, the young man showed too much cunning and created a saw, which Daedalus hurled over the Acropolis in Athens. Then Athena transformed him into the bird that bears his name. This transformation may have been depicted on the red Lekythos vase dated to the fifth century BC. It is said that a group of Samians once landed in southern Italy, and were so terrified by a group of partridges that were flying and screaming so loudly that they immediately ran back to their ships and sailed away<sup>4</sup>.

Gallinule symbolizes chastity and loyalty, as some sources indicate the existence of a recurring Roman legend, according to which a male dies of starvation after the death of a female. If the wife in her master's house is unfaithful, the bird despairs and dies of grief. He strangles himself and ends his life, to send a clear warning message to his master or husband. It became a symbol of chastity, sincerity, and loyalty, and this may be another motive for the popularity of this bird among the wealthy Romans<sup>5</sup>. It is assumed that the origin of this myth may be due to the bird being ashamed of the presence of an intruding stranger, so it harms itself in a state of panic<sup>6</sup>.

The peacock symbolizes resurrection and renewal, as the peacock is connected to two myths: the myth of Argos, a monster with a hundred eyes who served as Io's guard. He was killed by Hermes, and then Hera transformed him into a monster and moved his eyes to the peacock's tail. For the second myth, the myth of the rape of Erinona by Adonis, whom Zeus loved; So, Zeus struck Adonis with a thunderbolt and turned Erinona into a peacock, but he later brought them back to life<sup>7</sup>. The peacock had the strongest religious bond with the gods. crossed Babylon, Persia, and Asia Minor and reached the island of Samos, where it became a sacred bird in Hera's temple. The

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<sup>1</sup> Liddell, Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1005; Lewis, Short, *A new Latin Dictionary*, 116.

<sup>2</sup> Arnott, *Birds in the Ancient World from A to Z*, 218.

<sup>3</sup> Pavel Omer, Bahjat Hiewa, "Chukar partridge in northern Iraq": 495-498.

<sup>4</sup> Arnott, *Birds in the Ancient World from A to Z*, 254-256.

<sup>5</sup> Antero Tammisto, "Swamp-Hens (Porphyrio spp.) and Ducks (Anatidae) in the Tomba di Morlupo and Other Republican and Early Augustan Romano-Campanian Mosaics and Wall Paintings", *Arctos*, Vol. 37 (2003): 215; Ricardo Lopes, Gómez, Andreotti, Andreoni, "Purple Swamphen or Gallinule": 580, note 6.

<sup>6</sup> Ashleigh Green, *Birds in Roman life and Myth*, (London: Routledge, 2023), 189.

<sup>7</sup> Arnott, *Birds in the Ancient World from A to Z*, 342-345.

peacock's tail is adorned with eyes that resemble the stars in the sky, such as the starry arc of the sky, which frequently represents eternity<sup>1</sup>. Peacocks sometimes appear alongside pigeons, vines, and grapes; Therefore, it is associated with the god Dionysus<sup>2</sup>.

The peacock appears on many coins from the end of the third century BC onwards; It appeared frequently on Roman coins between the first and third centuries AD. Depicted on the reverse of coins, while appeared on the obverse the spouses of emperors, such as Domitia, the wife of Domitian, Faustina the Elder and the Younger, the wives of Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius, and Diva Mariniana, the wife of Valerian I. The appearance of the peacock on coins alongside the Roman emperors and their partners symbolizes stability, peace and the general state of the empire<sup>3</sup>.

It is worth mentioning that the peacock was one of the most widespread birds in Christian art, and it was regarded as a symbol of Christ's resurrection. It was also connected to the concepts of immortality and eternity, since it represents eternity or the Elysian plains, or a glimpse of the Gardens of Eden (Ἐλύσιον πεδῖον/ Ἡλύσιον πεδῖον), a reference to heaven and the bliss of the afterlife<sup>4</sup>.

Its feathers fall out annually in the fall and grow again in the spring. Therefore, it is considered a symbol of renewal<sup>5</sup>. According to legends, peacock meat does not spoil after its death, as it drinks from living water to symbolize the soul<sup>6</sup>. According to Saint Augustine, he used to serve him roasted peacocks. He claimed to have put the meat away for over a month and was surprised when it showed no signs of rot<sup>7</sup>.

The appearance of the peacock usually accompanies the kantharos or tree of life and was commonly depicted on the walls of late Roman tombs and early Christian tombs in Serbia. It was usually represented in places closest to the most sacred part of churches (altar wall paintings). In the Christian faith, the kantharos was represented as a fountain from which holy water was issued and the Tree of Life also appeared alongside the two peacocks, they were depicted as drinking from the spring of life, so they became symbols of the human spirit. The Tree of Life connects heaven and earth, death and

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Anthon, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers 1882), 747; Anđelković, Nikolić, Gavrilović, "Peacock as a Sign in the Late Antique", 233.

