

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation / Thesis: **A PRIVATE SPECTACLE IN ANTIOCH:
INVESTIGATION OF AN INITIATION
SCENE**

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The House of the Mysteries of Isis, contains a controversial mosaic pavement identified as *Mors Voluntaria*. It shows a female and a male figure with Hermes on their right, standing in front of a door. The subject has been identified as an initiation scene into the cult of a motherly goddess – either Isis or Demeter--, but the lack of scenes depicting mysteries and the singularity of the iconography have also led to the suggestion of a theatrical representation. This paper aims to explain the choice of iconography from the standpoint of the ancient viewer. After a brief historical survey, each object and each figure and its gesture are investigated separately and compared with elements in contemporary works of art. These comparisons suggest a scene of the initiation into the cult of a deity with an hidden identity, which provides a secret spectacle for the pavement's patron.

A PRIVATE SPECTACLE IN ANTIOCH:
INVESTIGATION OF AN INITIATION SCENE

By

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
2004

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank to Prof. Marjorie Venit for her infinite patience and help in the preparation of this work. I would also like to acknowledge Prof. Eva Stehle and Prof. Marie Spiro for their constructive criticisms that allowed me to form a stronger thesis. Many thanks are due to my husband and my family, all of whom were extremely supportive and encouraging throughout this project and beyond.

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Introduction

The House of the Mysteries of Isis at Antioch takes its name from the subject of its best preserved mosaic, which is the subject of this thesis. The house, was found in 1937 directly below the modern surface.¹ It consists of five rooms, four of which have mosaic pavements, most of which are in fragmentary condition. The house is one house of a two-villa complex situated on one of the terraces of Mount Silpius overlooking the city. It lies on the north-south axis on level ground close to the two-mile long Street of Herod and Tiberius (fig. 1).² The second house, known as the House of the Bacchic Thiasos, is a loggia on the slope of the mountain.³ Its only room with a view faces North (fig. 2). The House of the Mysteries of Isis stood below this house, though it is difficult to establish a topographical relationship between the two buildings because of the scarce documentation.

¹ *Antioch-on-the-Orontes* III Excavations of 1937-1939, Richard Stillwell, ed., p. 178 ff., nos. 114, 115 (hereafter cited as *Antioch Excavations* [vol. No.]); Doro Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements* (Roma: 1971), 163 ff. (hereafter cited as Levi, *AMP*); idem. "Mors Voluntaria, Mystery Cults on Mosaics from Antioch," *Berytus* VII (1942): 19 ff. (hereafter cited as Levi, "Mors Voluntaria"); Sheila Campbell, *Mosaics of Antioch* (Leiden: 1988), 74 ff., pls. 205-216 (hereafter cited as Campbell, *Mosaics*).

² Glanville Downey, *Antioch in the Age of Theodosius the Great* (Oklahoma: 1962), 23. The plan is from the time of Theodosius the Great (379-395 CE).

³ Levi, *AMP*, 45-46; Campbell, *Mosaics*, 73, pls 203, 204.

The mosaics in the House of the Mysteries of Isis are dated to the Severan Period (193-235 CE) by Doro Levi⁴ and to the mid-third century by Sheila Campbell,⁵ whereas Levi dated the House of the Bacchic Thaisos between the Hadrianic and Antonine periods (Hadrian 117-138 CE, Antoninus Pius 138-161 CE).⁶ Nevertheless, it is important to consider the House of the Bacchic Thiasos in a discussion of the House of the Mysteries of Isis, because it is the only building found anywhere in its vicinity. Moreover, a mosaic panel in the House of the Bacchic Thiasos has theater scenes, the significance of which will be discussed in the final chapter.

The House of the Mysteries of Isis has at least parts of three figural mosaics preserved. The best-preserved mosaic has been identified as the *Mors Voluntaria*⁷ -- the initiation ritual into the cult of Isis (fig. 3). Despite the mosaic's commonly used name, its unique iconography and its ambiguity due to the lack of attributes of the goddess who is represented in it have led to differences of opinion regarding the interpretation of the subject of the mosaic.

⁴ Levi, *AMP*, 625.

⁵ Campbell, *Mosaics*, 74. Her dating is widely accepted.

⁶ Levi, *AMP*, 46.

⁷ Levi, "Mors Voluntaria", 19 ff.

The figural mosaic in the second room is identified as the *Navigium Isidis* (fig. 4).⁸ It has suffered rather severe damage. A pipeline passing through the room destroyed the upper half of the mosaic, leaving some parts in fragmentary condition. The emblem of the mosaic of the third room is completely destroyed except the lower left part where the feet of a man are visible (fig. 11), though the bottom and the left part of the mosaic border remain. From the fourth and fifth rooms the remains are too fragmentary to discuss. Aside from a Kufic inscription,⁹ no other archaeological finds are recorded near the house. Thus, the two mosaics from Room One and Room Two will be the main point of concern.

The aim of this paper is to understand how an individual might have celebrated a cultic ritual in his Antioch house and to discern his reasons for choosing a theme that speaks to Isiac worship and the unique iconography in which this theme is expressed. Questions that will be addressed are: What is the meaning of the mosaic? Why was an initiation theme intended for a room in a house? Is the theme found in other Roman houses? What might be the aspects that affected the iconography? What might be the function of the mosaics? Yet, since the meaning of the mosaic cannot be separated from the patron who commissioned it, it is first necessary to investigate the history of the city and its cultural

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ N. A. Faris in *Antioch-on-the-Orontes II Excavations*, Richard Stillwell, ed., p. 166 ff.

and social development. Therefore, the first chapter deals with a brief history of Antioch as well as its celebrated pagan cults. In this chapter, the excavation history of the site and the problems associated with it are also stated. The second chapter gives a description of the mosaics and discusses the scholarship on the *Mors Voluntaria* mosaic as well as the problems raised by the literature. The third chapter is a survey of the iconography of *Mors Voluntaria*, which entails an investigation of the figural representation of each figure. The last chapter analyzes the iconography of the mosaics – mainly the *Mors Voluntaria* – adducing evidence from the cultural life in Antioch in order to show how the subjects chosen for the mosaic fit into the life of Antiochians, who very much enjoyed entertainment and spectacle.

Chapter 1: A Brief History of Antioch and Its Excavations

A Brief History of Antioch

The city of Antioch lies between the Orontes River and Silpius Mountains. It has two suburbs: Daphne (Defne-Yakto), five miles to its south, and Seleucia Pieria (Cevlik), fifteen miles west of the city on the seashore. The geography of the area permits the city to be easily protected due to the mountains, and the closeness of a sea port makes it attractive for the traders. The city acted as a gate from the Mediterranean to the Eastern provinces, which became important beginning in the fourth century BCE.

Alexander the Great defeated the Persian ruler, Darius III in 333 BCE at Issus, which was named Alexandretta (modern day Iskenderun, approximately 23 miles north of Antioch) in commemoration of Alexander. Compared with the earlier seven-month resistance of Tyre (a coastal Phoenician city in the south) to Alexander's conquest,¹⁰ Issus greeted him as victor, so it is plausible to think that the native population around Issus and Antioch may have been ideologically and culturally closer to the Greek speaking people than to the Persians that had previously held the region.¹¹

¹⁰ Philip Hitti, *History of Syria* (New York: 1951), 232.

¹¹ George Haddad, *Aspects of Social Life in Antioch in the Hellenistic-Roman period* (Chicago: 1949), 38-40. Haddad points to the legend of Io of Argos, who fled to Antioch where Hellenes had already been living. Triptolemus and the Argives were

After Alexander's death, Seleucus Nicator, the first Seleucid ruler of the new empire,¹² pursued the policy of Alexander, which included the spread of Hellenism. To this end, he founded many Greek cities along Greek lines. Colonists, consisting of Greek and Macedonian soldiers and mercenaries, were settled in the newly founded cities.¹³ Antioch was founded on 22nd Artemisios (May) 300 BCE. It was named after Seleucus' father, Antiochus,¹⁴ and it became the capital of the Seleucid Empire.¹⁵ It was at a convergence of trade routes and, in fact, many people with different ethnicities started a new life there. The population of the city grew and consisted mainly of Hellenistic and Semitic people.¹⁶ Most Semites were Jews pursuing their own religion, although they dressed like Greeks

sent to look for her, but instead they settled there and named the city Iopolis. The story varies according to its ancient author.

¹² His last name means victor.

¹³ Hitti, 251. Haddad, 51.

¹⁴ Glanville Downey, *History of Antioch in Syria from Seleucus to the Arab Conquest* (Princeton: 1961), 56, 57, and 67. There are sixteen other Antiochs named after his father.

¹⁵ The Seleucid Empire (312-64 BCE) expanded as far East as India (including Persia and Mesopotamia and excluding the Syria-Palestine area, which was a battleground between it and the Ptolemies) and as far West as southern Asia Minor including Thrace. C.f. the maps in Hitti, 237, 238, 240.

¹⁶ Even though the excavations do not show domestic structures before the Roman period it may be plausible to think that Hellenic and Semitic people would have been living there, like they did in the rest of the Seleucid cities (see Hitti, 246, 249, 288). The others were Syro-Hittites, Arameans, and Kurds. Writers like Malalas and Libanius mostly mention the Greek settlers like Cypriots and Macedonians.

and mingled in the larger community.¹⁷ Greek was the main political language in the Seleucid Empire, although the vernacular language remained Aramaic. Even throughout Roman rule, when Latin became the political and philosophical language, Greek and Aramaic were to remain the dominant languages of the area.¹⁸

Under the Seleucid Empire, Antioch was in close relationship with the Ptolemies from Egypt, but the long-lasting enemy became the Persians. Seleucid presence in Antioch intermittently ceased by the conquests of Macedonians and Persians. With these attacks the power of the empire declined rapidly and became vulnerable to further invasions. Finally Antioch met with the newly rising power of the West in the beginning of the second century BCE.¹⁹ The conflict between the expansion of the Seleucid Empire and that of Rome toward the Greek territories had already resulted in the Roman conquest of Asia Minor and concluded in the termination of the Seleucids in 65/64 BCE. The status of the city was to change, not only politically, but also economically by the defeat of

¹⁷ Hitti, *ibid.* Haddad, 42, 50, and 60-67 for Jews under the Seleucids and Romans.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ In 198 BCE an embassy from Rome went to Antioch to warn the Seleucids to keep hands off Egypt. This is the first communication between Rome and Antioch c.f. Hitti, 57.

Mithradates²⁰ by Pompey in 65/64 BCE.²¹ The Roman interest in Antioch, as in other Syrian cities, was mainly militaristic and commercial. After the Roman conquest, Antioch, already an important military, administrative, and commercial center, remained the capital of the province of Syria.²² Although Antioch gained autonomy with its own provincial governors, its strategic importance had forced Augustus to establish the headquarters of a legate and a procurator who responded directly to him.²³ This responsibility also gave way to the construction of a new social life and set of buildings

²⁰ The king of Pontus near the Black Sea. It is said that Mithridates' monarchy was a decendent of the Persian. C.f. Hitti, 249, n. 1.

²¹ Downey, *History of Antioch in Syria*, 143. Even though Antioch came to be ruled by Romans after this time, there were Italians or Greek-Italians living in Antioch because of the commercial interest of Rome. After the Roman conquest, Roman traders began to settle in Syrian cities. However, this was a commercial interest spurred by individuals, not initiated by the government in Rome. Hitti, 297 also see Downey, *ibid*, 140. Haddad (56-57) mentions that the Roman settlement was mainly military and commercial and thus it was temporary although some Romans were sent by the emperors. Graeco-Roman and Syrian merchants traveled between Antioch and Delos which was the link between East Mediterranean and Italy see Downey, *ibid*, 136. Also see Hitti, 278-9 for the population in the first century CE. Strabo (c. 63/64 BCE - c. 24/25 CE) said that Antioch was as large as Seleucia-on-the-Tigris which was reported as 600,000 in Pliny's time (23 CE-79 CE). In the half of the first century in our era, it was the third largest city of the empire after Rome and Alexandria. Hitti, 302. C.f. Haddad, 67-73 for the population changes during the Seleucid and Roman Empires.

²² Hitti, 281.

²³ Downey, *History of Antioch in Syria*, 81.

in Antioch. The city followed the Hellenistic models with its foundation of Olympic Games and its building of a great colonnaded street.²⁴

By the middle of the third century CE, Persians had become a rising menace to Rome, and Roman emperors had failed to protect Syria against this rising Empire.²⁵ Antioch became a prize to be bartered and sold in the struggle for domination of the East. The Persians had already attacked Antioch twice and had taken a number of captives that had included the educated and skilled people of the city.²⁶ Therefore, Rome made an agreement with the ruler of the caravan city Palmyra, Prince Odenath, in order to try to force the Persians to withdraw from Syria.²⁷ In return, the Roman emperor Gallienus (260-268 CE) granted Odenath the supreme command of the Roman forces in the East,²⁸ and Antioch was abandoned to the Palmyrenes in 261/262 CE.²⁹ The subsequent Roman Emperor, Aurelian (270-275 CE), however, was unhappy with the Palmyrenes gaining so much control over Syria so, during his short reign, he reconquered Syria. During the

²⁴ Downey, *History of Antioch in Syria*, 82, 83.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 111.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 112-113.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 113.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Downey, *History of Antioch in Syria*, 236-271.

reigns of Probus' (276-282 CE) and Diocletian (284-305 CE), Antioch was reconstructed. In the fourth century, the Roman Empire was established as a Christian state; Constantine the Great (306-337 CE) moved its capital from Rome to Constantinople, and by this time, a well-established Christian community had already developed in Antioch.³⁰ By the fourth century old religious cults had become to be practiced by dispersed groups and individuals who sought to soothe their own souls.³¹

Pagan Cults in Antioch

Antiochians were devoted to pagan cults and open-minded in acquiring popular gods of the time. Apollo and Zeus were the chief Olympian deities worshipped in the city, because they were closely related to the foundation of Antioch.³² Other deities were brought to Antioch from places like Cyprus and Egypt.³³ From Egypt, for example, came Isis and Sarapis. As late as the fourth century CE, in the time of Julian the Philosopher (361-363 CE), Antiochians still worshipped at the temples of Hermes, Pan, Demeter, Ares, Calliope, Apollo, and Zeus.³⁴

³⁰ Ibid., 124-127. Disciples of Jesus had started visiting the city in the first century CE.

³¹ Ibid., 120.

³² Sarolta Takacs, "Cults in Antioch," in *Antioch: The Lost Ancient City* (Princeton: 2000), ed. by Christine Kondoleon, 198.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Hitti, 315, note 90.

The Roman household shrines, *lararia*, of Antioch are less well attested; however, terracotta, bronze, marble and silver statuettes found during the excavations in Greek and Roman private houses suggest their existence.³⁵ Herakles, Zeus, Asklepios, and Isis seem popular savior deities among these statuettes, along with Hermes, patron of trade, as well as personifications of luck, such as Tyche or Fortuna.³⁶

Among cults found at Antioch were mystery cults. These were open to all people willing to pay for initiation rites in order to gain a higher social status as well as the acceptance by the deities.³⁷ These cults offered a promise of spiritual enlightenment along with salvation in the afterlife, since the initiate would expect to rise to the realm of gods and live with them.³⁸ In Syria, during the beginning of our era, the most famous mystery cults were those of Dionysus, the Greek fertility god, Mithras, the Persian sun-god, and Isis, the Egyptian deity known as the goddess with many names.³⁹ In Antioch, after Dionysos, Isis is the best known deity to have a mystery cult. According to Libanius, the Isis cult

³⁵ Takacks, 199.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Hitti, 332.

was brought to Antioch during the reign of Seleucus IV (187-175 BCE)⁴⁰, but the earliest archaeological evidence indicates that the head and bust of Isis appears on the coins of Antioch as early as the reign of Antiochus IV (ca. 168 BCE). The imagery of Isis in the Greek world adopted some of her characteristics from Olympian deities like Demeter, the vegetation goddess, who was concerned with mystery rites; Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty; Fortuna the goddess of good fortune; and Persephone, the Underworld goddess.⁴¹ Isis was worshipped for her protection of marriage, family, and fertility. Among the many syncretisms of Isis, Isis-Aphrodite played an important role representing love (fig. 5).⁴² But the Greek Isis was preminently a deity who was concerned with mysteries.

The Excavation and the Problems

Excavations in Antioch were conducted in eight campaigns from 1932 to 1939.⁴³ The identification of the ancient city and the specific areas that were chosen for excavation were based on evidence from literary sources, as well as on chance finds discovered by local farmers. The lack of time, scarcity of funds, and the huge extent of the area

⁴⁰ Glanville Downey, *Ancient Antioch*, 91-92 note 23. Scholars find Libanius' words far from reality, yet Antiochos IV is Selekos IV's im mediate successor which demonstrates the approximation of Libanius to the archaeological evidence.

⁴¹ Hitti, 332.

⁴² Takacs, 199.

⁴³ *Antioch Excavations I, II, III*. (Princeton, 1934, 1938, 1941).

necessary to unearth prevented many questions from being sufficiently dealt with. In addition, earlier pillaging of the stones from which the houses had been built was a serious problem for someone trying to trace out the entire plan of the domestic architecture.⁴⁴ Therefore, only few houses have been published with a complete plan.⁴⁵ As a result of these problems, it is difficult to construct a whole domestic plan for most of the houses and adjacent dwellings.

This lack of a coherent plan also exacerbates the difficulty of studying the House of the Mysteries of Isis and obfuscates its connection to the House of the Bacchic Thiasos. In addition, the topographical relationship of the two houses is missing from the excavation reports, probably due to the excavators' lack of time. No plans show the orientation of the houses, and only photographs remain, which unfortunately prove inadequate to elucidate completely the architectural structures.

From these poorly documented buildings at Antioch, a generous number of mosaics in the Graeco-Roman style from the early Empire to the Romano-Byzantine has come to light.⁴⁶ With great effort these houses and their mosaics were studied and their general

⁴⁴ Richard Stilwell, "Houses of Antioch," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 15 (1961): 47-8.

⁴⁵ The scholars were successful in drawing a plan for main rooms forming the nucleus of few houses. Stilwell, 47-48.

⁴⁶ Stilwell, 47-8.

features were established.⁴⁷ The following characteristics are peculiar to Antiochian house plans: an open court, often with a nymphaeum that opens onto a portico; beyond that portico, the entrance to the main room with a figural panel, which is oriented so that it appears upside-down when viewed from the entrance; narrow geometric panels framing the figural one (except at the side nearest the entrance), leading to a triclinium that opens toward the entrance to the room and the portico beyond; and the court, portico, and main room generally lying along a single axis. Though these features are difficult to find in the House of the Mysteries of Isis, they can be used to help to distinguish some features of the mosaics.

Another problem, stated by Frederick W. Norris,⁴⁸ is the lack or irrelevance of the documentation of the finds from Antioch now housed in the Antakya Museum. The numbers on the labels of the finds held in Antakya differ from the numbers given in the excavation reports. Therefore, it is difficult to study an important part of the finds, that is, the ones that remained in the Antakya Museum. During my visit in Summer 2002, the museum was in the process of initiating a renovation. Thus, studying the objects in the

⁴⁷ Such contributions are: Doro Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements* (Roma: 1971), Sheila Campbell, *Mosaics of Antioch* (Canada: 1988), Christine Kondoleon ed., *Antioch the Lost Ancient City* (Princeton: 2000).

⁴⁸ Frederick Norris, "Isis, Demeter and Sarapis in Antioch," *Harvard Theological Review* 75:2 (1982): 189.

depot was never possible. Aside from this problem, a comparison of the photos taken at the time of the excavation and the mosaics at the museum sixty years after their excavation shows that some of the information on the mosaics has been lost, either during the lifting of the mosaics or in the restoration process. Therefore, despite having viewed the mosaics at the Antakya Museum and at the Princeton Art Museum, I have relied heavily on Doro Levi's descriptions made during the excavation before the mosaics were lifted.

