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Abstract

The Roman *triclinia* mosaics of Antioch are among the most interesting discoveries due to their premium Roman designs. These mosaics show significant Hellenistic artistic heritage in the representation of the classical and mythological topics (e.g. Iphigenia, Narcissus etc.) The main aim in this study was to classify the *triclinia* mosaics in Antioch according to their designs and to record them in a complex database including their topics, date, dimensions, exposures in order to determine possible connections between design elements and building types.

Doro Levi in his book of 1947 “Antioch mosaic pavements” established the classical typology of Antiochian mosaics (T, U and Horseshoe shapes). However, I managed to identify a new design unnoticed by Levi, which I named H-shape design. This is composed of two large separated panels along the room, one with geometric motifs close to the rear wall and the second with figural representation close to the entrance and facing the rear wall.

Introduction

This poster is based on the author's MA thesis under title "The Roman mosaics designed for *triclinia* in roman Syria (Antioch). Relationship between decoration and function" under supervision Dr. Lóránt Vass, which submitted to Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Budapest, Hungary in 2020.

Aims and goals

This study concentrated mainly on the designs of the mosaic pavements of *triclinia* at Antioch. It would also reflect on the possibilities of identifying *triclinia* solely based on the mosaic design among other rooms in Antioch's houses, such as T, U, H, and Horseshoe designs. The relationship between the mosaic and its architectural surrounding have been analyzed too. Additionally, Antioch's architecture of these *triclinia* and their unrivaled standard structure are closely examined.

Historical and geographical background

Antioch is located in a coastal area in north-western Syria. It is situated on the south-western gate of Amuk plain on the flow head of Orontes river. Antioch was founded in 300 BC and named in honour of *Antiochus*, Seleucus Nicator I's father. In 64 BC, the Roman leader Pompey the Great entered Syria through Cilicia plains to annex Syria to the Roman Empire as a new province. Antioch, since its foundation by Seleucus Nicator I, was saturated in Hellenic culture (Fig. 1).

Antioch's wealthy population arranged a fancy surrounding that reflected their classical background, which was a mixture of the Greek and Roman traditions. Antioch's literary and archaeological evidence proves the priority of the *symposium* and banquet events among the elite people of Antioch. These events were a proper occasion for enriching philosophical and literary conversations derived at most from the *triclinium* decoration elements (Fig. 2).

Figure 1. Antioch location. (Bryce 2014: 228).

Figure 2. Drinking Contest, Atrium House. (Cimok 2000: 27).

Context

The excavations carried out in Antioch between 1932 and 1939 revealed the 300 mosaic pavements dated between the early 2nd century and the first quarter of the 6th century AD²⁰. The mosaics discovered in Antioch's city, besides Seleucia Pieria, Antioch's port city, and the wealthy suburb of Daphne, the city of rich merchants. Several masterpieces of Roman mosaic art were found in multiple locations in Syria, especially in Antioch, dominated by Hellenistic philosophical orientations on one hand and religious traditions based on mythological scenes with symbolic content on the other one (Fig. 3).

The books of "Antioch mosaic pavements" of Doro Levi 1947 and "Antioch mosaics" of Fatih Cimok in 2000 are considered an influential source, the core and database of all studies about Antiochean mosaics, which includes all discovered Roman mosaics of *triclinia* in Antioch, Daphne, and Seleucia Pieria. Thus, after the survey made on the data extracted from this book, the author was able to quantify the Roman mosaics of *triclinia* and recognize their designs, layouts, and depicted scenes.

The Greek culture had a strong influence in Syria. It is displayed by Antioch's mosaics, which represented scenes, from the Greek mythological, literary, and theatrical scenes, such as the Judgement of Paris, Menander, *Iphigenia*, *Tethys* and *Oceanus*, and personification of the geographical and natural elements, between the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD (Fig. 4).

Figure 3. Excavation team 1932-1939.
(<http://vrc.princeton.edu/researchphotographs/s/antioch/page/introduction>). Accessed date: 20-02-2021.

Figure 4. Judgement of Paris, Iphigenia, Menander, and Oceanus mosaics (Cimok 2000: 29,49,107,180).

Conclusion

There are 28 Roman *triclinia* mosaic pavements within 19 residential houses distributed between Antioch, Daphne, and Seleucia Pieria. The proliferation of *triclinia* in the Antiochean dwellings testifies the importance of meetings, like banquets and other social events.

We can recognize ten mosaics of T-shape design, nine mosaics of U-shape, one mosaic of horseshoe shape, and eight mosaics with the newly observed *triclinium* design pavements, which the author named it H-shape (Table. 1). It should note that this design was not noticed before in any of the other Roman provinces, except for one example in the ancient city of Zeugma.

H-shape design consists of two main separated panels. The inner panel is adorned by geometric motifs framed by a thin black border (often, this panel's size is equal to the other figured panel or narrower). The second panel is decorated with a figured representation close to the entrance and oriented inward to the rear wall. The figured panel is enclosed by multi types of geometric or floral decoration.

Table 1. An illustration of the designs of triclinia mosaics in Antioch. (Edited by the author).

The orientations of the houses' *triclinia* present a considerable variation, and all eight points of the compass are represented. It seems that the eastern quadrant was not very desirable. However, the two western quadrants (northwest; southwest) and the real west were the most favourite orientations for the Antiochean *triclinia* by 53% out of all. This might be due to Antioch, Daphne, and Seleucia Pieria's geographical position. They are located on a coastal area where the air's direction blows up the city from the sea in north-western Syria (Table. 4).

The following features are characteristic of the *triclinium* complex in the Antiochean *domus*: a ***triclinium***, which has a mosaic pavement elaborated with a design referring to the location of the couches, openings on a **portico**. Beyond the portico, there is an open court, most of the time with a ***nymphaeum*** or pool (Table. 2).

The sitting on the couches inside the *triclinium* has an essential role. The guest of honour is seated on the middle couch's left side, where the host is sitting on the low couch's right side. This corner between these couches is arranged in the optimum position, facing the centre directly with the *nymphaeum*/pool via a portico. A fine example is the *triclinium* complex at Drinking contest House in Seleucia Pieria (Table. 3).

Table 2. The *triclinia* architecture complex of Antioch. (Edited by the author after <http://vrc.princeton.edu/archives/items/show/14638>). Accessed date: 20-02-2021.

Table 3. This scheme shows the relationship between the triclinium, triclinium mosaic, paved portico, and nymphaeum/pool with the optimum place of the honor guest's couch in the triclinium. (Edited by the author after Dobbins, *The Houses*, 54).

The scenes of the *symposium* related to *Dionysus* and his deed and cult stages were Antioch's most popular scenes, which reflect the cheerful side of life. They were part of the evidence about the *symposium's* importance as a critical social event among the Antiochean community, which considered the heir of Greek tradition (Fig. 5).

Narcissus depiction was a popular scene in the domestic ornaments. He has been associated with the fountains and landscapes, and these were the features of Antioch. Also, he was a metaphor for the desire for love delusions, and it could be a message or warning to the seduction by the host. Consequently, according to Levi's analysis, the depiction of *Narcissus* was derived from the Pompeian paintings. The typical representation of *Narcissus* in the Pompeian paintings was as a youth slouching diagonally and holding a spear (Fig. 6).

Table 4. Distribution of *triclinia* mosaics' designs, orientation, and chronology in Antioch.

Figure 5. Dionysus and Ariadne, Drunken Dionysus, Drinking contest and Bacchic Thiasos mosaics. (Cimok 2000, 51,59,125,135).

Figure 6. Narcissus and Echo mosaic. (Cimok 2000: 115).

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