<sup>2</sup> Anđelković, Nikolić, Gavrilović, "Peacock as a Sign in the Late Antique", 233.

<sup>3</sup> Todor Antić, Mateja Stevanović, "Ikonografska analiza predstava pauna na rimskom novcu", *Zbornik radova*, PS 77, (2018): 522-529. It first appeared on Flavian dynasty coins during Domitian's reign. After Emperor Domitian, coin minting ceased under the reigns of Hadrian and Antoninus Pius, but resumed later during the Severan dynasty and the third-century crisis. Domitian, Faustina I and II Faustina, the wives of Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius, Julia Domna, the wife of Septimius Severus, Paulina, the wife of Emperor Maximus I, and Mariana Mariniana, the wife of Valerian I, minted the majority of these coins. For example, see A coin depicting Faustina the Great on the obverse and a peacock on the reverse. Anđelković, Nikolić, Gavrilović, "Peacock as a Sign in the Late Antique", 232, fig. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Anđelković, Nikolić, Gavrilović, "Peacock as a Sign in the Late Antique", 233; Casey Dué, et al., "Afterlife in Homer," in *The Cambridge Guide to Homer*, ed. Corinne Ondine Pache (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 287–92.

<sup>5</sup> Anthon, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, 342-345.

<sup>6</sup> Doaa Fadel, "The Influence and Semantics of Using Animals and Birds Symbols in Greek, Roman and Coptic Art", *Journal of the Faculty of Tourism and Hotels Mansoura University*, Issue No. 11, part 5, (2022): 302

<sup>7</sup> Green, *Birds in Roman life and Myth*, 119.

rebirth, and sometimes refers to the cross. According to the interpretation of the Bible, water and the Tree of Life together guarantee eternal life and bliss for the deceased<sup>1</sup>. Plant images such as wreaths of laurel leaves, flowers and trees indicate heaven and victory over death<sup>2</sup>.

Birds are symbolic of souls, and a bird imprisoned in a cage represents the human spirit being held captive within the body. (See Figure:7)<sup>3</sup>. Hence, the bird released from the cage represents the soul that was set free by death<sup>4</sup>, (See Figure:8)<sup>5</sup>.

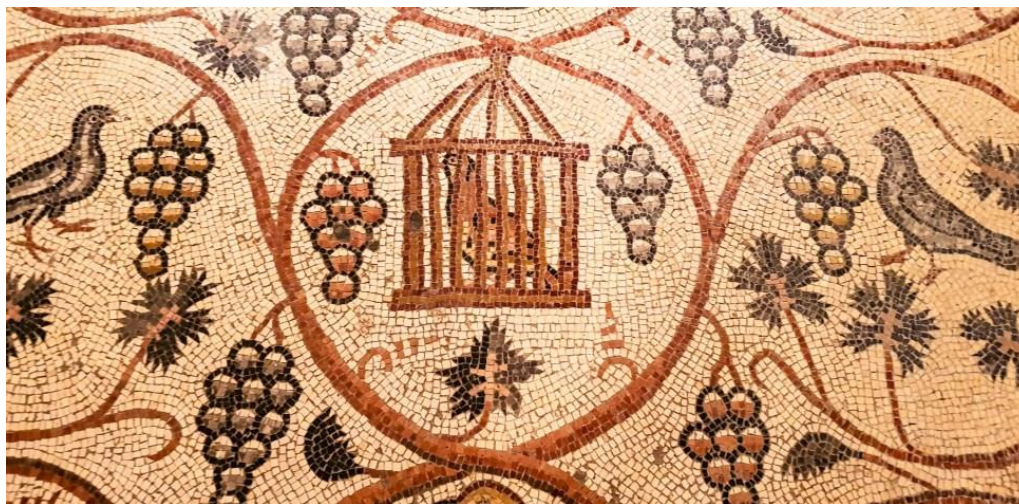


Figure 7: The Caged Bird from the mosaic of the Chapel of Jerusalem.

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<sup>1</sup> Anđelković, Nikolić, Gavrilović, "Peacock as a Sign in the Late Antique", 231, 239-240

<sup>2</sup> Anna Litovchenko; Aleksey Michail, "On the Origin of the Early Christian Artistic Tradition in Byzantine Chersonesos", *Athens Journal of History*, Vol. 1, Issue 3, (2015): 230.