Chapter 2: Mosaics in The House

Description of the Mosaics in the House of the Mysteries of Isis

The House of the Mysteries of Isis has five rooms. Although the excavators did not provide a plan of the building, the relationship of the rooms to one another is clear on a photo that is taken looking north (fig. 6). During the excavation, the rooms had been labeled so that Room 1 was the room with the mosaic of the *Navigium Isidis*, Room 2 was the room with the mosaic of the *Mors Voluntaria*, and Room 3 was the room with the mosaic of the Mosaic Border with Masks. However, in this work, the numbers have been changed to accord with the topographic relationship of the rooms as seen in the excavation photo (fig. 6). This numbering system also aligns with the order of the condition of the mosaics from the best preserved to the least well preserved one. According to this scheme, the room with the *Mors Voluntaria* mosaic is designated Room One and the room with the mosaic of the *Navigium Isidis* is labeled Room Two. Room Three, with its Mask Bordered Mosaic, retains its original designation. An approximate plan of the house (fig. 7) has been drawn to show the relationship of the rooms with mosaics to one another. A modern pipeline that had been laid diagonally across the house partially destroyed all the mosaic pavements. Nevertheless, the border of the mosaic from

the third room and discernible images from the first and the second rooms remain. All the mosaics are aligned on the north-south axis at ground level.

The emblema of the mosaic pavement in the first room -- the *Mors Voluntaria* -- is oriented to the West. It is set to be seen from the opposite direction from that of the figured mosaic in the next room -- the *Navigium Isidis* -- which faces the East. The *Mors Voluntaria* is flanked by two geometric panels. The one on the left has a pattern of cubes in perspective; the one on the right has intersecting circles with small squares in each compartment. The figured panel and the geometric mosaics are further surrounded by connected rectangles and squares that have elongated lozenges and diamonds within them.

Room One with a panel of the *Mors Voluntaria* has three figures: a young man is flanked by a female on the left and Hermes on the right (see fig. 2). The female figure wears a white peplos with blue shadows (fig. 8). On her head she wears a grayish-white veil with a wreath on top of it. The wreath has long spikelike leaves stemming out from the top of her head in all directions. The female holds a yellow-ochre colored torch which protrudes above of her head right behind her headdress. The top of the torch is twofold and has a circular protrusion at the top. The yellow color of the unlit torch suggests that it is a metallic one. The female figure's only visible hand -- her right -- is extended with fingers

splayed and the palm turned halfway between the wall and the ground. Her open fingers are slightly bent and reach toward the man in the middle, toward whom she looks. She is lower on the picture plane than the other two figures in the scene, which may suggest that she is seated, since there is enough space remains in front of her to accommodate her knees without their touching the man.

Only the upper body and feet remain of the man in the middle (fig. 9). He wears a turquoise headdress with orange coloring at the top and turquoise ribbons hanging to his shoulders. His hair, which appears stringy, hangs down on his forehead in front and onto his cheeks at the side. Other than an indication of a red drapery on his left shoulder, the man seems naked (no drapery runs across his upper body). His left foot is in profile and his right is in three-quarter view. There are shadows right beneath his feet, and his body causes a lighter rectangular shadow towards right. There is an object next to his right foot. It has a square shape, with a dark triangular shape (perhaps an indication of opening) in the middle. The top of the object is damaged but, whatever it is, it casts a shadow that tapers down at the top of the object.

The god, identified by Doro Levi as Hermes, stands at the right (fig. 10). The figure is destroyed below the pectorals and above the knees. Hermes has a yellow caduceus with a

red shaft resting on his left shoulder.⁴⁹ In his right hand is a grey wand with which he is touches the young man. He wears a laurel wreath that has a ribbon and leaves that are smaller than those of the female's headdress. Wings are attached to his headdress; his sandals also are winged and he wears a chlamys, part of which can be seen near his left leg, probably hanging from his left arm. The caduceus, the winged headdress, and sandals, and the chlamys identify the god. His idealized face and body are turned to interact with the middle character. His right foot is in profile whereas his other foot is in three-quarter view. His feet cast a dark shadow, whereas his body makes a light and rectangular one, as in the case of the middle figure. There is a gate at his back with a column on the right. The left and right post, the lintel, and the cornice of the doorway are rendered in different colors. The closest post – the right one – is light and the farthest one is dark. The background is white and the floor below is darker than the background with cast shadows that are even darker. Between this space and the border is a band of light color.

Room Two contains the mosaic pavement that is identified as the *Navigium Isidis* (fig. 4). The figured panel is surrounded by two borders. The outer one has a bird and flower motif, with the figures set against a white background. The inner border, wider than the first, has a hunting scene. This border has a dark background creating a contrast with the

⁴⁹ Levi, "Mors Voluntaria," 19 ff., pl. I. *Antioch Excavations* III, p. 180, no. 116, pl. 53.

figured panel, which, like the outer border, sets its figures against a light ground. This kind of rendering gives a three-dimensional effect to the totality of the mosaic by bringing together the images with the light background.

The greatly damaged *Navigium Isidis* preserves two ships, one of which is seen at the left side, anchored at the shore. A man stands with one foot on the shore, the other on a high step next to a loading dock. His upper body is destroyed, but from his posture he may be carrying heavy goods to the ship. A shield that appears to be placed upright on the gunwales of the ship, is probably held by a man standing on the deck of the ship. A purple circular object (the difference in the rendering of the shadow may be an indication that the purple was not used for flesh) is visible on the loading dock. The other ship is at the right of the emblema and seems to have set sail. The oars can be seen projecting from the portholes. A man stands on the ship. In the sky above the left ship a Victory flies with wings extended.

The mosaics in the other rooms are only fragmentary. The third room preserves primarily the mask border that once framed the emblema (fig. 11). The masks are framed first with pseudo-niches and then with cuboids (small perspective cubes); two masks are set in each window with the exception of corners. Each mask is different from the others. From the panel, the only remains are the feet of a person below the knees. He is turned toward the

left side and stands on a large stool. The dark hem of his white tunic is visible, and he wears sandals.

From the fifth room only small figured fragments of a big mosaic, which are identified as genre scenes, remain. One fragment retains a landscape with bushes and a goat (fig. 12). Below this scene are two people, one of whom carries a bundle of wheat on his back. Of the other man, who rests his hand on top of his head, only his hair and bent arm are seen. The other fragmentary genre scene includes two men walking towards the left (fig. 13). A small stool seems to stand near the man on the right -- perhaps a milking stool. He is leaned forward near the stool, as if carrying a heavy basket or perhaps pushing along the cow that he has just milked. The other man, who is on the left, seems to drag something, perhaps a cow, the feet of which are obscured by a dark object. At the right side of the scene are bushes. This scene must be the lower scene of a large composition, since below the feet of the men remains a series of wide and narrow borders.

Although the architectural structure is not clear, it seems that the entrance to Room One is from the inside of the house. There seem to be walls to the South and East of the *Mors Voluntaria* mosaic leaving the entrance as either from West or North, the directions in which the genre scene (Room Five) and *Navigium Isidis* (Room Two) mosaic are found adjacent to *Mors Voluntaria* respectively (see fig. 6). If this observations is correct, it

would mean that there was a doorway between the room with the *Navigium Isidis* mosaic and that with the *Mors Voluntaria* mosaic or between the room with the genre scene mosaic and the one with the *Mors Voluntaria* mosaic. Therefore it is likely that the *Mors Voluntaria* mosaic relates with these two adjacent mosaics.

Background to The Iconography of the Mors Voluntaria

The ambiguity of the iconography of the mosaic panel in the Room One has led scholars to propose various interpretations for the scene. Though the mosaic panel is considered as an independent entity, Doro Levi adduced the scene in the mosaic panel of the Room Two, which he distinguished as showing the *Navigium Isidis* (see fig.4),⁵⁰ to aid in his identification of the goddess in the mosaic in Room One. Although scholars have challenged his identifications, the house nevertheless retains the name of the House of The Mysteries of Isis. This section focuses on the scholarly work on the mosaic panel of Room One, with some attention to scholarship on the *Navigium Isidis* mosaic in the adjacent Room Two.

Doro Levi identifies the mosaic in Room One as the representation of a voluntary “death” of an initiate, which provides the Latin name for the mosaic -- *Mors Voluntaria* (see fig.

⁵⁰ Levi, *AMP*, 164 f.

3).⁵¹ Levi first notes Hermes, identified by his caduceus and standing in front of an architectural complex that implies the entrance to Hades, leading the young man. Levi suggests that Hermes is using his wand in a magical action,⁵² as he takes the place and assumes the role of the mystagogus, the priest who, according to the liturgy, leads the initiate to the door of the temple, which – in this case- symbolizes the gates to the Underworld.⁵³ Because of the “y outh and vigor” of the young man Levi sees him not as a dead person who is coming from the Underworld, but as a live person, who is about to have a mystic journey for which he has volunteered through the doors of Hades.⁵⁴ The young man' gesture and his attire further indicate to Levi that he is involved in some kind of ritualistic event.⁵⁵ To support this idea Levi adduces evidence from Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* (XI.23) in which the initiate into the mysteries of Isis begins his journey naked in the baths. Though there is little known about initiation rites, it is widely accepted that spiritual preparation includes humility and submission, which are the

⁵¹ Levi, *AMP*, 163 and Levi, “Mors Voluntaria,” 19; J. Gwyn Griffiths ed. and trans., *Apuleius of Madauros The Isis-Book (Metamorphoses, Book XI)* EPRO 39 (Leiden: 1975), 94, 21 (283, 5f.), p. 281 f.

⁵² Levi, “Mors Voluntaria,” 19.

⁵³ Levi, *AMP*, 164.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

characteristics of the initiate on the mosaic with his slightly bowed head.⁵⁶ These features, as well as the half naked young man and his headdress, lead Levi to suggest that the man is an initiate. According to Levi, the initiate's headdress with gems and ribbons may also be the Dionysos headdress – the mitra --associated with the initiation rites.⁵⁷

The mosaic, then, for Levi, depicts a ceremony in which the young man is about to be initiated into a mystery cult, and the attributes of the goddess provide for him the identity of the cult. For the purpose of identifying the goddess, Levi concentrates on the torch the female figure carries.⁵⁸ After concluding that the female's identity as a torchbearer likens her to goddesses like Demeter and Isis-Selene, he identifies her as Isis (though the figure lacks Isis headdress)⁵⁹ because he believes that "Isis is the goddess most obviously associated with Hermes in the world of magic."⁶⁰ Levi also adduces the mosaic panel in Room Two, which he distinguishes as *Navigium Isidis*.⁶¹ As he argues from evidence provided in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* (XI.16), this mosaic depicts the festival celebrated

⁵⁶ Levi, "Mors Voluntaria," 22-23.

⁵⁷ Levi, "Mors Voluntaria," 29.

⁵⁸ Levi, "Mors Voluntaria," 20.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Levi, *AMP*, 164; idem. "Mors Voluntaria," 22, 23.

on the fifth of March, which was the opening day of commercial navigation for the year. The festival was dedicated to the Egyptian goddess Isis, after whom the ship to be launched was usually named.⁶²

A problem that Levi has to deal with in interpreting the scene as an initiation into the mysteries of Isis is the presence of Isis and Hermes together. No clear textual evidence demonstrates the presence of these two divinities together in an initiation scene.⁶³ In search of the type of magic Isis and Hermes perform, Levi first notes their presence together in certain texts⁶⁴ and in a number of tasks the divinities perform together.⁶⁵ He also draws attention to the magical papyri where the name of Isis-Selene is mentioned in the world of magic beside Hermes.⁶⁶ Isis declares that she was taught by Hermes, but Levi notes that the panel does not represent this story.⁶⁷ Nor does it picture them in the distribution of wealth.⁶⁸ Since the function of this mosaic is neither meant for good luck,

⁶² J. Gwyn Griffiths, *Apuleius*, 31.

⁶³ Norris, 199 f.

⁶⁴ Levi, "Mors Voluntaria," 20; Great Magic Papyrus of Paris and Four Hymns discovered on the pillars in the temple at Madinat Madi (modern day Fayum).

⁶⁵ Levi, "Mors Voluntaria." 20 ff.

⁶⁶ Levi, "Mors Voluntaria," 21.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

nor for restoring the health, nor for preventing illness of the owner,⁶⁹ he concludes that Isis and Hermes are present at an initiation ceremony. To support his idea, Levi mentions the syncretism of Isis with Greek deities, especially Demeter as a result of which, according to Levi, Isis became more involved in the initiation rites.⁷⁰

Frederick W. Norris rejects Levi's conclusions.⁷¹ He points out that in the literature the types of magic in which Hermes and Isis interact do not include an initiation ceremony,⁷² although it should be noted that few texts and inscriptions remain that give specifics about mystery cults due to the secrecy of the initiation ceremonies. It is true, as Norris states, that in the literature of mystery rites, Isis does not explicitly accompany the initiate throughout his mystic journey.⁷³ Norris rejects to identify the goddess as Isis due to the lack of her obvious attributes and then names the goddess Demeter. The close relationship of Demeter worship in the Eleusinian Mysteries to Isis worship in Isiac Mysteries lead him to this conclusion.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Levi, "Mors Voluntaria," 21.

⁷¹ Norris, 201.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

In the last centuries before our era and the first centuries of our era the initiation rites of these two goddesses may have been very much alike: Diodorus Siculus (1.96.5), for example, says that “[t]he initiation of Isis is very much like the initiation of Demeter. It is only question of changing the names.” However, even though presenting a plausible conclusion, Norris does not demonstrate why the goddess should be Demeter. Yet it is as true that Isis herself can be “present” at the initiation ceremony, as an accompaniment to the priest who is going to perform the rites. Moreover, throughout the *Metamorphoses*, in his dreams, Lucius mentions many times the apparition of Isis who has never left him (XI.19.2). The presence of Isis, as well as Demeter, with Hermes in an initiation scene is conceptually accurate, even though it cannot be specifically substantiated by texts. Hermes is psychopompos and the soul of the initiate must symbolically die before it is reborn; the goddess represented is the deity of the cult, the identification of which was, in this case, obvious to the owner of the house.

The appearance of Hermes in the mosaic with a door behind him recalls his role as psychopompos.⁷⁴ However, in the mosaic, the god is not depicted in the manner of the god who guides the dead to the Underworld.⁷⁵ Levi notes that in this representation,

⁷⁴ Levi, “Mors Voluntaria,” 22.

⁷⁵ Levi, “Mors Voluntaria,” 22 as is demonstrated on Attic vases or Roman-period sarcophagi. For the examples of Hermes leading the souls to the underworld see *LIMC* II s.v. “Hermes” pp. 248,249 , figs . 606, 608,614

Hermes' back is turned to the doors of Hades and he is not gripping the man's wrist to take him to the Underworld as he usually does,⁷⁶ but, instead, he is touching the man with a wand. What is represented here, then, is not the usual scene of the departure to the land of the dead -- either the voyage over the River Styx or the descent to Hades.⁷⁷

R. E. Witt suggests a somewhat different identification for this god. He identifies him as Hermanubis, the Hellenization of the Egyptian god Anubis, who -- like Anubis -- is related to the cult of Isis.⁷⁸ Anubis is the consort of Isis during the embalming process.⁷⁹ The psychopompos character of Anubis became prominent in Roman times, and his cult spread from Egypt and gained a universal character.⁸⁰ Hermanubis is represented as a

⁷⁶ *LIMC* II s.v. "Hermes"; see the black figured Attic lekythos from Palermo, coll. Mormino 310, *LIMC* II p. 336, no. 606: p. 248, fig. 606, and also, the red figured Attic vase from Brussels, Museum Royal A 903, *LIMC* II p. 337, no 614, p. 249, fig. 614.

⁷⁷ Levi, "Mors Voluntaria," 20.

⁷⁸ Reginald Eldred Witt, *Isis in the Graeco-Roman World* (Baltimore: 1971), 161-162 and pl.46

⁷⁹ Jean Leclant in *LIMC* I s.v. "Anubis" p. 862 ff.

⁸⁰ *LIMC* II s.v. "Hermanubis" The images in *LIMC* are exclusively from Roman Alexandria from the second and third centuries CE. The examples do not refer to the Isiac Anubis, who is also sometimes called Hermanubis to express his character as psychopompos. For the image of hellenized Anubis or as it is sometimes called, Hermanubis, see *LIMC* I s.v. "Anubis" and, for the description, see Griffith, *Apuleius*, 198-199.

human youth who carries a caduceus and a palm branch (fig. 14). In contrast, the Hellenized Anubis, who is also sometimes called Hermanubis,⁸¹ is depicted in human form but wearing a dog (or jackal) mask; this aspect of the deity also carries a caduceus and a palm branch (fig. 15).⁸²

The Hellenized Anubis is the leader of the souls to the Underworld as depicted on the Saqqara shroud of around 170-180 CE, possibly from Memphis (fig. 16).⁸³ There are three figures: Osiris, the dead man, and Anubis, who is depicted on a boat. The dead man is presented both alive in the middle and dead as an Osiris, since when the person dies, he is assimilated to the god.⁸⁴ Contrary to the Antioch mosaic, Anubis is a dark-skinned human with a dog head in this scene on the shroud which depicts the journey of a person from the Upperworld to the Underworld. On the shroud, his journey is not necessarily the voluntary one that seems to be depicted in the Antioch mosaic.⁸⁵ Moreover, though the

⁸¹ John Gwyn Griffiths ed. and trans., *Plutarch's De Iside Et Osiride* (Great Britain: 1970), [61, 375 E], 517 f.

⁸² Check *LIMC* I s.v. "Anubis" for the Hellenized Anubis. This is the god depicted in Apuleius' book.

⁸³ Klaus Parlasca und Hellmuth Seemann, *Mumienporträts und ägyptische Grabkunst aus römischer Zeit* (Munich: 1999), 261, fig. 165.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ One may wonder how the Antiochian male figure looks voluntary with the sober look on his face, and in this matter the Memphis scene guides us. The difference in the faces of the both middle figures shows us how these scenes are different in meaning.

shroud depicts the dead person as seemingly alive, the emphasis is on his dead character and on the journey that he will take. The most important difference between the two scenes is the half naked body of the man on the Antiochian mosaic and the sorrowful look on his face.⁸⁶

Moreover, Witt's identification of the male deity as Hermanubis is dependent on the goddess' identification as Isis and Hermanubis' association with her. Yet the (albeit, only occasionally seen) animal mask of Hermanubis is missing, as is the more telling palm branch. Instead, the youthful male deity in the mosaic carries a wand, which is apparently unknown as an attribute in representations of Hermanubis. None of the representations of Hermanubis nor the Hellenized Anubis known to me carries a wand, and the god in our mosaic neither wears a mask nor carries a palm branch. Moreover the deity in the mosaic has wings on his head which is an attribute of Hermes. Therefore, the wand may have another function, like an instrument used in performances, to stress the action of Hermes. Nevertheless, scene on the Memphis shroud may be an initial example of demonstrating

The Memphis scene depicts a dead person who would naturally accept this fact and thus he is depicted as he would be seen alive; however the Antioch scene depicts a person alive -- a person who can show an emotion to his presence state and thus is represented with the look of a person who would react to his own death.

⁸⁶ The dress and the attitude of the Antiochian character will be discussed in the following chapter. Also the presence of the female figure plays an important role in changing the meaning of the scene.

what the Antioch scene might show us symbolically, while cautioning what its meaning is not.

The visual construction of the scene on the Memphis shroud is strikingly close to that of the *Mors Voluntaria*, even though the theme is seemingly different. The three-figured scene with the middle figure moving towards Osiris shows similarities with the Antioch mosaic composition. On Memphis shroud, Osiris, the Underworld god is on the left; the dead person, whose journey is about to begin, in the middle; and Anubis on the right. The middle figure moves towards Osiris – to his death as in our mosaic the middle figure moves towards Hermes, who will carry him to the Underworld. The presence of a boat in the scene recalls the *Navigium Isidis* scene in the adjacent room of *Mors Voluntaria*.⁸⁷

In the Antioch mosaic, the man moves towards Hermes and the female figure is behind, looking at him. Similar single-directional-movement scenes appear in the mosaic of Room 1 in the House of the Red Pavement in Antioch (see fig. 62).⁸⁸ Three scenes include three dynamic figures, two of which occupy half of the scene and one of whom

⁸⁷ The three figures are on a boat but many images that I have found do not show the boat but the explanation in the catalogue entry in Parlasca and Seemann, *Mumienporträts und ägyptische Grabkunst aus römischer Zeit*, 261 they are on a boat.

⁸⁸ See below p. 70.

stands alone (or with an architecture) in the other half. The mosaics take their subjects from Greek plays, so the “theatrical” arrangement of their figures is consistent with their theme. This similarity of composition makes the iconography of the *Mors Voluntaria* mosaic all the more interesting, since the subject does not seem to depict a play, yet the figures are disposed as actors on the stage.

The Theatrical Interpretation

Although most of the disagreements about the subject of the *Mors Voluntaria* mosaic center upon the identification of the goddess, a completely different way of viewing the theme of this panel offered by Kurt Weitzmann. According to Weitzmann, the scene is not an initiation into the cult of a deity at all, but rather a scene from the *Protesilaos*, play by Euripides.⁸⁹ In the play, Protesilaos, under the guidance of Hermes, is released to the upper world for a short time to visit his wife Laodamia.⁹⁰ For Weitzmann, the goddess on the left of the mosaic would be Persephone, depicted seated on her throne in Hades as she gives her permission for Protesilaos' release.⁹¹ Weitzmann's interpretation of the scene is

⁸⁹ Kurt Weitzmann, “Illustrations of Euripides and Homer,” in *Antioch Excavations III*, 246, note 59. Weitzmann mentions this identification in his footnote and Editor's note.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

provocative, but there are problems with his identification, and these will be addressed in the next part.

Problems in Weitzmann's Interpretation

Since the house is close to the theater on the slopes of Mount Silpius (see fig. 1), and since its mosaics include one with a border with theatrical masks (see fig. 11), one may easily connect the First Room mosaic to a theatrical scene as does Weitzmann. In Weitzmann's interpretation, Persephone extends her permission to Protesilaos to be released from the underworld and to return to earth to meet his wife. However, Weitzmann's reading raises several problems: First of all, if Protesilaos is to be released to see his wife, why then is he shown fatigued and distressed as is the central figure in the mosaic? In images on sarcophagi that give the myth, Protesilaos is depicted in misery when he is about to *leave* Laodamia to go to the underworld. On a second-century sarcophagus in the Vatican, for example, which shows the myth, Protesilaos is seen in the second scene from right, sitting at the foot of a kline on which Laodamia lies (fig. 17).⁹² The pose of Protesilaos, with his downturned head, shows his misery and how loathe he is to leave his wife. It is at this point in the story that Protesilaos is dejected, not at the moment that Weitzmann sees depicted in the mosaic.

⁹² See *LIMC* VII s.v. 'Protesilaos' p. 558, no 27; p. 432, fig. 27 from the Appia Nuova Street now in Vatican, Candelabri Gallery 2465. Also see *ibid.* pp. 558, 559, nos 24, 27, and 28; the sarcophagi date 160-170 CE.

A second problem, as Levi also points out,⁹³ is that if the action seen in the Antioch mosaic occurs in the underworld (since, according to Weitzmann, Hermes is leading the dead out from the underworld upon the command of Persephone), one might wonder about the absence of Hades in the scene. In almost every Underworld scene of the Protesilaus myth, Persephone is represented together with Hades (fig. 18).⁹⁴ On a sarcophagus scene from Barcelona Museum, for example, Persephone is on the extreme left next to Protesilaus who is shrouded with a garment, while Mercury leads Protesilaus towards Hades who sits on his throne.

The third contradiction has to do with how the man in the middle is represented, and this problem has two parts. First, Doro Levi notes that Protesilaos is shown naked when he is on earth and with a mantle in the underworld, and his observation seems borne out by the available monuments.⁹⁵ On the sarcophagus in the Vatican depicting the Protesilaus myth, for example, (see fig. 17),⁹⁶ dated 160-170 CE, Protesilaos (second scene on the right) is shrouded with his head covered when he leaves Laodomia and has a garment wrapped

⁹³ Levi, "Mors Voluntaria," 26, footnote 43.

⁹⁴ As an example see the sarcophagus from Barcelona Museum. *LIMC* VII s.v. "Persephone" pp. 970-971, nos 238, 255, p 652, fig. 255. The piece dates to 220/230 CE.

⁹⁵ Levi, "Mors Voluntaria," 26, footnote 43.

⁹⁶ *LIMC* VII s.v. "Protesilaos" fig. 27.

over his shoulder when he is sitting next to his wife on a kline, which is interpreted as the rising of his psyche from his inanimate body.⁹⁷ On the same scene at the far left he is also represented with the shroud covering his head and body in the presence of Mercury. On the second sarcophagus, similarly dated, Protesilaos' head and body are covered with a garment when he is in the presence of Hades (see fig. 18).

Levi furthermore notes a problem with Weitzmann's interpretation that can be brought to bear as the second inconsistency in the figure's appearance: the permission for Protesilaos' release from the Underworld is given by Hades with a hand gesture and not by a gesture of Persephone.⁹⁸ In addition, Persephone asks Hades to order Hermes to touch Protesilaos with his wand (the gesture that is seen in the mosaic) so that when Protesilaos sees the sunlight again, he will turn into a young man, such as he was when entering the nuptial room (Lucian, *de Mort.* 23, 428).⁹⁹ In the Antiochian scene, the man in the middle, who is already young, is touched by Hermes, so, according to the story he should still be in the underworld in the scene, but contrary to the story, he is here as a young man. Therefore, despite Weitzmann's desire to see a literary model for the mosaic, this scene is not likely to represent the Euripidean play.

⁹⁷ Fulvio Canciani in *LIMC* VII s.v. 'Protesilaus,' p. 558, no 27.

⁹⁸ Levi, "Mors Voluntaria," 26, footnote 43.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

Problems in Levi's Interpretation

Levi's interpretation of the scene as the performance of ritual seems to be the most plausible one. However, the way he identifies the female figure is vague and therefore unconvincing. He investigates torches from Roman scenes and concludes that figure is the Egyptian goddess Isis, even though she is seen without any specifically Isiac attributes. Moreover, he supports this identification mainly with the Room Two mosaic, which he interprets as *Navigium Isidis*,¹⁰⁰ but the scene is so badly destroyed that it is difficult to read the scene as such. Despite the poor condition of the mosaic in Room Two, it seems clear that there remains a man boarding a ship, or perhaps carrying something to a ship which is about to set to sail. A second ship is also sailing a little farther away from the shore. There is some evidence that the yet-anchored ship also carries some goods. The existence of these two mosaic panels in a same house next to one another may not be just a mere coincidence, yet despite Levi's intention, there is not enough evidence that supports the scene as a celebration and purification of the new year's navigation.

¹⁰⁰ Levi, "Mors Voluntaria," 32-34. He uses Roman coins to demonstrate that the man standing near the ship is a divinity due to his greater size but his posture seems to indicate that he is carrying something heavy, and thus he does not display the dignity of a divinity with dignity.

An Assertion

Even though the scholarly interpretations may seem compelling, with the next chapter I would like to question the need of identifying the female figure as a specific goddess. Levi and Norris choose goddesses that function similarly, yet neither identification seems entirely satisfactory for the iconography. I submit that a specific identification of the goddess was not necessary for the ancient observer, because the deity's function in the scene is more important than her actual identification. I shall demonstrate that the uncertainty of her identity does not detract from her function in the narrative of the scene. Instead I shall try to evaluate the identity of the figure from the standpoint of an ancient observer who is the owner of this private house. To this end, I will consider the scene in terms of each object that can be identified in other, roughly contemporary, works of art.

Chapter 3: Survey on the iconography of *Mors Voluntaria*

The mosaic depicts three figures. The modern viewer of the mosaic immediately recognizes Hermes, who stands at the right, from his caduceus, chlamys, and his idealized appearance. He is not only taller than the man in the middle, but he also dominates the scene with his presence. Hermes stands in front of the doors of the underworld¹⁰¹ and holds a wand in his right hand, which he extends towards the central figure. Hermes, however, is the only figure in the mosaic whose identity is not in doubt. For this reason, there are issues that should be discussed before any attempt is made at interpreting the iconographical meaning of the mosaic as a whole.

Elements in the mosaic that beg inquiry are: the identity (and pose) of the female figure at the left; the identity of the figure in the middle, and especially the attitude he effects; and the wand that Hermes holds out toward him. The understanding of each of these components helps define the meaning of the mosaic. Therefore, in order to understand what these figures mean and how they work together, we need to investigate the elements that constitute each figure—that is, their pose, their garb, and their attributes. It is also important, I believe, to examine the gestures of the figures in the scene for a better comprehension of the theme. With these elements in mind, I will bring to bear other

¹⁰¹ This will be discussed in the last part of this chapter.

works of art to find parallel features. It should be noted that, in some cases, however, comparisons with other works of art might lead us simply to recognize the uniqueness of the scene.

The Female Figure

Headdress

The female figure has a veil and a headdress with green leaves (fig. 18). These leaves look different from the foliage on Hermes' wreath, which is made from small laurel or olive leaves (see fig. 10). Her headdress carries longer and more pointed leaves, and it seems that the foliage on her head is placed over the top of her veil. A similar type of foliage is found among personifications of the Horai or Seasons. Calendral representations may well reflect the local cults of the region, with the personifications assuming the iconography of the deity whose religious festivals was celebrated during that month. Among the personifications of the Seasons, one in the House of Menander in Daphne, a third century CE mosaic, looks similar to our figure, because the leaves are worn on top of her veil (fig. 19).¹⁰² There are seasonal personifications in each of the four corners of the Daphne mosaic. The condition of the mosaics does not allow the identification of each of the figures, but the figure (fig. 19) in question is thought to be

¹⁰² Fatih Cimok, *Antioch Mosaics* (Istanbul: 1999), 19, fig. 10; Christine Kondoleon, *Antioch: The Lost Ancient City*, 74 ff. Fig. 8.

Spring.¹⁰³ However, the closest parallels to our figure are among the Horai who represent Winter, because they wear reeds, which are spikey. For example, on a polychrome mosaic from the late Antonine era (fig. 20) Winter, on the lower left, is represented as a female figure with a hooded green *palla*, on top of which is a reed crown.¹⁰⁴ These two figures demonstrate that the investigation of calendar personifications does not appear to be a fruitful path toward the identity of the our female figure. The wide variety of representations, because of regional differences, and the lack of a substantial amount of calendar iconography in Antioch, due to its original paucity or to its preservation, does not permit any conclusions to be drawn.¹⁰⁵

Leaves of exactly the same kind as our female figure wears appear on a Dionysiac mosaic (fig. 21) from a third century CE house named the House of the Boat of Psyche in Daphne.¹⁰⁶ The scene shows a maenad fleeing from a satyr. The maenad's headdress is

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Tunisia, Bardo 529; *LIMC V s.v. "Horae"* p. 532, no 221, p. 167, fig. 221, from Thysdrus; David Parrish, *Season Mosaics of Roman North Africa* (Roma: 1984), 184-186 no 40, pl. 57b. For other representations see *LIMC V s.v. "Horae"* pp. 529, 530, 532-533 nos 181. 191. 193. 222, pp. 364-366, 368 figs. 181. 191. 193. 222. The last three have reed and olive branches.

¹⁰⁵ However, on a calendar image from North Africa it is nevertheless interesting to discover the headdress of the male figure in our mosaic. For a discussion of that image, see fig. 47 which is discussed on page 54 and footnote 151 below.

¹⁰⁶ Cimok, 64, fig. 40.

adorned with the same kind of foliage as is our figure's, and a tree in the scene also has the same kind of spiky leaves and the same colors as the foliage atop the female figure's head in the Antioch mosaic. These leaves are distinguished from the ones adorning the satyr's head, which are identified as river weeds.¹⁰⁷ The appearance of a different kind of foliage as the headdress of the maenad may show the symbolic representation of a bacchic ceremony.

Attire

Since much of the relevant part of the mosaic is destroyed, it is difficult to distinguish the female's mode of dress (see fig. 8). From what remains, however, one can say that she is veiled and that she is wearing a white peplos with some blue tints, which may be intended to indicate the shading of her dress. However, the second color may also be evidence of another garment worn over the first. The example most resembling this representation of garments is the description of a fresco from the Isiac Temple in Pompeii (63-79 CE), half of which is unfortunately lost (fig. 22).¹⁰⁸ From the description, it is evident that Sarapis and Isis are enthroned.¹⁰⁹ Isis, shown without any of her attributes, bears a lotus flower on

¹⁰⁷ Levi, *AMP*, 181 f. The maenad wears a wreath with large green leaves.

¹⁰⁸ Tran Tam Tinh, *Essai sur le culte d'Isis a Pompéi* (Paris: 1964), 145, no 51, pl. 8, I; Olga Elia, *Pitture murali e mosaici del museo nazionale di Napoli* (Naples: 1932), no 356; Karl Schefold, *Die Wände Pompejis* (Berlin: 1957), 233.

¹⁰⁹ The image of Isis is now lost.

her head. She wears a white peplos, and a blue mantle is evident over her left shoulder. According to Levi, our female figure's white peplos and dark mantle with veil and rich wreath are also shown in other Isiac representations,¹¹⁰ but I believe there is no need to associate the attire only with Isis. First of all, Isis generally wears a transparent peplos like the ones shown in the fresco from the Isis Temple in Pompeii (fig. 23)¹¹¹ and the mosaic of an Isiac Ceremony in Daphne (fig. 24), and it is difficult to decide if our figure has a transparent garment. Second, many other figures find themselves similarly dressed to ours. An example is the personification of Athanasia represented on a mosaic from Ma'arrat al-Nu'man, Syria (fig. 25).¹¹² The mosaic dates to the third or fourth century of our era and comes from a house in Emesa (modern Homs). Though similarly dressed with a peplos and a blue mantel, Athanasia lacks the veil and the headdress. Another similar attire is seen in one of the female figures from the Villa of the Mysteries, who is clothed in a transparent peplos (fig. 26).¹¹³ She wears attire similar in its transparency to the Isiac garments.

¹¹⁰ Levi, "Mors Voluntaria," 30.

¹¹¹ For the description see page 49 below.

¹¹² The mosaic is only published in G. W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar, *Late Antiquity A guide to the Postclassical World* (Harvard: 1999), colored plate 12. There is no catalogue for the museum and the inventory has been done poorly. The mosaic is also discussed under the Torch subhead, below, p. 47.

¹¹³ The Villa of the Mysteries, *La peinture de Pompéi II*, p. 199, fig. 354c.

Torch

The torch that the female holds (see fig. 8) is colored golden-yellow with shades of red, which are indications of metals like bronze and gold. It is unlit, and takes the form of an elaborate twofold torch with a knob at the top. Similar metal torches with a twofold or just a onefold top are shown in Pompeian and Herculaneum frescoes and on gems, where they are held by both female and male characters. It is an object not limited to deities.

In a sacrificial scene from the Villa of the Mysteries, for example, a wanderer holds a burning onefold topped torch (fig. 27).¹¹⁴ In a pastoral setting, the man advances towards the altar of Priapus, which is adorned with garlands and the phallic figure of the god. To the left of the man an Eros drags a sacrificial pig. Another onefold lit torch is shown in a painting from the House of the M. Fabius Rufus in Pompeii (fig. 28).¹¹⁵ In this Dionysiac scene the torch is carried by Apollo, who is seated between Hesperos and Aphrodite.

From the House of the M. Gavius Rufus in Pompei, Dionysus sits on a raised throne holding a twofold unlit torch in the presence of throned Helios, Aphrodite, and two other

¹¹⁴ A. Mauiri, *La villa dei misteri anno 1960*, pp. 90, 91, fig. 51; Salomon Reinach, *Répertoire de peintures Grecques et Romains* (Roma: 1970), 237, fig.5.

¹¹⁵ Pompei, VII, Insula Occidentalis (16), 17-22, east apse, in *La peinture de Pompéi: témoignages de l' art romain dans la zone ensevelie par Vésuve en 79 ap. J.-C. II* ; texts Giuseppina Cerulli Irelli et al.; pp. 157, 158.

deities (fig. 29).¹¹⁶ This “torch,” and the next example, seem like scepters. On the scene of prothesis from the Tomb of the Haterii, in which Dionysus finds Ariadne after she has been abandoned by Theseus, a similar scepterlike torch to the one in the Antiochian mosaic is seen leaning against the rocks (fig. 30).¹¹⁷

Yet another figure with the same torch (twofold and unlit) is a Bacchante in a painting from Stabie.¹¹⁸ The torch has a ribbon tied to the handle. Doro Levi adduces this comparison, which he calls a “ritualistic object with the shape of a long club with a twofold top.”¹¹⁹

Aside from the ones mentioned above, twofold top torches are held by deities like

¹¹⁶ Pompei, VII, 2, 16, inv. 9449 in *La peinture de Pompéi* II, pp. 139, 140.

¹¹⁷ *Museo Borbonico* IV, 2; D, Welcker, *Alte Denkmäler erklärt* IV, 2, 210.

¹¹⁸ Wolfgang Helbig, *Die Wandgemälde der vom Vesuv verschütteten Städte Campaniens* (Leipzig: 1868), 428, n. 1817.

¹¹⁹ Levi, “Mors Voluntaria,” 20.

Demeter/Ceres,¹²⁰ Isis,¹²¹ and Luna,¹²² and Persephone.¹²³ Hekate also holds torches but none of them look like the one in our mosaic.¹²⁴ The ones held by Demeter (or Ceres), however, are the ones that most closely approximate ours, as do those in Dionysiac scenes.

One of the three Ceres figures comes from a painting in the House of Naviglio, which is dated to the emperorship of Nero (54-68 CE), and which is now in the Naples National Museum (fig. 31).¹²⁵ The scene shows Ceres sitting on a throne, wearing a long chiton and a himation. Her head is crowned with shafts of wheat, and on her right is a basket full of wheat. A bunch of shafts of wheat rests in the crook of her left arm, and she holds a lit

¹²⁰ See the examples on the same and following pages.

¹²¹ A gem is thought to represent Isis-Demeter-Selene for the example see page 47 below.

¹²² For the example see p. 47 below.

¹²³ A torch held by Kore on a relief near the Haterii tomb in the Via Labicana is mentioned by Levi, "Mors Voluntaria," 20. J. Overbeck, *Griechische Kunstmythologie*, III (Osnabruck: 1969), 522 ff., pl. XIV, 9-10 and 15.

¹²⁴ *LIMC* VI s.v. "Hekate" pp. 994, 995 1008 nos 65, 69, 271, pp. 659, 671 figs. 65, 69, 271.

¹²⁵ Napoli, Mus. Naz. 9457. Casa del Naviglio VI 10, 11; *LIMC* IV s.v. "Demeter/Ceres," p. 602, fig. 84; Olga Elia, *Pitture murali e mosaici nel museo nazionale di Napoli*, 94 no 238; Schefold, *WP* 124; *Museo Borbonico* VI, 54; H. Roux and M. L. Barre, *Herculanum et Pompei* III, 55; A. Baumeister, *Denkmäler des klassischen Alterthums* vol. 3, (Munich: 1884-1888), I, 417.

twofold torch in her right hand. The second Ceres figure is a standing figure in a wall painting from the House of the Dioscuri, also dated Neronian (fig. 32).¹²⁶ Dressed in a long chiton and a himation, the deity holds a long torch in her right hand and a basket of wheat in her left. Her headdress is a wheat crown encircled with a nimbus. The third Ceres figure is from the House of the Meleager in Pompeii that belongs to the period of Nero or Vespasian (54-68 or 69–79 CE) (fig. 33).¹²⁷ The goddess is seated wearing a long chiton and a himation and crowned with the ears of wheat. She holds a torch,¹²⁸ which has the same twofold top as our torch. In front of her, Hermes stands with his caduceus on his left arm and a moneybag in his right hand. Doro Levi has no trouble in identifying her as Isis-Fortuna because the ears of wheat and the stool on which the goddess sits are also features of Isis-Fortuna.¹²⁹

Gems show other deities with the same kind of torch. One from the National Museum of

¹²⁶ Napoli, *Mus. Naz.* 9454. From Casa dei Dioscuri VI 9, 6; *Museo Borbonico*, IX, 35; H. Roux and M. L. Barre, III, 60 or 50; *LIMC* IV s.v. “Demeter/Ceres” p. 600, fig. 38; Olga Elia, *Pitture murali e mosaici nel museo nazionale di Napoli* 94 no 236; Schefold, *WP* 116.