<sup>3</sup> The mosaic was discovered in 1894, during construction work north of the city walls of Jerusalem, in the Musrara neighborhood. The mosaic floor is 3.38 x 8.10 m and consists of a central panel. The rectangular central section is ornamented with vine scrolls rising from an amphora flanked by two peacocks. The scrolls are filled with diverse birds, and the prisoner bird appears in the midst of the panel, dating from the sixth century AD. Baurath Schick, F. J. Bliss, "Discovery of a Beautiful Mosaic Pavement with Armenian Inscription, North of Jerusalem", *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, vol. 26, no. 4 (1894): 259; Helen Evans, *Nonclassical Sources for the Armenian Mosaic near the Damascus Gate in Jerusalem*, In *East of Byzantium. Syria and Armenia in the formative period*. (Washington, D.C.: Symposium Dumbarton Oaks 1982), 223-224; Re'em Amit, et al., "New Archaeological Study of the Armenian Birds Mosaic Chapel in Jerusalem", *New Studies in the Archaeology of Jerusalem and Its Region Collected Papers*, Vol. XIV, Jerusalem, (2021): 120, fig. 1.

<sup>4</sup> The first person to interpret the scene was Andre Grabar in 1966 according to Henderson Priscilla, "The Christian mosaics of Byzantine Palestine: towards an interpretation", (Unpublished PhD diss., Australian National University, vol. 1-2, 1990), 139; Frederick Jones, "The Caged Bird in Roman Life and Poetry; Metaphor, Cognition, And Value", *Syllecta Classica* 24 (2013):110

<sup>5</sup> Henderson, "The Christian mosaics of Byzantine Palestine: towards an interpretation", no. 72



Figure 8: The open cage from the mosaic of the Nahariya Church in northwest Palestine.

### **The meaning of the consecration inscription:**

The text dedicated in the center of the panel was directed to the other world represented by Antinous and Dionysus. The panel expresses eternity, honoring a soul that most likely died by drowning and moved to the world of Dionysus and was liberated through the symbolism of the open cage. Perhaps the nature of the presence of the gallinule bird near the river calls for a connection with the death of Antinous by drowning in the Nile as well.

The panel symbolizes resurrection, immortality, and the other world, and this particular place was chosen to convey a religious message from the location of the theater's lord Dionysus. It is also likely that the Signs on the panel have a religious significance, expressing the Christian faith in the late Roman era, before the confession of Christianity. Consequently, the study supports that the scene in content is directed to Jesus Christ who was compared to the healer Antinous as well as the twice-born Dionysus. Furthermore, Christ has both a divine and a human nature<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, the message may have been sent to Jesus Christ in an implicit reference before the Edict of Milan in 313 AD, which declared the neutrality of the Roman Empire regarding matters of worship. As a result of this removed obstacles to the religious practices of Christianity and other religions, and after the fourth century, crosses were placed alongside other symbolic ornaments. So perhaps when the theater was abandoned it was reused as a church.

### **Dating:**

According to the plant decorations surrounding the panel and the arrangement of birds around the kantharos vessel and comparing the mosaic panel with others within

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the divine and human natures of Christ, see: Jean-Marie Sumo, "Christology: Divinity and Humanity of Christ," (Unpublished PhD diss., Beulah Heights University, Atlanta, 2016), 9-13.

the region, such as the one discovered inside the Triclinium of the Dàphne - Harbiye house in Turkey, which dated between 350-375 AD, we can observe the kantharos vessel appeared in the middle of the scene and Birds wrapped around it such as peacocks, gallinules, and ducks.... etc. Together with Dionysus, birds could also be seen on the mosaic of Constantine's Villa in the same town, which dates back to the period between 325-350 AD<sup>1</sup>. And, with the assistance of the dedicatory inscription that was formulated indirectly to refer to Jesus Christ during the period of Christian persecution. Therefore, the study suggests that the mosaic floor dates to the beginning of the fourth century AD.

### **Conclusion:**

According to the study, every bird has a symbolic meaning and is considered sacred. The peacock is a symbol of resurrection, immortality, and eternity, the partridge represents courage, daring, intelligence, inspiration, and nobility, and the gallinule indicates chastity, sincerity, and loyalty. As for the open cage, it symbolizes the liberation of the soul trapped inside the body through death. After death, the human settles either in the abode of Hades or the Elysian Field, where the heroes associated with the gods go to the Isle of the Righteous without justification for their deeds or accountability.

The study reached the true meaning of the consecration text, which connected the deified human Antinous and the twice-born Dionysus to Jesus Christ, who has both human and divine natures. The connection was also made between their ability to heal, die, and be resurrected again. As a result of the study Jesus Christ was the message's consignee. His virtue in liberating the human soul and freeing it from torment is indicated by its transfer to the Garden of Eden after its death. The transformation of the theater into a church later confirms the functional change of the place, as the artist later inserted the mosaic panel inside the theater after its entertainment function changed to a purely religious function to indicate the meaning.

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<sup>1</sup> For examples see: Dağlier, "Late Antique floor mosaics", 571-572, no. 332, pp. 282-289, no. 335



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