¹²⁷ The House of the Meleager VI 9, 2; *Museo Borbonico*, IX, 38; *LIMC* IV s.v. “Demeter/Ceres” p. 903, fig. 152; Boyce, G. K., “Corpus of the Lararia of Pompeii”, *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 14 (1937): 110 no 10; Schefold, *WP* 110.

¹²⁸ This is identified as a scepter in *LIMC* IV s.v. “Demeter/Ceres” p. 903 fig. 152 by Stefano de Angeli.

¹²⁹ Levi, *ibid.*, p. 20.

Aquileia (Padova) (fig. 34) dates to the second or third centuries CE, and the figure is identified as Isis-Demeter-Selene. Sena Chiesa calls the figure an interesting and rare representation on the assimilation of Isis, Demeter, and Selene.¹³⁰ The goddess wears a long chiton and a himation that is wrapped around her legs. She has a crescent moon headdress and holds a long torch diagonally pointed slightly upwards. The goddess stands on top of a frontal male figure whose arms are extended holding branches or ears of grain in both hands. Another gem, of uncertain date, shows a representation of Luna who also carries a twofold torch (fig. 35).¹³¹ She sits on a carriage drawn by two animals and carries the torch obliquely at her right side.

The torch also appears on the mosaic from Ma'arrat an-Nu'man, discussed previously (see fig. 25).¹³² The female figure, inscribed as A[tha]nasia, holds a lit golden yellow torch, an unlit version of which seen in our mosaic. The mosaic depicts the introduction of Herakles to Zeus, who is depicted enthroned. The personification of Immortality leads Herakles (also inscribed) who would gain a place among the Olympian deities.

¹³⁰ Ermanno A. Arslan, *Iside: il mito, il mistero, la magia* (Milan:1997), 257, IV.276, Sena Chiesa, *Le gemme del museo nazionale di Aquileia I* (Padova: 1966), 422, n. 1549; 2 tav LXXVIII, n. 1549; Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets, Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian* (Ann Arbor: 1950), n. 26.

¹³¹ *Antike Gemmen in deutschen Sammlungen*, I, 3, pl. 160, n. 3153. There is also another gem carrying the figure of Kore but that is doubtful. For that see p. 19, n. 2208.

¹³² Discussed earlier above page 42.

Position, Gesture, and Expression

The gestures, the attitude, and the size of the female demonstrate that she is one of the dominant figures in the scene even though the focus is on the middle character. She has a serious, self-confident expression, and she looks directly into the eyes of the male figure in the center of the scene (see fig. 8). Moreover she holds an emblem---a torch--- which, together with her gesture, underlines her importance. These aspects all give the impression that the figure is most likely a goddess. However, her head is placed lower on the picture plane than the heads of the other two figures, which is in contrast to her godlike character. To mitigate this position, she is placed at a distance from the male so she does not have to raise her head to look at him, and the way her torch is positioned seems to add to her apparent height, since it rises directly above her head. Nevertheless, this peculiarly low placement of the figure makes the modern viewer ponder whether the female figure is seated. When one completes the lacking parts of her, it seems indeed plausible that she is seated (fig. 36). There is enough space for her knees in the lost section of mosaic so they need not overlap or even touch the man with whom she interacts. In fact, she has to be seated because, were she depicted standing, her feet would exceed the limits of the bottom of the mosaic panel.

The female extends her right arm towards the man in what may be construed as a gesture denoting encouragement. The pose is reminiscent of that of the seated Isis in Pompeii in a

painting in which Isis accepts Io into Egypt (see fig. 23).¹³³ In this painting, like the Antiochian figure, Isis is careful to avoid looking up at Io; rather her head is placed so that she looks straight ahead with dignity. Her right hand is raised to show her acceptance and blessing of Io, unlike in our mosaic, in which the deity's raised hand seems to be encouraging the man, whose back is turned to her because he is about to follow Hermes.

Yet it is not correct to turn one's back to a goddess: In the *Metamorphoses* (XI.9), during the procession for the *Navigium Isidis*, women wear mirrors at the back of their heads to honor the goddess who is behind them. The female deity in the Antioch mosaic allows the man to turn his back to her in order for him to complete his journey.

The fingers of the outstretched hand of the female deity in the Antioch mosaic are open, and her palm is turned halfway to the ground (fig. 37). Her thumb is not visible and her ring finger (or third finger, discounting the thumb) is bent inwards more than her other fingers, so that the top of it is invisible. She makes a gesture such as seen, for example, in the figures of Old Testament Illumination in a Syriac manuscript (fig. 38).¹³⁴ The manuscript is illustrated with miniatures of the prophets, each of whom wear long white

¹³³ *Il museo archeologico nazionale di Napoli* ed. Stefano De Caro, fig. 133 inv. 9558; *Museo Borbonico*, X, 2.

¹³⁴ H. Omont, 'Peintures de l'ancien testament dans un manuscrit syriaque du VIIe ou du VIIIe siècle,' *Monuments Piot* 17 (1909): 85, pls. VII and VIII.

tunics. Nine of them raise their right hands in a blessing gesture, which is formed by locking the third finger with the thumb. This gesture is also repeated above the figures by the Eternal Hand. I would argue that the gesture was adopted from pagan deities, such as from the goddess in our mosaic (as was the case of the Christ Pantokrator image, which is believed to be an adaptation from the Olympian Zeus of Pheidias).¹³⁵ Among these prophet representations, one should also notice Ezekiel's gesture in which he holds a rod down on a pile of human bones, which reminds one of the wand and gesture of our Hermes.¹³⁶ The gesture made by the female figure in our mosaic is more natural, and thus less explicit, than the ones made by the prophets. The goddess' palm is turned away from the viewer; thus her gesture is obscured. Notwithstanding its subtlety, I believe that this gesture was eminently readable by the literate viewer for whom it was intended and who knew the meaning of the gesture and thus the iconography. The reason that the gesture is represented as it is might be the gesture's special meaning to the patron.

¹³⁵ John and Elizabeth Romer, *The Seven Wonders of the World* (New York: 1995), 22-24. The adoption of pagan symbols in Christianity can be its replication like the image of Horus sitting on his mother Isis' $\alpha\phi$, which was adopted for Madonna and Child images in Christianity.

¹³⁶ See below p under the subhead "Wand."

The Male Figure

Headdress

The male figure wears a Phrygian cap with long ribbons hanging down his shoulders (see fig. 9). This kind of headdress is seen on representations of eastern people like Thracians, Phrygians, Syrians, and Persians (fig. 39).¹³⁷ It is also worn by mythical figures like Ganymede (fig. 40),¹³⁸ Orpheus (fig. 41),¹³⁹ Paris (fig. 42),¹⁴⁰ and Mithras (fig. 43)¹⁴¹ to denote their Eastern origin.

The cap in our mosaic is somewhat different from the normal Phrygian cap however. It

¹³⁷ For the Syrians depicted in the same cap see, e.g., third-century funeral portraits of a Syrian family, Gustave Mendel, *Musée impériaux ottomans, Catalogue des sculptures Grecques, Romains et Byzantine* III, 3 vols. 1912-4, III, 515; M. J.-B. Chabot, "Notes sur quelques monuments épigraphiques Araméens," *Journal Asiatique*, 10th ser. VII (1906) II, 281 ff., plate; Mendel, *Musée impériaux ottomans*, no. 130 f., p. 515 f; M. Bieber, *The Sculpture of the Hellenistic Age* (New York: 1955), 71, figs, 243, 244, 247, 248.

¹³⁸ This is from the House of the Buffet Supper from Daphne belonging to the third century CE. For Ganymede see Cimok, *Antioch Mosaics*, frontispiece.

¹³⁹ For the images of Orpheus see Füsün Tülek, *Orpheus, The Magician* (Istanbul: 1998), pl. II, IV, V, VIII, and XX.

¹⁴⁰ For the image see Janine Lancha, *Mosaïque et culture dans l'occident Romain (Ier et Ives s.)* (Roma: 1997), pl.H no 101, from the Villa de Casariche.

¹⁴¹ *LIMC* VI s.v. "Mithras" pp. 593, 594, no s. 32 and 48, p. 328, fig. 48, especially fig. 32, and p. 618, fig. 602.

has long lappets and a bow or a fold at the back, and the caps worn by the Eastern people do not have those straps or the bow (see fig. 39). Neither do the ones worn by Persians earlier in the fourth century BCE, which have bows tied on the the cap. Nor do the caps seen on Ganymede or Orpheus have long lappets with a bow (see figs. 40 and 41). The cap worn by Mithras shown on a Roman marble altar is closest to the one in our mosaic in terms of the long back part and side lappets and the peaked top (see fig. 43).¹⁴² Nevertheless, since it is reminiscent of the Eastern hat, the one in our mosaic might have evolved from the headdress worn by Eastern people.

One headdress is found on a mosaic adduced by Levi dated to the first half of the second century CE (fig. 44).¹⁴³ Decorating the Roman theater of Byblos, the mosaic shows a medallion with the bust of Dionysus at the center, who wears a headdress adorned with leaves. According to the author who published this mosaic,¹⁴⁴ the bacchic iconography leads one to think that the mosaic served as a mystery representation. However, despite what Levi has to say, this last headdress is really not the same as the one in our mosaic: it

¹⁴² Ptuj, Mithraum I Inv. RL 146. *LIMC* VI s.v. “Mithras” p. 593, no 32, p. 328, fig. 32.

¹⁴³ Levi, “Mors Voluntaria,” 30. Levi, *AMP*, 327-328 fig. 198. Also see *LIMC* III s.v. “Dionysus (in. per. oc.)” p. 411 fig. 52.

¹⁴⁴ Françoise Dunand, “Notiziario,” in *Bullettino della commissione archeologica comunale di Roma e bullettino del museo dell’Impero Romano* anno 62, 1934, p. 110 fig. 17.

has leaves, and its configuration is different, since part of it protrudes from the forehead. However, a closer headdress also related to the theater can be seen worn on a female mime character on a stauette from Syria (fig. 45).¹⁴⁵ It has lappets hanging down onto the back and shoulders of the figure. The peaked cap, worn by travelers and peasants “has become the fool’s cap of the Roman mimes...”¹⁴⁶

A headdress exactly like ours is another one noted by Levi--- a *mitra* worn by a Dionysiac herm, signed by Boethos of Chalkedon, found in Mahdia in Tunisia dating from the second century BCE, (fig. 46).¹⁴⁷ Its ribbons and the projecting strap at the back are very close to those of our mosaic. According to the authors of its publication, the bronze herm was associated with a standing bronze Eros statuette,¹⁴⁸ but its importance is its Dionysiac character and headdress.¹⁴⁹ This small herm might depict the prototype for the amalgamation of the Phrygian cap and *mitra* that became used in Dionysiac

¹⁴⁵ Margaret Bieber, *The History of the Greek and Roman Theater* (Princeton: 1966), 249 fig 829a-b.

¹⁴⁶ Bieber, 249.

¹⁴⁷ From Musée du Bardo in Tunis; Levi, “*Mors Voluntaria*”, p. 30; A Merlin and L. Poinssot, “Bronzes trouvés en mer près de Mahdia,” in *Monuments Piot* 17 (1909): 42 ff., figs, 1-2, and pl. IV; Bieber, *The Sculpture of the Hellenistic Age*, 82, fig. 286 and 288. Chalkedon is a city in Bithynia, to the south of the Bosphorus in Asia Minor.

¹⁴⁸ For the image see Bieber, *ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ A. Merlin and L. Poinssot, 42; Bieber, *The Sculpture of the Hellenistic Age*, 82.

ceremonies.

I would like to adduce another image with a cap, which appears on a figure that depicts a month in which an Isiac ceremony was celebrated.¹⁵⁰ The image appears in a room of a Roman house presumably near the Serapeum in Carthage (fig. 47).¹⁵¹ The mosaic dates to the second half of the fourth century of our era. The month November is represented as a priestess of Isis with a sistrum in her right hand and an Isiac situla in her left. She wears a gray tunic and a cap. Since representations of months may well incorporate the specific attire of religious festivals that take place during month,¹⁵² the headdress may likely demonstrate a cap worn during an Isiac ceremony that took place in November.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Levi also identifies a *mystes* wearing a Phrygian cap, facing Horus near Isis holding a cornucopia on a fragment of a sarcophagus coming presumably from the Iseum of Hierapytna in Crete. Levi, p. 28. Mendel, *Musèe imperiaux ottoman* I, 135 ff. But I have not seen this image.

¹⁵¹ London, British Museum, Mosaic No. 29. David Parrish, *Season Mosaics of Roman North Africa* (Roma: 1984), 113-116, pls. 17, 18, fig. 18b; Doro Levi, "The Allegories of the Months in Classical Art," *The Art Bulletin* 23 (1941): fig. 9.

¹⁵² David Parrish in *LIMC* VI s.v. "Menses," p. 479-480.

¹⁵³ Unfortunately, I could not find a color representation of this mosaic to compare with the Antioch cap. On a calendar mosaic from Hellín, a Roman villa, November is represented as a female divinity with a bow and arrow riding on a horse. On this third-century mosaic the veiled deity holds a lit torch and a basket full of wheat. It should be noted that the torch has a twofold top. Furthermore, on a mid-third century mosaic from Trier, Rhein, the bust of Isis was chosen for the month November. For the bibliography see *LIMC* VI s.v. "Menses," pp. 269, 270, figs. 27, 28;" During that month Isis begins her journey in search of his husband Osiris, and this seminal moment is celebrated in November by her followers. See Levi, "The Allegories of the

Hair

The male figure wears his hair loosely: his tassel-like locks hang down onto his forehead and his cheeks (fig. 48). This kind of hair recalls the hair worn by Hades during his abduction of Persephone in a mosaic from the Vatican (fig. 49).¹⁵⁴ The monochrome mosaic, which dates sometime between the beginning of second and the end of third centuries CE, shows Hermes in front of the carriage on which Hades holds Persephone. Hades' hair has the same kind of looseness as that of our figure.¹⁵⁵

Another chthonic god, Sarapis, who is associated with Osiris-Apis and Hades and thus the underworld, also wears his hair same as our male figure, as seen on the marble bust of the god from the Delta, dated to the half of the second century CE. Five locks of hair hang down onto his forehead (fig. 50).¹⁵⁶ Among many other representations of Sarapis, a Roman marble bust from Hama in Syria (about 30 km south of Homs), carries a similar

Months in Classical Art," 270 f.

¹⁵⁴ *LIMC* IV s.v. "Hades," Ruth Lindner, p. 380 no. 76b, p. 213, fig. 76b. Monochrome mosaic from the nekropolis under St. Peter, Vatican; R. Lindner, *Der Raub der Persephone in der antiken Kunst* (Wurzburg:1984), 59 no 52 taf. 14, 52.

¹⁵⁵ For another image see *LIMC* IV s.v. "Hades," fig. 76a. This is a polychrome mosaic from a Columbarium in the Porta Portese dated as the second half of the second century CE.

¹⁵⁶ Alexandria Museum inv. no, 23836; *LIMC* VII s.v. "Sarapis" p. 675, no 83 a, p. 508, fig. 83a; G. J. F. Kater-Sibbes, *Preliminary Catalogue of Sarapis Monuments*, *EPRO* 36 (Leiden: 1973): 9 no 47.

rendering of the hair (fig. 51).¹⁵⁷ The prototypes of these examples is third-century BCE sculpture of Serapis created by the young Bryaxis, who combined imagery of the Greek Hades and the Egyptian Osiris for Ptolemy II (285-247/6 BCE).¹⁵⁸ This prototype shows the characteristics of Serapis, such as the modius worn on top of the head and the long thick curls of hair falling over the brow. Since the hairstyle of the male figure resembles those of the underworld gods, I would like to suggest that the mosaicist chose this particular kind of hair style to emphasize the underworld theme.

Attire

Only a bit of red drapery is preserved hanging from the man's left shoulder. Because the part of the mosaic showing the body is damaged, it is difficult to tell the position of the drapery or whether it covers his body. Nevertheless, one may imagine that the cloth crosses over his body concealing his genitals (fig. 52), since there is no trace of drapery near his left foot. It is the contrast between the figure's (at least partial) nudity and his elaborate cap that makes the representation provocative. In a clothed society, this figure is represented at least half-naked, and yet he wears an intricate cap.

¹⁵⁷ National Museum of Copenhagen; *LIMC* VII s.v. "Sarapis" p.676, no 93b, p. fig. 93b; G. J. F. Kater-Sibbes, 77 no 442. There is also a statuette of Sarapis enthroned found in Antakya, Hatay Archaeological Museum, inv. 10799, see Kater-Sibbes, 77, no. 439.

¹⁵⁸ Bieber, *The Sculpture of the Hellenistic Age*, 83, figs. 296, 297.

Position, Gesture, and Expression

On a Roman wall painting, Theseus appears at an heroic moment as he is greeted by the crowd of people who come to thank him for killing the Minotaur (fig. 53).¹⁵⁹ In this early first century CE painting, Theseus is shown as a young man with drapery hanging from his left shoulder, much as our figure's drapery may fall. He stands with his legs slightly apart, and he thrusts out his chest proudly. His pose proclaims his victory. Although they may wear their garments similarly, the difference in pose between Theseus and that of the central figure in the mosaic clearly show the difference in their character.

The body of the male figure is turned toward Hermes (fig. 54). His unstable pose is supported by his right heel, which seems to be slightly raised (fig. 55). This pose may indicate his willingness to go with Hermes, but his head, although very slightly inclined towards Hermes, is turned towards the viewer, and his eyes look back toward the female. This position imparts an uncertainty to his pose. His face is unusually expressive, and his expression adds to the hesitancy seen in his pose. His eyebrows and eyes are cast down in a way that makes him appear worried and seemingly unready to complete his action; it appears that he is still pondering it. He may be frightened because he does not know what

¹⁵⁹ From the House of Gavius Rufus VII, 2, 16 inv. 9043 now in Naples National Museum; *LIMC* VII s.v. "Theseus" p. 941 fig. 250; Olga Elia, *Pitture murali e mosaici nel museo nazionale di Napoli* Roma, 73 no 143 fig. 24; *La peinture de Pompéi* II, 139, 140.

the consequences of his action will be. He seems to be afraid of going with Hermes to the Underworld. Hermes is about to take him to Hades, represented by the door, and it is natural that the man is frightened.

Although the man's mouth is not open (one may think that his mouth is open, but his upper lip is darkened, I believe, to create shading as is done in the mouth of Hermes) he seems to be about to talk, but he seems to be hesitant, too, about opening his mouth (see fig. 48). This discomfort is supported by the rendering of his eyes, which evokes pity in the viewer--since their expression makes it appear that the man is begging for help--and his immobile gaze, which seems to show depression as well as worry. The man is the point of interest of the other two figures, and his somber face is emphasized by the placement of the right hands of the female and of Hermes: both their hands point directly to it (see fig. 3). The placement of their hands, coupled with the central figure's unusually expressive face, suggests that the man in the middle is the protagonist of the scene. By these means, the viewer is drawn to his image and, consequently, to the uncomfortable condition he is in. This visage might have had an effect on the ancient viewer who had experienced the initiation rites; because the theme is so well hidden in the iconography, only one with arcane knowledge would have understood it. This ambiguity might well have been due to the secrecy of the rites, but among the elements discussed in the scene, the least ambiguous element would be the wand that Hermes is holding.

Hermes

The usual attributes of Hermes are one or more of the following: a caduceus, a winged hat, winged boots, and the chlamys and petasos of the traveler, since Hermes journeys between the two realms of the upper and lower worlds. In Roman examples, when he is called Mercury, the god is often depicted with a moneybag as well. The most interesting, and perhaps the most rare, attribute of Hermes is that carried by Hermes (aside from his caduceus) in this Antiochian scene --- the wand (see fig. 10). Since I believe the meaning of the wand will lead us to interpret the meaning of entire scene of the mosaic, in this part I would like to investigate scenes with Hermes and his wand as well as the gesture he effects with it.

Wand

Although a caduceus is taken for granted as an attribute of Hermes, many scenes show him with a wand, as well; some of these depictions Levi points out in his article.¹⁶⁰ In a number of these images, the god is depicted only with a wand, which seems to replace his caduceus as an attribute. In a literary example adduced by Levi,¹⁶¹ Lucian (de Mort. 23, 428) has ‘P ersephone [ask] Hades to give orders to Hermes to touch Protesilaos with his wand as soon as the latter sees again the sunlight, and to make him a young man such as

¹⁶⁰ Levi, “Mors Voluntaria,” 25-27.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 25.

he was when entering the nuptial room.” This use of the wand points to Hermes as a psychogogos, who releases the souls from the grave.¹⁶² The iconographical evidence for Hermes as psychogogos is found on a lekythos from Jena, where Hermes with his wand releases small winged souls (*keres*) from a pithos, which represents the underworld as a big container half of which is buried under the earth (fig. 56).¹⁶³ One could say that this scene best explains our mosaic, but with one exception: the male figure in Antioch mosaic is half-naked except for his elaborate cap. This remarkable choice of clothing suggests that he is alive at the moment that Hermes leads him forth.

In addition to these images, I would like to add two more examples of Hermes with the wand. In a late second- or early third-century CE tomb in situ (now lost) at Massyaf in Syria, Hermes is shown wearing a long cloaklike garment, without any other attributes but a wand (fig. 57).¹⁶⁴ Other than perhaps the wand, only that his name is inscribed

¹⁶² Ibid., 26.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 26. Jena University 338; *LIMC* VI s.v. “Ker” p. 21, no 72; John Davidson Beazley, *Attic Red-figure Vase Painters* (Oxford: 1963), 760, 41, attributed to the Manner of the Tymbos Painter; Carl Kerényi, *Dionysos Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Jersey: 1976), fig. 91; Emily Vermeule, *Aspects of Death in Early Greek Art and Poetry* (California: 1979), 25-26, fig. 19; Jane E. Harrison, “Pandora’s Box,” *Journal of Hellenistic Studies* 20 (1900): 101, fig. 1.

¹⁶⁴ Fernand Charpouthier, “Les peintures d’un hypogée funéraire de Massyaf,” *Syria* 31 (1954): 193, fig. 10.

indicates that this figure is, indeed, Hermes. In another in situ fresco from a tomb in Beit-Râs (ancient Capitolias in Jordan), which also dates from the end of second to the beginning of the third century of our era, Hermes also appears (fig. 58).¹⁶⁵ In this tomb, he is shown in a scene with Prometheus and Psyche. In this case, it is Prometheus who holds a wand over a supine figure (identified as Plasma) lying in front of him. Plasma's name means 'the human body, molded by the Creator,'¹⁶⁶ and in this scene Hermes psychopompos helps Prometheus the Creator, who is holding the wand, to restore the dead man's soul.

The wand is also used as a symbol for the freeing of a slave. If an owner wanted to free his slave a certain legal formula of manumission had to be followed. According to Gaius, who wrote a textbook of Roman law for students in the second century CE, a slave might

¹⁶⁵ *LIMC VII s.v. "Prometheus"* p. 546, no. 107 and p. 546, fig. 107; *LIMC VII s.v. "Psyche"* p. 575, no. 73; Fawzie Zayadine, "Une tombe peinte de Beit-Râs (Capitolias)," *Studia Hierosolymitana in onore del P. B. Bagatti, Studium Biblicum Franciscanum* 22 (1976): 285 f.; idem, in *Iconographie classique et identités régionales, BCH Supplement 14* (1986): 411-412, fig. 4; Marek-Titien Olszewski, "Le langage symbolique dans la décoration à scènes mythologiques et son sens dans les tombes peintes de l'orient Romain: nouvelle approche," in *La peinture funéraire antique* (Vienne: 1998), 365, fig. 11.

¹⁶⁶ Fawzie Zayadine, "Une tombe peinte de Beit-Râs (Capitolias)," *Studia Hierosolymitana* 285 f.; Adnan Bounni, "L'iconographie d' Héraclès en Syrie," *Iconographie classique et identités régionales, BCH Supplement 14* (1986), 411-412.

be legally freed by the touch of the Roman magistrate's rod (*vindicta*).¹⁶⁷ With this symbolic act, the slave would gain the right to be a full citizen of Rome.¹⁶⁸ This kind of manumission of the slave could also be done by an owner who had quiritary rights.¹⁶⁹ That is, a slave could be owned by one person and at the same time be in the possession of another; the freeing of the slave had to be made with the consent of the owner who had lawful rights to the slave and had to be done by the stroke of the magistrate's rod. By analogy, a man could be freed by Hermes' wand with the blessings of the motherly goddess.

All uses of the wand seem to point to an act of freedom: Hermes frees the keres from the underworld symbolized by the pithos (fig. 56); Prometheus restores the soul of Plasma, freeing him from death (fig. 58); and the slave is legally freed by the touch of the Roman magistrate's wand. In the painting from Massyaf (fig. 57), although only the figure of Hermes and his wand remain, the funerary context makes it likely that Hermes here, too, is meant to be freeing the dead.

¹⁶⁷ Thomas Wiedemann, *Greek and Roman Slavery* (Baltimore: 1981), 23, 24 and also see p. 50.

¹⁶⁸ There are other regulations to be a full citizenship but the *vindicta* seems to be the most important of all.

¹⁶⁹ Levi, "Mors Voluntaria," 27.

Position, Gesture, and Expression

Hermes is standing with his weight on his left leg, right in front of the doors to the Underworld (see fig. 10). He is not represented in his usual psychopompos act, in which he leads the soul to the Hades by holding the wrist of a dead person.¹⁷⁰ On the contrary, Hermes turns his back to the doors of Hades and, immobile, reaches with his wand toward the male figure whom he is about to touch, and —given the expression and pose of the central figure —the consequences of this action would most likely make the man unhappy. Nevertheless, the man still slightly advances toward Hermes.

¹⁷⁰ *LIMC* II s.v. “Hermes” p. 336-7, figures under section *C. Hermes psychopompe* and also see the lekythos dated around 450 BCE from Athens now in Palermo, fig. 606; see also a marble relief on a funerary loutrophoros from Athens dated around 420 BCE, fig. 608; also a bronze statuette from Spain dated to the second half of the fifth century BCE, fig. 609b, and a red-figured Attic vase dated around 420 BCE in Brussels, fig. 614.

Chapter 4: A New Interpretation

Evidence shows that the identification of the goddess is not clear and, I believe, cannot be precisely proven. It is striking that in a land where almost all mythological characters that are represented are identified by inscription,¹⁷¹ in our mosaic not only are inscriptions lacking, but the identifications are merely implied. Though the missing left hand (and its possible missing attribute) of the goddess and her precise posture might clarify her identification for the modern viewer, this is unlikely, and I do not think that there is a need of exact identification. Even when the mosaic was complete, the female would have most likely been a syncretic goddess Demeter-Isis (or Isis-Demeter). As expressed in the *Metamorphoses* (XI.1, 2) the goddess has many names, and it is difficult and may not be necessary, in this case, to distinguish which one is active. A goddess easily identified by the patron would have needed no specific attributes represented. The blessing gesture she extends with her right hand is already masked save for the eyes of the literate patron and others who are enlightened through initiation into a mystery cult; thus it would not be surprising if her identity, too, had been intentionally hidden. The presence of the cults of both Isis and Demeter in Antioch permits the figure to be Demeter as well as Isis,

¹⁷¹ See Roger Ling, *Roman Painting* (Cambridge: 1991), 183. "... it almost seems the artists felt that the subjects were unfamiliar to their clients."

although that of Isis is more strongly emphasized through the archaeological evidence.

Both goddesses are associated with the torch the figure holds, and their association with torch, which can also be seen in Dionysiac representations, leads to the belief that the scene depicts a mystical action: with the blessings of a motherly earth goddess, the man is about to enter the realm of the Underworld gods to gain immortality and happy afterlife.

The personification of immortality (Athanasia) appears in the scene shown on the third or fourth century CE mosaic in Ma'arrat an-Nu'man discussed earlier (see fig. 25).

Immortality wears a similar garment to the deity on the Mors Voluntaria mosaic and, like her, carries a twofold golden torch. Emesa is only about 60 km south of Antioch, and like our mosaic, the one from Emesa comes from domestic context; unlike our mosaic, in the one from Emesa the names of the figures are inscribed.¹⁷² Athanasia (A..NASIA), the personification of immortality, and Herakles are evident since their names are inscribed. Herakles wears a himation that falls over his shoulder and a headdress with oversized laurel leaves, which he has obviously donned for this ceremony. The act depicted in the Emesa mosaic is intended to raise the mortal Herakles to the level of the gods and grant him immortality. Our mosaic suggests the performance of a similar act performed by different actors. The goddess in our mosaic functions as the bestower of blessings, and in the case of our mosaic, it is Hermes who will open the doors to the gods in order to free

¹⁷² Ling, *ibid.*

the man from his earthly enslavements.

At this point one may ask why the man in our mosaic seems solemn if he has been promised a happy afterlife. He should be happy, or at least seem heroic like Herakles in the mosaic from Emesa. A number of points can be brought to bear to understand the pose and the visage of the young man in the Antioch mosaic. First, it is known from the rare literary accounts of mystic ceremonies that a devotee had to undergo strict abstinence and fasting several days before the initiation (*Metamorphoses* XI.19, 21, and 23). This abstinence surely weakened the devotee, and these signs of weakness may be those that appear on the young man's face. Second, since the encounter with Supreme Beings was done in darkness¹⁷³ and one would not have known what to expect, the ceremony was intentionally constructed to frighten and intimidate the initiate. Both his pose and his expression denote his anxiety. Third, the expression on the young man's face and his hesitant and tentative pose clearly distinguishes him from heroic figures and depicts him as a human.

The examples of Hermes with a wand appear in mainly either funerary or underworld context; the wand appears when he is releasing the souls from the Underworld, as well, as

¹⁷³ Apuleius (XI.23) says that after Lucius goes to the threshold of Persephone to meet death he returns from the dead of night and sees light.

leading them to the Hades. Our mosaic however is from a house; it is neither from a tomb nor from other contexts that refer to the afterlife. Our mosaic is in a context in which we would expect scenes of myth or genre. Yet the central figure seems to rule out a mosaic illustrating myth, and the deities absolve it from being a scene of daily life. The contrast between the tentative stance of the central figure and his elaborate Phrygian cap, and the contrast between his (at least half) nakedness and this cap make his iconography an important element on which to base our understanding of the scene. Clearly the cap is an important consideration. It either may be an indication of the man's ethnicity, since Antioch is certainly in an Eastern province, or a ceremonial cap. The cap may also be used as a symbol for his imaginary state of slavery like the cap of a different sort that Lucius once had when he was in the form of an ass,¹⁷⁴ before he is saved by Isis. The male figure, like Lucius, asks to be forgiven and saved from his slavery to earthly desires by Isis through devoting himself to her cult. Therefore the cap may symbolize the male figure's enslavement to his desires. It is evident that this kind of cap is also worn by mythical figures like Ganymede, Marsyas, and Paris and by mythico-religious figures, such as Mithras¹⁷⁵ and Orpheus, who are closely related to the immortality concept aside

¹⁷⁴ William Fitzgerald, *Slavery and The Roman Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: 2000), 94 ff.

¹⁷⁵ Levi draws the attention to the name of the priest who conducts the initiation of Lucius. For him, the name Mithras for the priest was intentionally chosen because of the close relation on the concepts of Mithraic and Isiac cults. See Levi's article in "Mors Voluntaria," p. 28-29, note 60.

from their eastern ethnicity.¹⁷⁶

Our figure is at best half-dressed, which suggests that he is still alive. In Roman tomb paintings and on stelai the dead are shown dressed, not naked or half-garbed.¹⁷⁷

According to Plutarch (*De Iside et Osiride*.3) devotees of Isis are buried wearing garments.¹⁷⁸ It should also be recalled that when Protesilaos is in the Underworld he is dressed, but when he is on earth he is depicted naked (see fig.17). Therefore, I believe the mosaic does not demonstrate a death theme, but a cultic initiation theme. Isis-Demeter, represented similarly to Athanasia but for the latter's lack of veil, leads the initiate to the spiritual wisdom offered by a mystery deity as she and Hermes confer upon him immortality.

¹⁷⁶ The Phrygian cap is also related to the freed slaves by a 18th century French revolutionaries but this idea seems to be modern because no ancient source that I searched of mentions this. Moreover during Nero's time Seneca complains about how slaves and the Roman free man look alike in their clothing and I would assume that the freedmen would also have no visible differences. Appian in (*Roman Civil Wars* 2, 17) says that there was no distinction between the slave and the free man. See Thomas Wiedemann, *Greek and Roman Slavery* (Baltimore: 1981), 68 f. For slave clothing, see the book by Larisa Bonafante, *The World of Roman Costume* (Wisconsin: 1994), 9, n. 14.

¹⁷⁷ See the representation of the dead on tomb stelai and paintings. like the Imperial period Saqqara shroud from Egypt, Reinach, 245, figs. 5-6; Jean-Claude Grenier, *Anubis Alexandrin et Romain* (Leiden: 1977), pl. VIII.

¹⁷⁸ Also see trans. J. Gwyn Griffiths, *De Iside et Osiride*, 70.

Mosaics from the excavated houses of the Roman Empire demonstrate that their patrons had chosen the subjects of the decoration of their dwellings to their taste. The themes in their houses reflected their interests and their status in the society.¹⁷⁹ The factor that the Roman house is a social gathering place also affected this choice, for often the decoration reflected the function of the room. Therefore, a banqueting theme, like the Drinking Contest between Herakles and Dionysus from Seleucia Piera, adorned a *triclinium* where banqueting took place (fig. 59). Another Dionysiac example from Antioch is the Atrium House, in which the mosaic at the entrance of the dining room shows the mosaic of the drinking contest between Herakles and Dionysus (fig. 60). These examples can also be observed outside Antioch as in the case of a mosaic pavement adorning the dining room of a house in Nea Paphos (fig. 61). These all point out that the rooms including these mosaics are designed for meeting and dining places, however the room that contains the three-figure mosaic that is the subject of this paper, does not seem to be a gathering place for the guests. Its small size (2.76m x 4.60m) precludes any large assembly of people and the seemingly very personal religious scene with its rare iconography and covert gestures suggests that it was most likely intended for the family.

The difficulty in interpreting the mosaic and its unique iconography suggest that it was

¹⁷⁹ Christine Kondoleon, "Signs of Privilege and Pleasure: Roman Domestic Mosaics," in *Roman Art in the Private Sphere* (Ann Arbor: 1991), Elaine K. Gazda ed., 105 ff.

most likely commissioned by the owner of the house. This may lead to the thought that the figure in the center might well be connected with the owner of the house. The choice of the figures and the three-figured iconography recalls the theatrical representation in the House of the Red Pavement in Antioch (fig. 62).¹⁸⁰ This three-figured iconography can also be observed in the Ma'arrat an-Nu'man mosaic (see fig. 25). Even though in the third century Antioch was not in a good situation economically, politically or strategically, the city inhabitants would have enjoyed the games and especially the theater plays, the occasional interruption of which¹⁸¹, would have made them all the more precious, and Antiochian delight in the theater may explain the choice of the mask border in Room Three, though it should be noted that the house is also close to the theater.

The Room Two mosaic, the *Navigium Isidis* may seem to have no iconographic relation

¹⁸⁰ Levi, *AMP*, 68 ff.; Weitzmann, *Antioch Excavations III*, 233 ff.

¹⁸¹ Although the games interrupted sometimes due to wars, internal affairs and/or natural disasters, they were re-established from time to time for example, during the reign of Claudius (41-54 CE) in 43/4 CE; see Downey, *Ancient Antioch* (Princeton: 1963), 90. During his time scenic and athletic contests including theatrical, dramatic and musical events and races in the hippodrome were added. Only six of these games were to be held until the reign of Commodus (180-192 CE), whose father, Marcus Aurelius (161-180 CE) was the one who had abandoned the games as a punishment of the city; see Downey, 103-105. This continued in the Severan period: since the city supported the enemy of Septimus Severus (193-211 CE), the emperor reduced the rank of the city to that of a village of Laodicea and combined its olympic festival to that at Alexandretta (Issus); Downey, *Ancient Antioch*, 108. This prevailed till the reign of the emperor's son Caracalla (211-217 CE) who gave the city's title and Olympic games back.

to the *Mors Voluntaria*, but a wall painting from Ostia represents Hermes with a ship identified as the *Isis Geminiana* (fig. 63) is interesting.¹⁸² On the ship, the inscribed names belong to the commander of the ship, Farnaces, and the captain, Abascantus. In the scene, porters carry wheat to the ship, which is about to set sail for Rome; one of them is finished carrying and rests on the ship near the bag inscribed as *feci*. This representation that includes both Hermes and a laden ship reminds one of the juxtaposition of the Second Room navigational scene with the First Room mosaic. In the *Navigium Isidis* mosaic a man on the shore carrying goods to the ship is evident, and another man seems to be standing on the deck of a second ship. This mosaic next door to the *Mors Voluntaria* room may have been intended for the blessing of the fleet belonging to the patron.

Since the other mosaics in the house are only in a fragmentary state, it is only speculative for one to assess the reason for their presence in the house and their contribution to its theme. I believe if one scrutinizes the border mosaics of Room Two and Three, which have a hunting mosaic and masks respectively, the choice of the mosaics may become clearer. The presence of a theater 300 m close to the house and the absence of other houses nearby is especially interesting. This may lead one to think that the owner might both be interested in theater and hunting in his daily life. It should also be noted that

¹⁸² *LIMC* II s.v. “Hermes” p. 517, fig. 215.

mystical rites were conducted in the theater at Byblos, as evidenced by the Dionysiac medallion. However, in the main theme of the mosaic in Room Two, the presence of a boat that is being prepared to set sail may indicate the owner's main job as a sailor. Yet since nothing remains to indicate the architectural relations of the rooms, nor to show the interests of the patron, one can only speculate.

Summery and Conclusion

The subject of this work is a third century CE Roman mosaic found in the House of the Mysteries of Isis. The identity of the female figure in the mosaic, Mors Voluntaria, has been a subject of discussion for some time. Doro Levi has argued that she is to be identified as Isis, while Frederick Norris has suggested an identification with Demeter. The difficulty in choosing one identification over another arises from the fact that both goddesses have attributes that can be considered to have been assimilated by the other.

I argue that no such ambiguity would have existed for the ancient viewer. In a region of the Roman Empire where inscriptions on mosaics of mythological scenes are abundant, the lack of any form of identification is striking. The owner might have thought that the female figure did not need any inscriptions since her identity was already obvious to him. Moreover, the meaning of the gesture of the goddess is clear only to the privileged few that had already been initiated into the mystery cult. The hairstyle of the male in the

center of the mosaic, which recalls the underworld gods Sarapis and Hades also suggests an initiation scene which would have been captured only by the eye of the initiated. The mosaic represents a personal image of a freedom from death, most likely an imaginary one.

This meaning would not be apparent even to guests of the patron, if they had not been already initiated to the cult. I suggest that the choice of the ambiguous iconography is such that, for the casual observer, the mosaic scene would be appreciated solely for its artistic value. This theatrically inspired representation would have been enjoyed by an ancient viewer who might have seen the other three-figured directional scenes.

The lack of distinguishing attributes of the goddess and the uniqueness of the iconography suggest that the patron has commissioned this mosaic for his own enjoyment. He might have even had himself depicted as the male figure in the middle.

The entrance to the room was most likely from the interior, which strengthens the idea of a personal space for the inhabitants. The movement of the three figures is toward the North, where a possible threshold could have led one to the adjacent room, where *Navigium Isidis* mosaic is.

The presence of a ship scene in the next room mosaic, the *Navigium Isidis*, also suggests that the patron might have chosen the scene for the prosperity of his fleet. The combination of these unique scenes might well explain his travels to the other parts of the Roman world---both the material and the metaphysical ones.

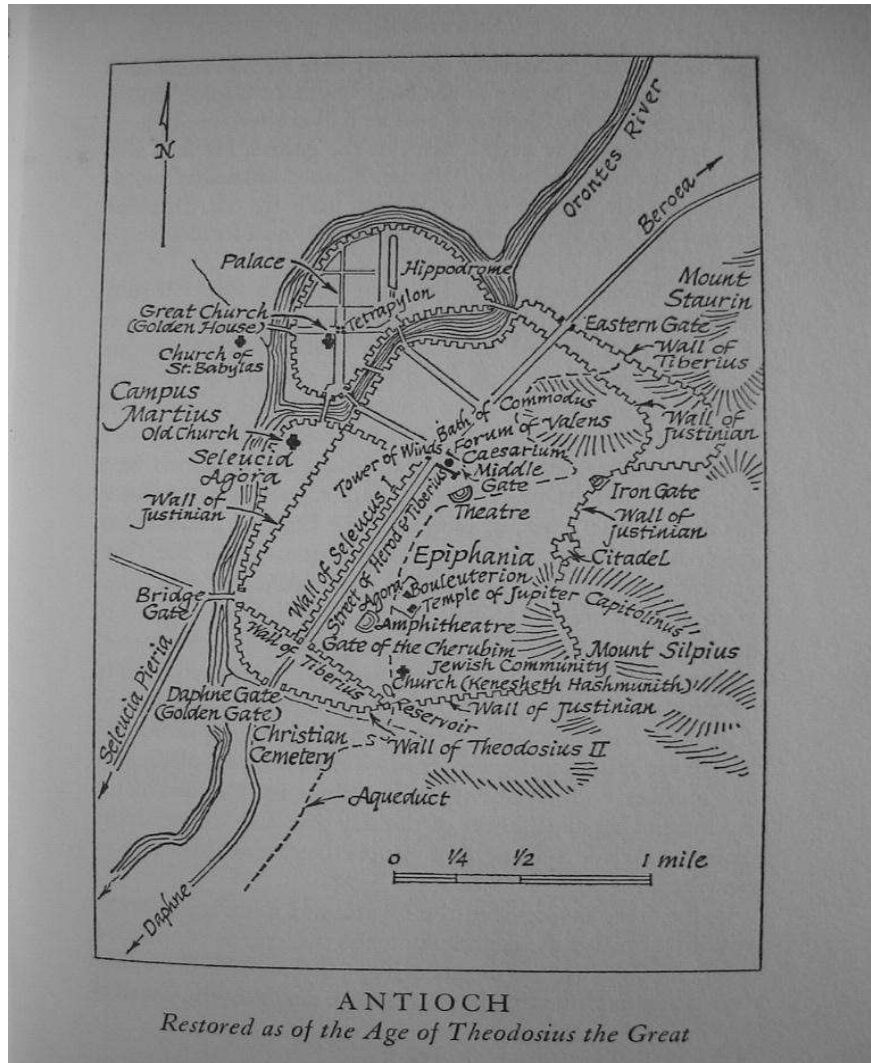


Fig. 1 Map of Antioch, restored as of the Age of Theodosius the Great
(after Glanville Downey, *Antioch in the Age of Theodosius the Great*, p. 23)

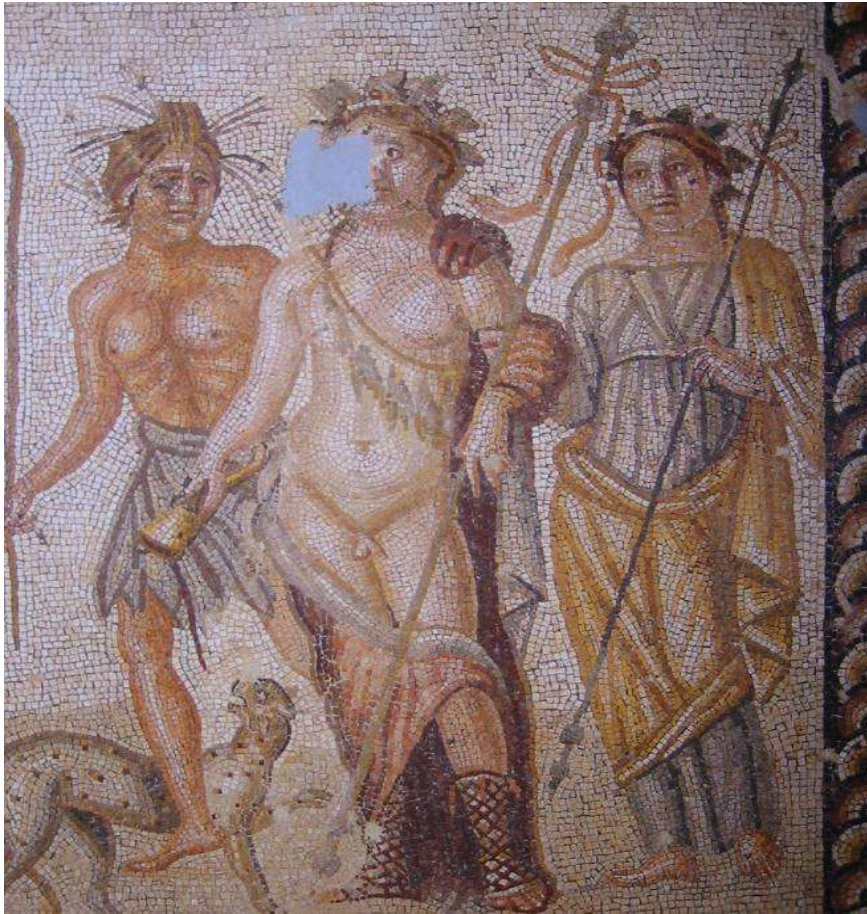


Fig. 2 The House of the Bacchic Thiasos
(after Fatih Cimok, Antioch Mosaics, p.75, pl. 49)



Fig. 3 Mosaic of *Mors Voluntaria*,
The Art Museum of Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey, no 5073
(photo by Ozge Gencay)



Fig. 4 Mosaic of *Navigium Isidis*
Hatay Archaeological Museum, Antakya, 958
(photo by Ozge Gencay)



Fig. 5 Bronze Statuette of Isis as Aphrodite,
The Art Museum, Princeton University
(after Christine Kondoleon,
Antioch: the Lost Ancient City, Princeton, 200, p. 88, fig 12)



Fig. 6 General view of the House of the Mysteries of Isis, looking north,
The Art Museum of Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey, no 4808
(photo by Princeton)

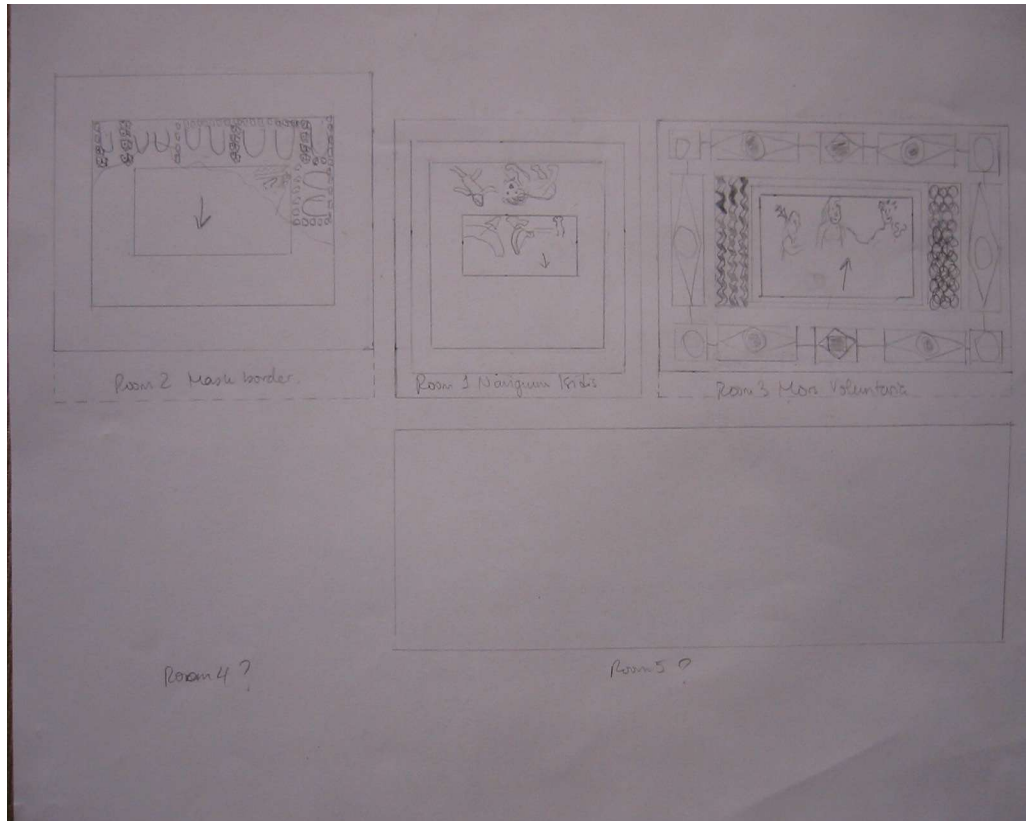


Fig. 7 Drawing of the approximate plan, detail
(illustration by Ozge Gencay)



Fig. 8 The Female Figure, detail
(photo by Ozge Gencay)



Fig. 9 The Male Figure, detail
(photo by Ozge Gencay)



Fig. 10 Hermes, detail
(photo by Ozge Gencay)

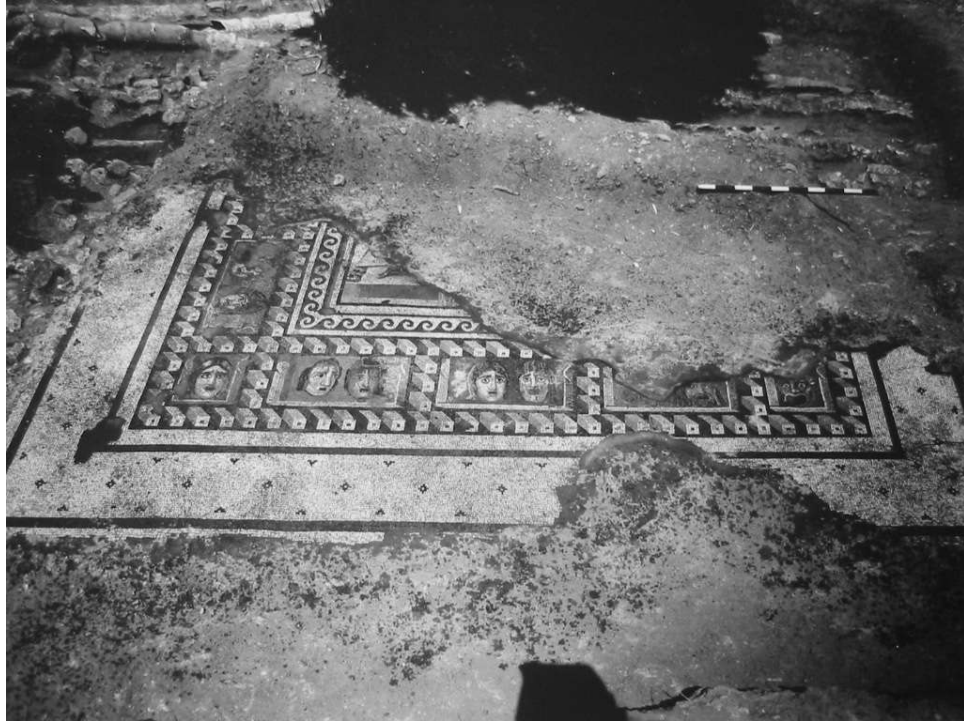


Fig. 11 The Mosaic with Mask Borders, from Room Three
The Art Museum of Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey, no 4809
(photo by Princeton)

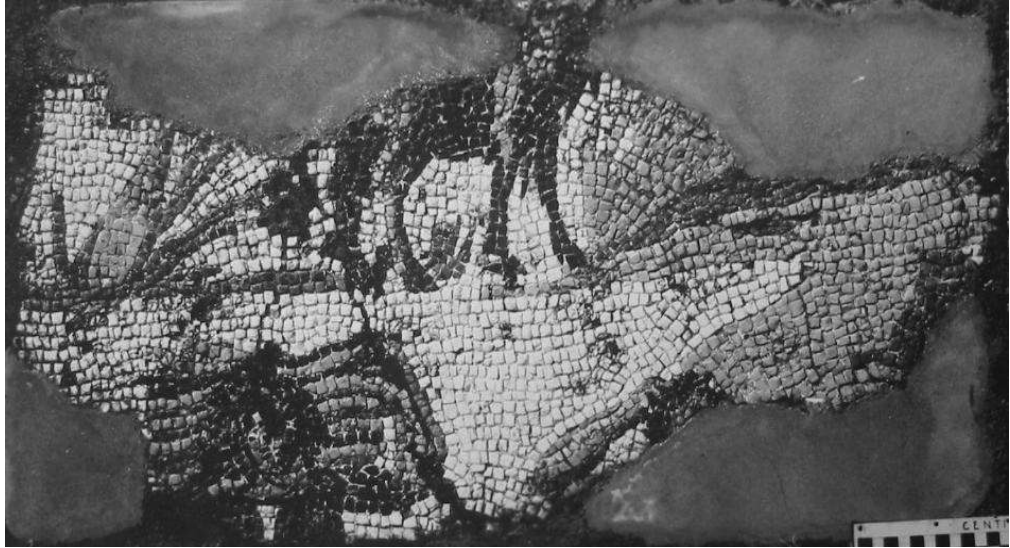


Fig. 12 Genre Scenes, from Room Five
The Art Museum of Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey, no 5077
(photo by Princeton)

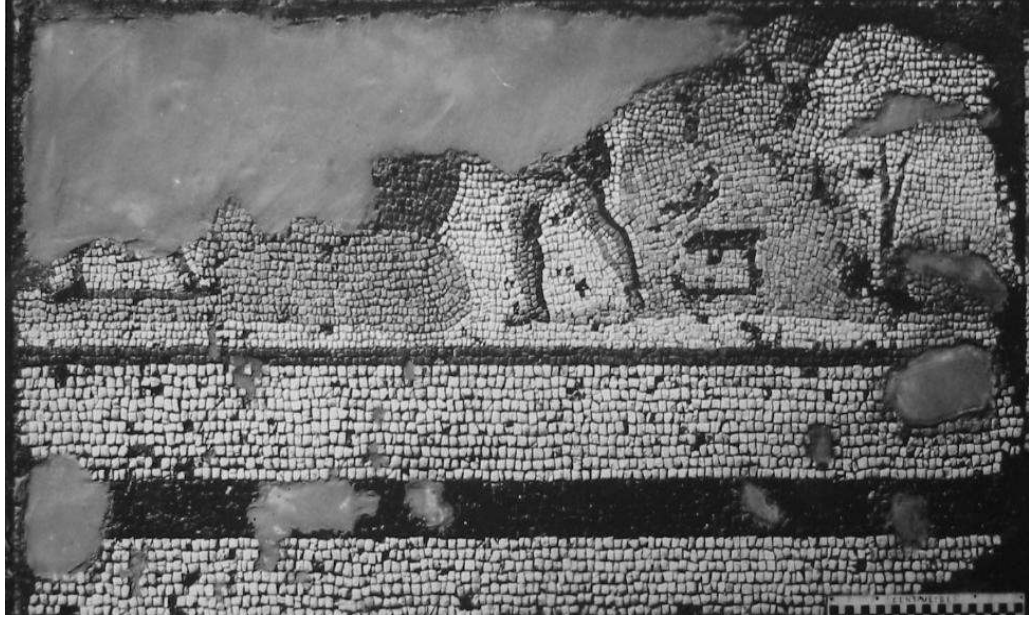


Fig. 13 Genre Scenes, from Room Five
The Art Museum of Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey, no 5076
(photo by Princeton)



Fig. 14 Marble statue of Hermanubis from Ras el-Soda
Alexandria Museum P. 442
(after LIMC II s.v. ‘Hermanubis’ p. 189, fig. 14)



Fig. 15 Statue of Anubis
Rome, Capitoline Museum
(after Jean-Claude Grenier, *Anubis Alexandrin et Romain*, pl XVIII, b)



Fig. 16 Shroud probably from Memphis
Moskow Museum Inv. 4229/I. 1 a, 5749
(after Jean-Claude Grenier, *Anubis Alexandrin et Romain*, pl XVIII, b)

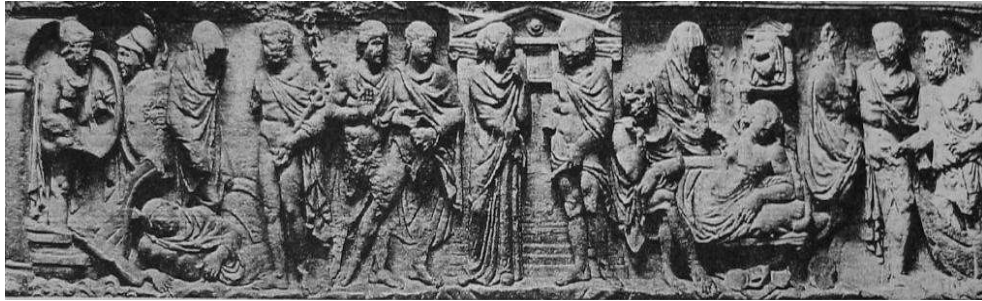


Fig. 17 Protesilaus Myth, Sarcophagus from the Appia Nuova Street
Vatican, Candelabri Gallery, no 2465
(after LIMC VII s.v. 'Protesilaos' p. 432, fig. 27)



Fig. 18 Protesilaus Myth, Sarcophagus
The Barcelona Museum
(after LIMC VII s.v. 'Persephone' p. 652, fig. 255)



Fig. 19 Mosaic representing Spring (?) from Room 2
Hatay Archaeological Museum, Antakya, no 1008
(after Cimok, Antioch Mosaics, p. 19, fig. 10)



Fig. 20 winter mosaic from Thysolus
Bardo, Tunisia no 529

(after David Parrish, *Season Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, Roma, 1984, pl. 57b)



Fig. 21 Satyr chasing a Maenad from the House of Boat of Psyche, Room 3
(after Cimok, *Antioch Mosaics*, p. 64, fig. 40)

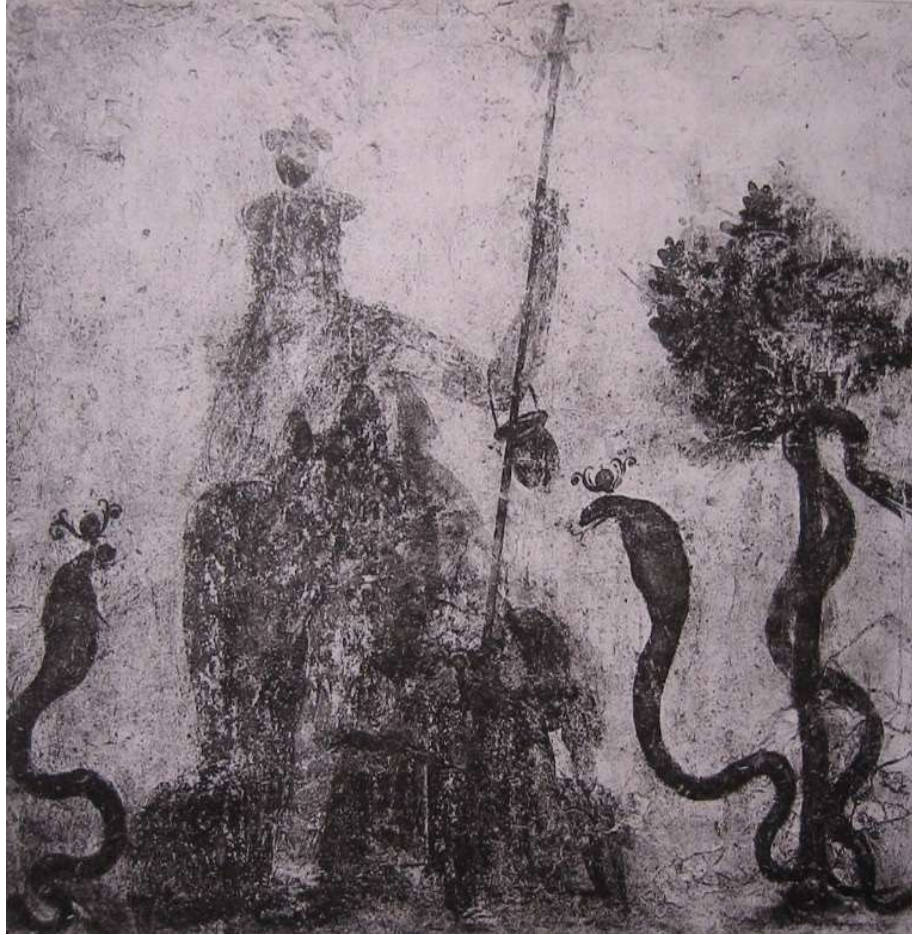


Fig. 22 Fresco from the Isiac Temple in Pompéi
(after Tran Tam Tinh, *Le culte d'Isis a Pompéi*, Paris, 1964, pl. 8, I)



Fig. 23 Isis accepts Io into Egypt, fresco from the Isiac Temple in Pompei, National Archaeological Museum of Naples, inv. 9558 (after *Il Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli*, Stefano de Caro, ed., fig. 133)



Fig. 24 The House of the Isiac Ceremony from Daphne, Hatay Archaeological Museum, Antakya, no xxx (photo by Ozge Gencay)



Fig. 25 Mosaic depicting the introduction of Herakles to Zeus from Emesa (modern Homs) Ma'arrat an-Nu'm an Museum (after Bowerstock, Late Antiquity, pl 12)

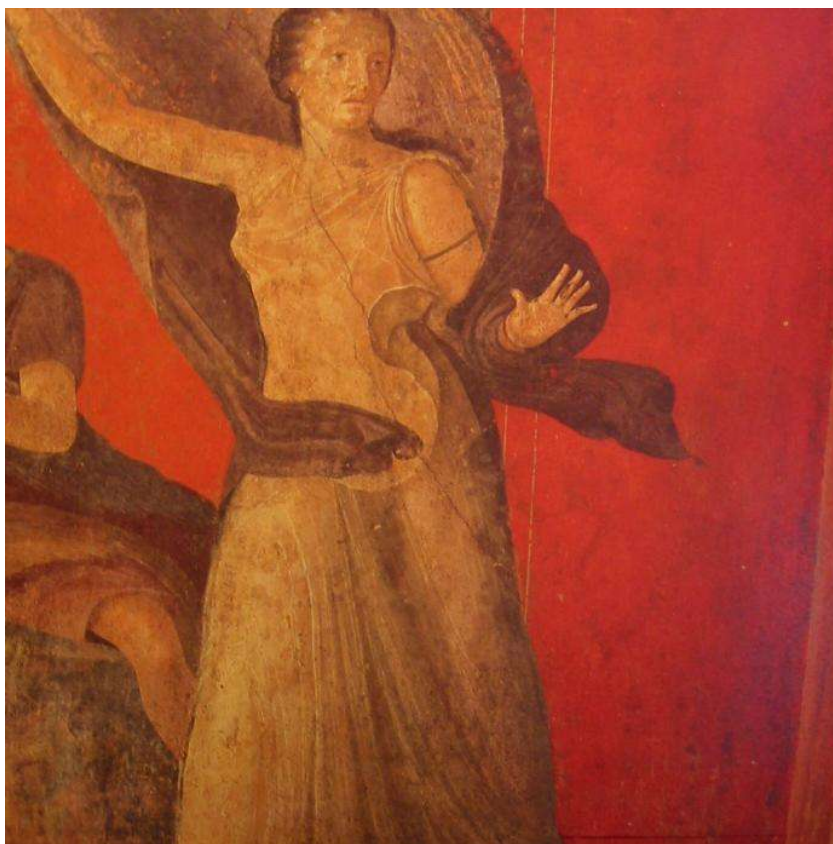


Fig. 26 The Villa of the Mysteries, Pompei, wall fresco representing the Mysteries
(after Alfonso de Franciscis, *La pittura Pompeiana*, pl 7)



Fig. 27 Sacrificial scene from the villa of the Mysteries Pompei
(after Alfonso de Franciscis, *La pittura Pompeiana*, pl. 12)



Fig. 28 Apollo on a wall fresco from the House of the M. Fabius Rufus in Pompeii, east apse, VII, Insula Occidentalis 16 17-22 (after *La peinture de Pompei*, p. 158, fig 276b)

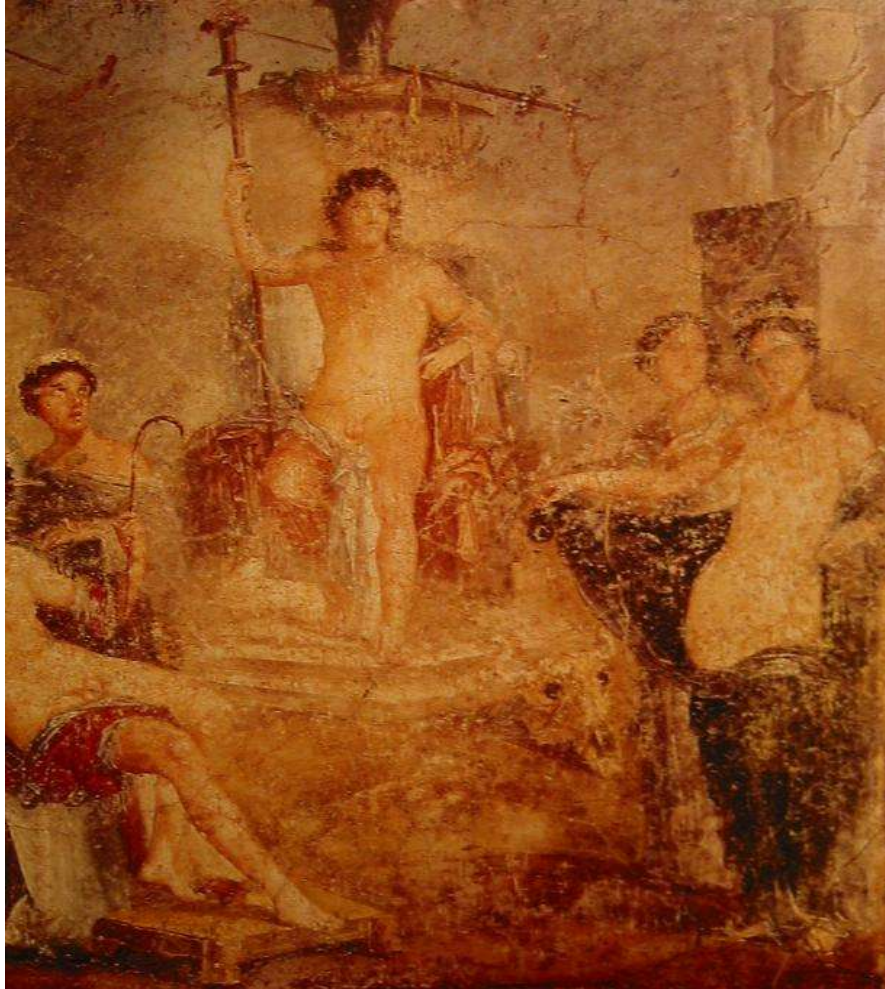


Fig. 29 Dionysus from a wall fresco from the House of the M. Gavius Rufus in Pompeii,
VII, 2, 16, inv. 9449
(after *La peinture de Pompei II*, p. 140, fig 2446)

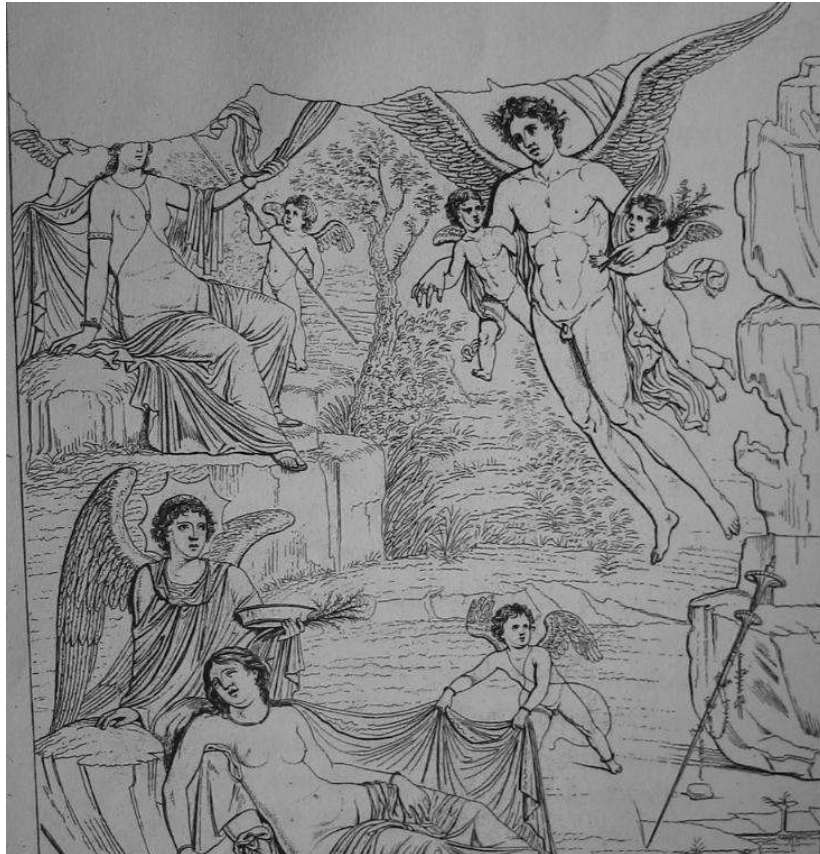


Fig. 30 Abandoned Ariadne, wall fresco from the Tomb of the Haterii
(after Museo Borbonico IV, 2)



Fig. 31 Ceres sitting on a throne, wall painting from the House of the Naviglio VI, 10, 11.
National Museum of Napoli inv. 9447
(after Museo Borbonico VI, 54)

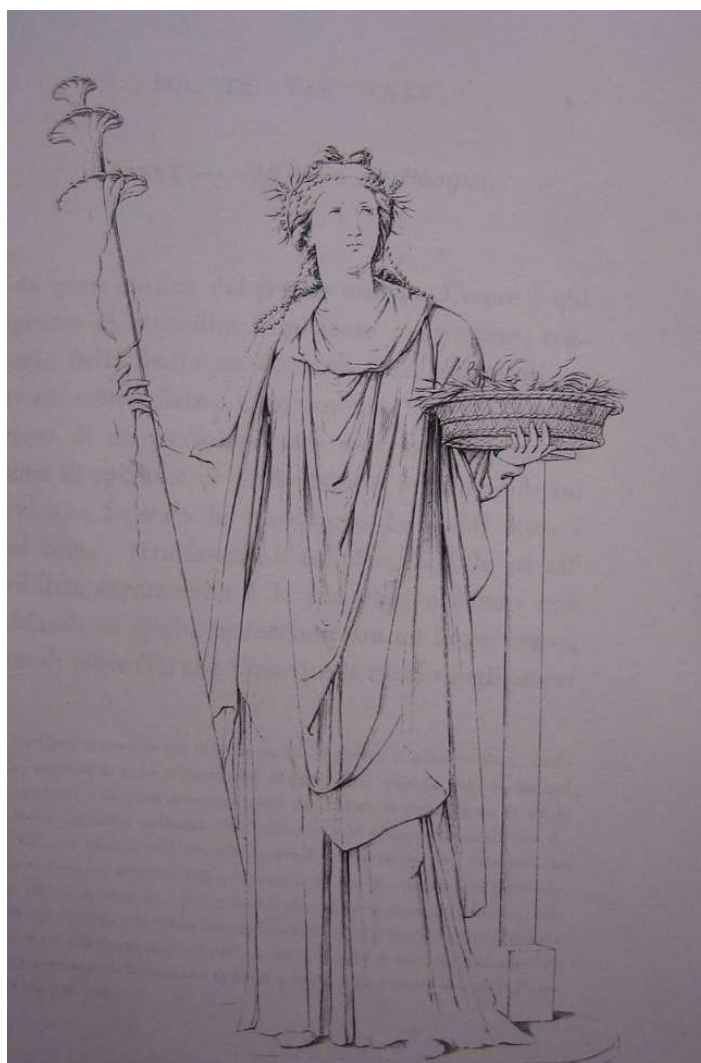


Fig. 32 Ceres standing, wall painting from the House of the Dioscuri VI 9. 6
(after Museo Borbonico, IX, 35)

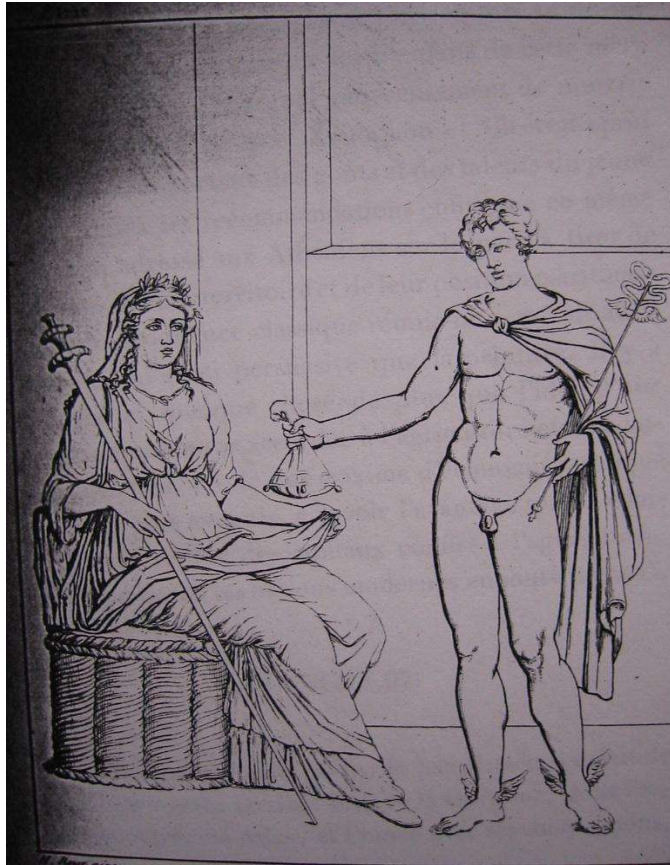


Fig. 33 Ceres sitting, from the House of the Maleagre in Pompeii VI 9, 2
(after Museo Borbonico, IX, 38)



Fig. 34 Isis-Demeter-Selene,
gem from the National Museum of Aquileia, Padova IV, 276
(after Sena Chiesa, *Le gemme del Museo Nazionale di Aquileia*, n. 1549; 2 tav LXXVIII)



Fig. 35 Luna on a gem
(after *Antike Gemmen in deutsches Sammlungen*, I, 3, pl. 160, n. 3153)

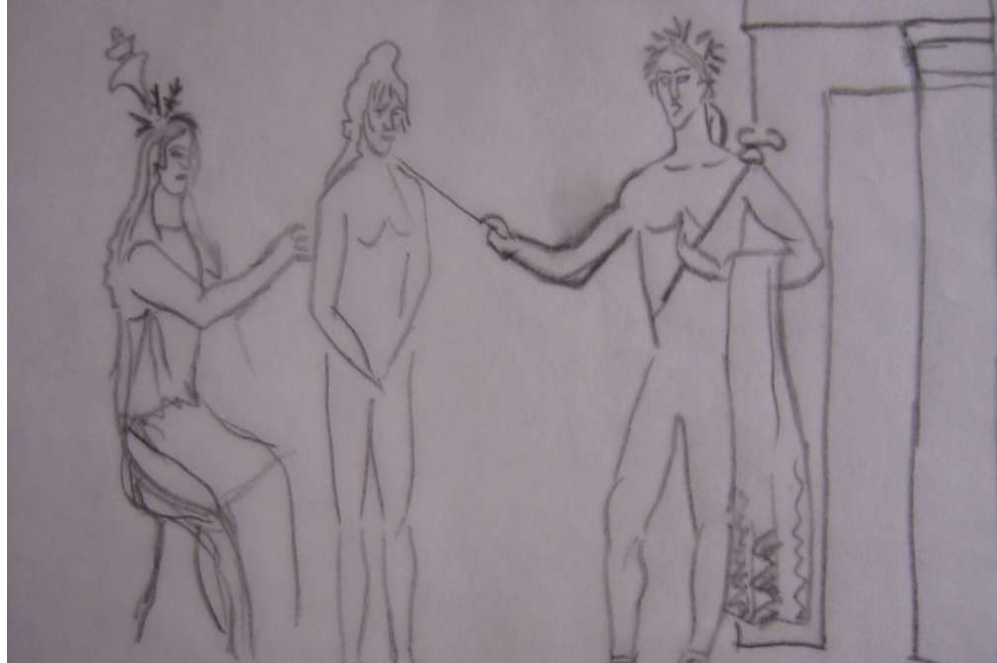


Fig. 36 Illustration of *Mors Voluntaria*
(By Ozge Gencay)



Fig. 37 Detail of the Female Figure
(photo by Ozge Gencay)



Fig. 38 Old Testament Illuminations in a Syriac manuscript showing the prophets (after H. Omont, 'Peintures de l'ancien testament dans un manuscrit Syriaque du VII^e ou du VIII^e siècle, "MAAR 17, 1909, pls. VII, VIII)



Fig. 39 Funeral Portraits of a Syrian family from Edessa (modern Urfa)
(after M. J. –B Chabot, “Notes sur quelques monuments épigraphiques Araméens,”
Journal Asiatique, 10th ser., VII, 1906 11, plate)



Fig. 40 Ganymede, from the House of the Buffet Supper in Daphne
(after Cimok, Antioch Mosaics, frontispiece)



Fig. 41 Orpheus from (Tarsus)
(after Füsun Tülek, Orpheus, The Magician, Pl. 19)

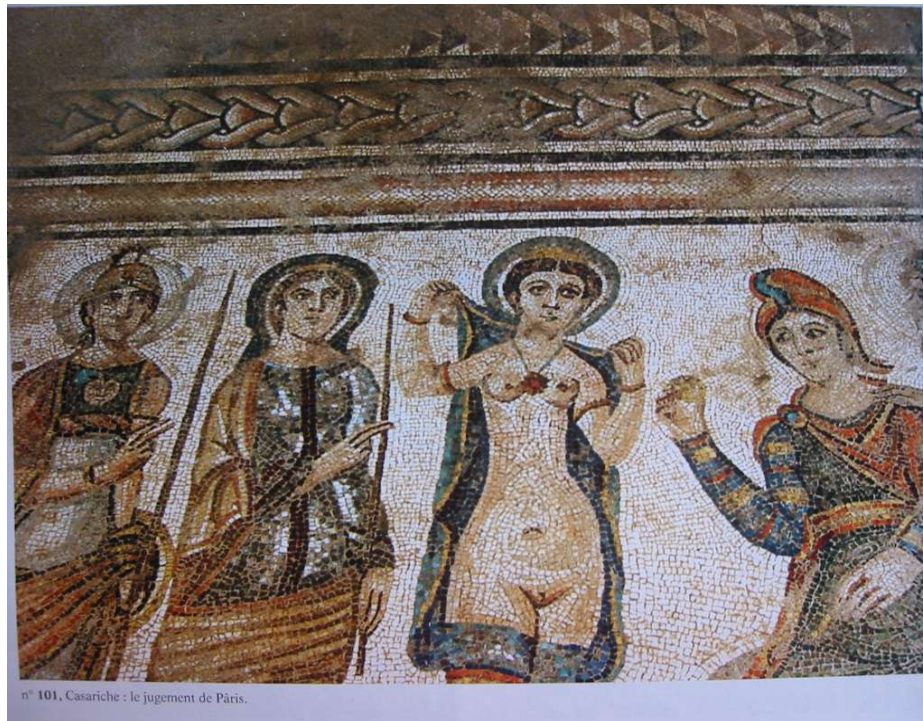


Fig. 42 Paris from the Villa de Casariche
(after Janine Lancha, *Mosaïque et culture dans l'oc cident Romain*, pl. H)



Fig. 43 Bust of Mithras on a marble altar from Mithraeum in Ptuj Inv. RL 146
(after LIMC VI s.v. “Mithras”, p. 328, fig. 32)



Fig. 44 Mosaic showing the medallion with the bust of Dionysus from Byblos
(after Doro Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*, p. 327, fig. 198)



Fig. 45 Bronze statuette of a female mime from Syria
(after Margaret Bieber, *The History of the Greek and Roman Theater*, p.249, fig. 829a-b)



Fig. 46 Dionysiac herm from Mahdia signed by Boethos of Chalkedon, Bardo Museum in Tunisia (after M. Bieber, *The Sculpture of the Hellenistic age*, fig 288)



Fig. 47 Personification of November on a mosaic from a Roman house in Carthage.
London, British Museum, no 20
(after David Parrish, *Season Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, pls. 17, 18)



Fig. 48 Detail of the Male Figure showing hair
(photo by Ozge Gencay)

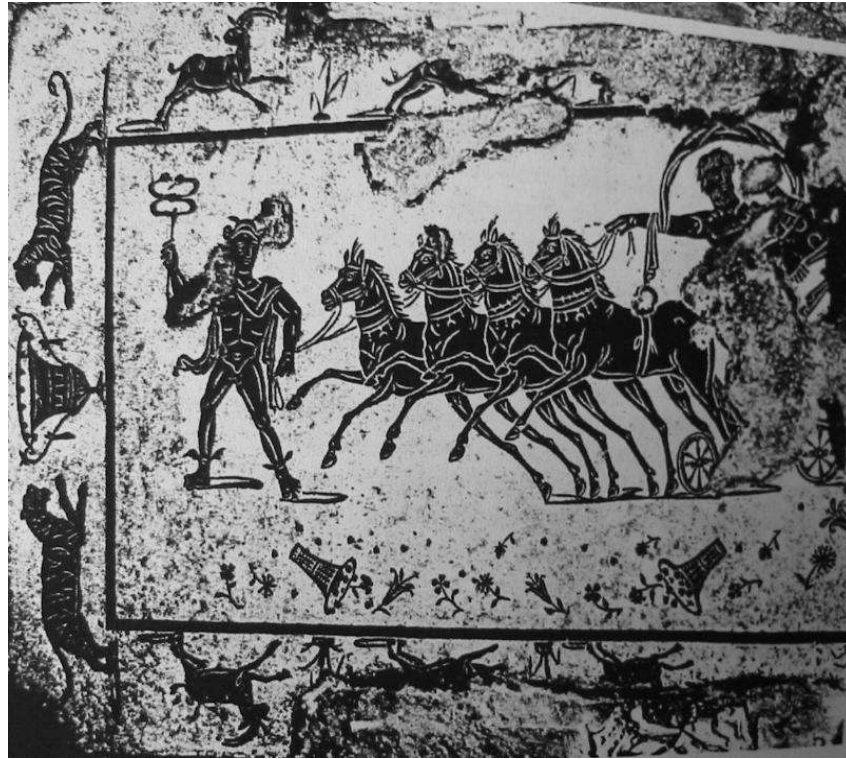


Fig. 49 Abduction of Persephone on a monochrome mosaic
From the Nekropole under St. Peter, Vatican
(after Ruth Linder, *Der Raub der Persephone in der antiken Kunst*, taf. 14, 52)



Fig. 50 Marble Sarapis bust found in Athribis. Alexandria Museum, inv. No. 23836 (after LIMC VII s.v. 'Sarapis', p.508, fig. 83a)

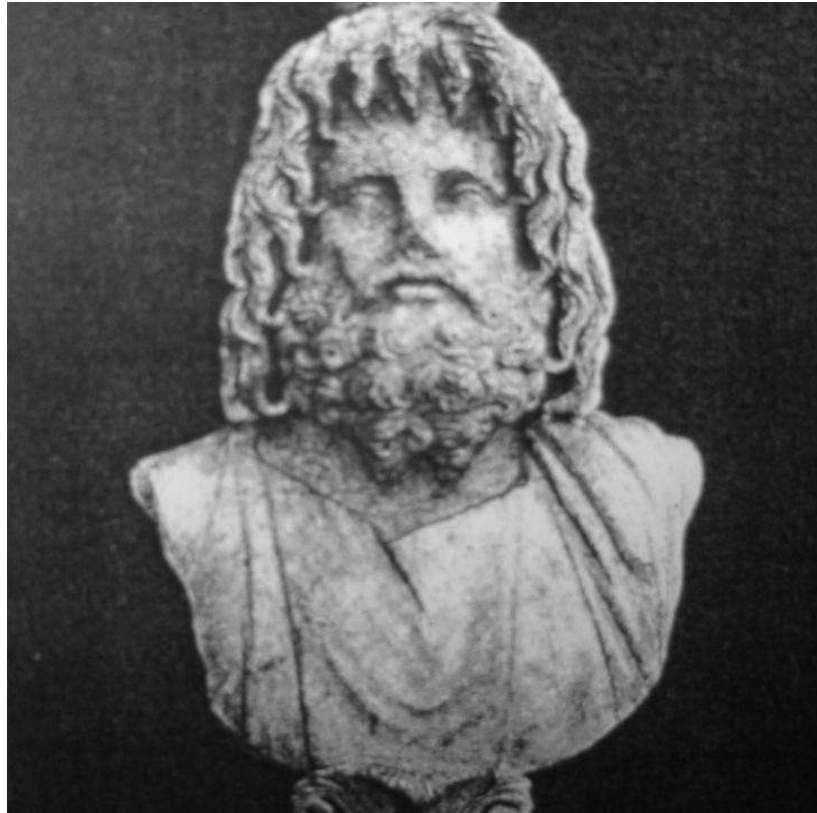


Fig. 51 Marble Sarapis bust found in Hama. National Museum of Copenhagen
(after LIMC VII, s.v. 'Sarapis', p. xxx, fig 93b)



Fig. 52 Illustration of *Mors Voluntaria*
(By Ozge Gencay)

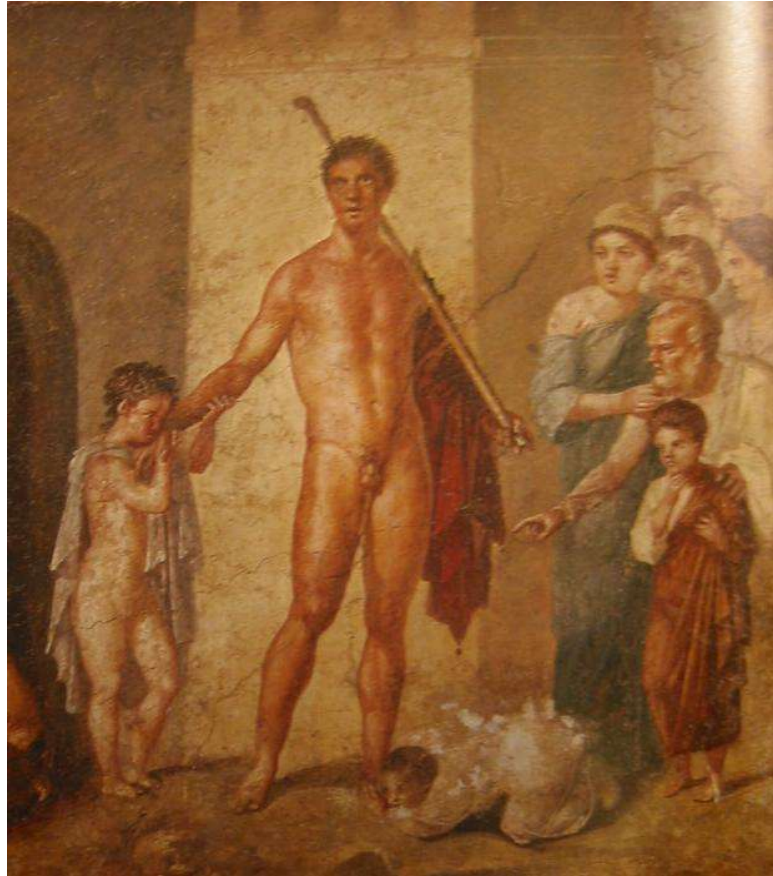


Fig. 53 Wall painting showing Theseus, House of Gavius Rufus VII, 2, 16, National Museum of Naples inv. 9043
(after La peinture de Pompéi II)



Fig. 54The Male Figure and Hermes
(photo by Ozge Gencay)



Fig. 55 Detail of the Male Figure's feet
(photo by Ozge Gencay)

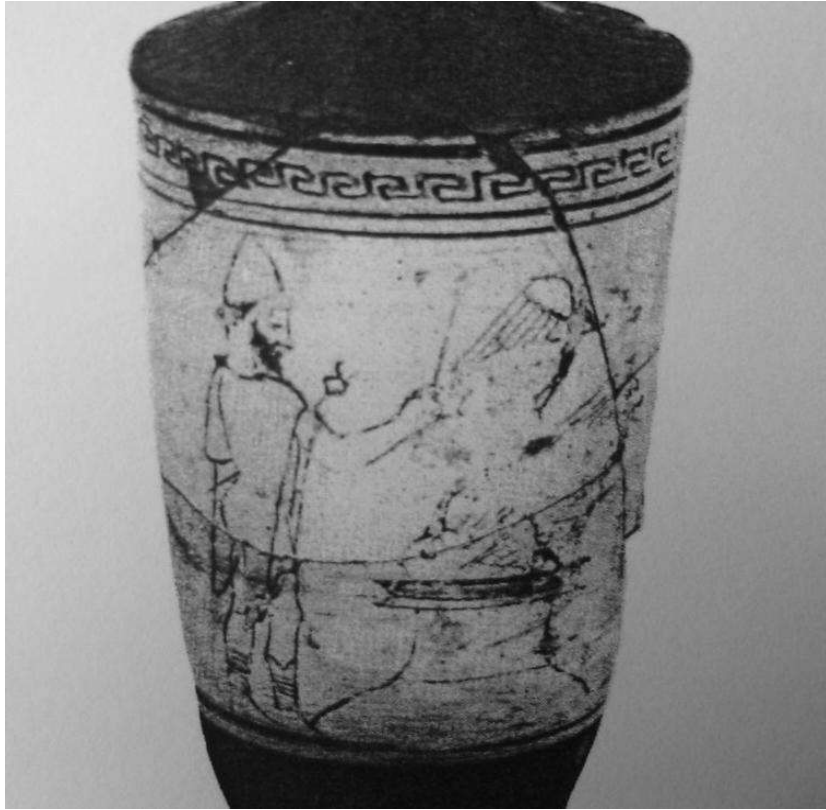


Fig. 56 Lekythos showing Hermes and winged souls, from Jena University 338
(after Emily Vermeule, *Aspects of Death in Early Greek Art and Poetry*, p. 26, fig. 19)

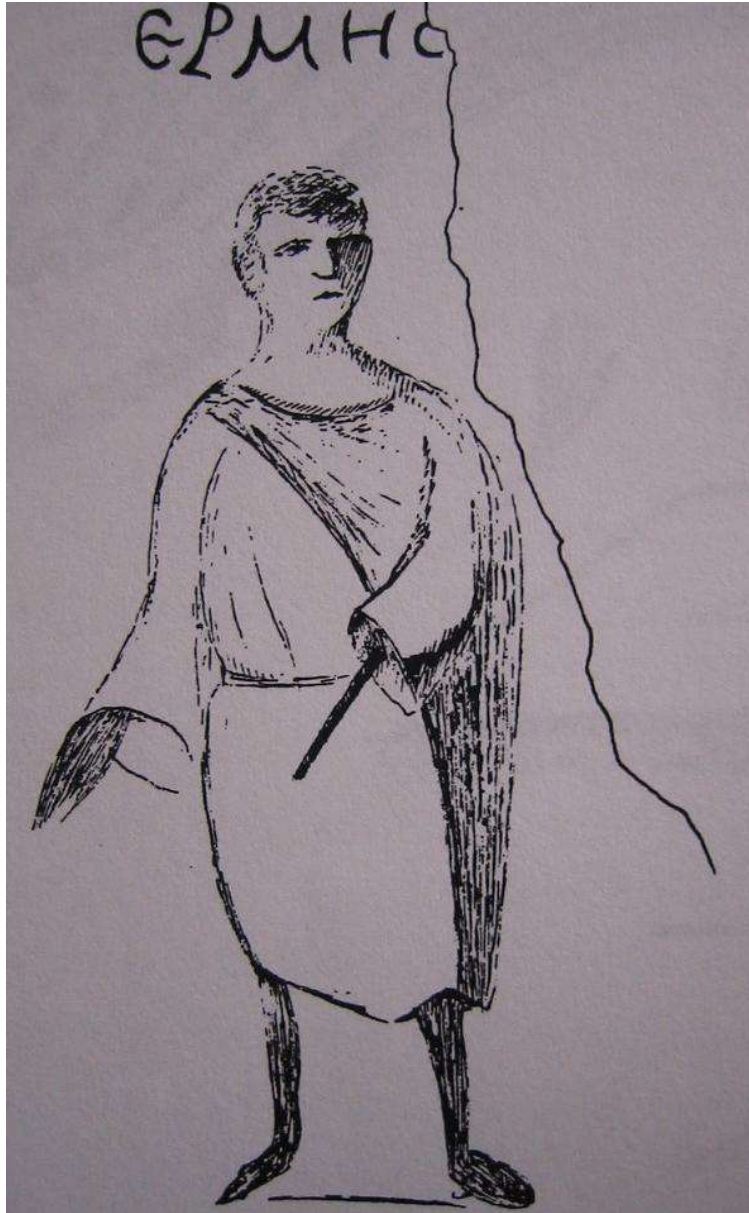


Fig. 57 Hermes, on a tomb painting from Massyaf Syria
(after F. Charpouthier, "Les peintures d'un hypogée funéraire de Massyaf," Syria 31
(1954), p. 193, fig. 10)

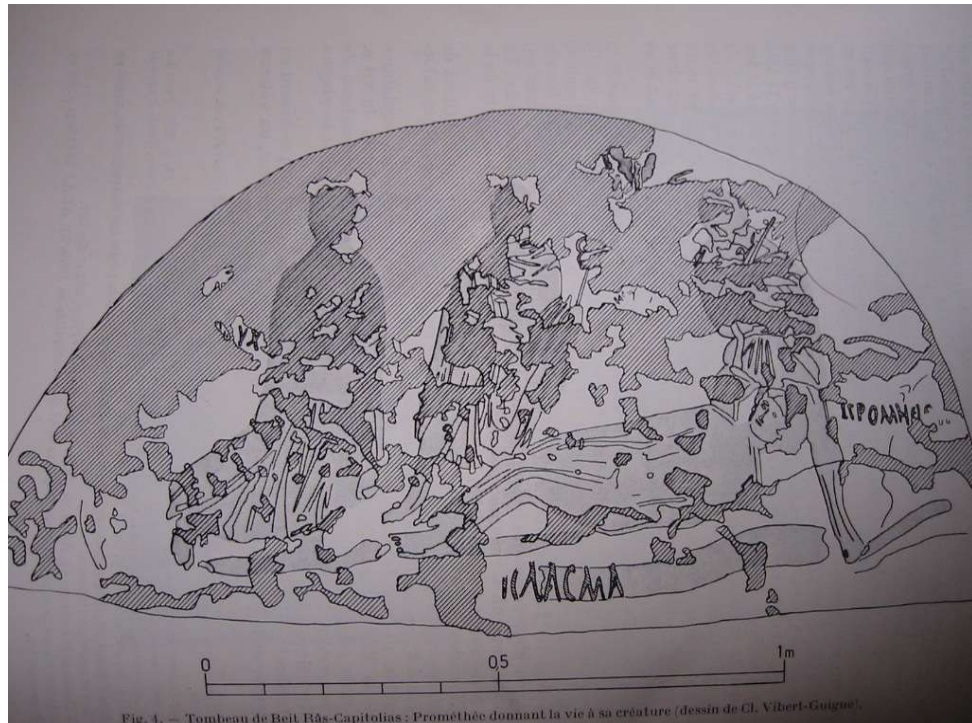


Fig. 58 Hermes on an in situ fresco from a tomb in Beit-Râs
(after the drawing by Cl. Vibert-Guigue in Fauzie Zayadine, *Iconographie classique et identités regionales*, BCH Supplement 14 (1986), p. 412, fig. 4)



Fig. 59 The House of the Drinking Contest, Seleucia Piera
the Art Museum of Princeton no. xxx
(after Christine Kondoleon, *Antioch: the Lost Ancient City*, Princeton, 2000, p.55, fig. 3)

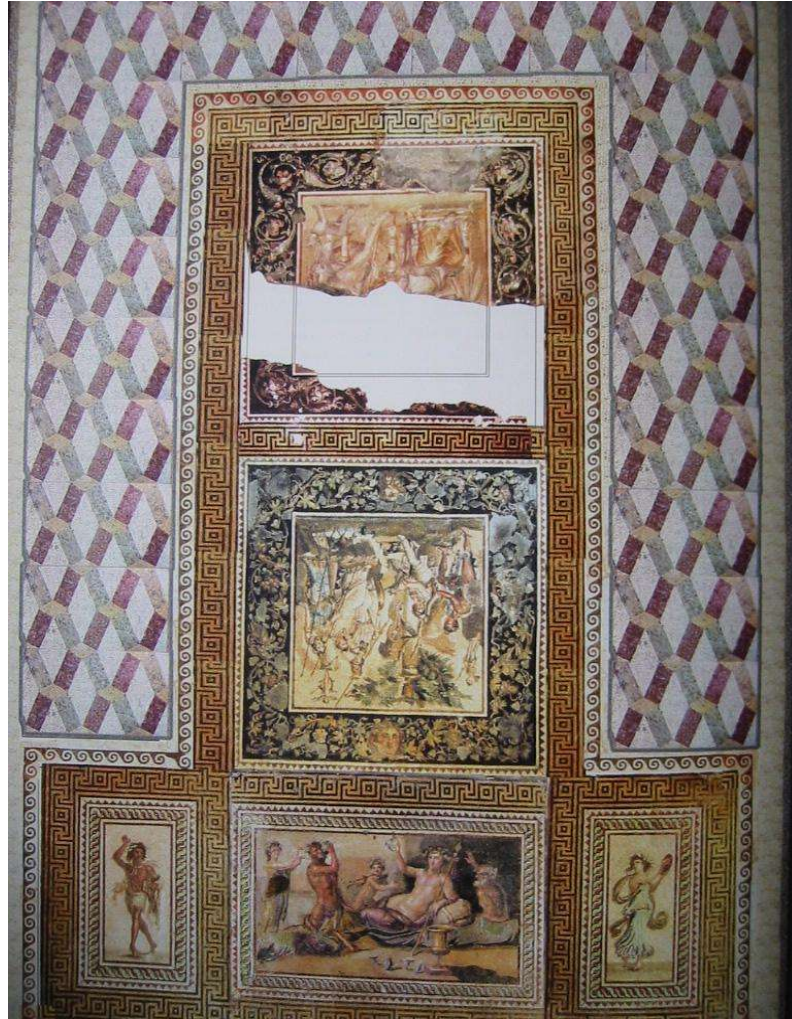


Fig. 60 Computer generated photo composite of the mosaics
The dining room of The Atrium House
(after Christine Kondoleon, *Antioch: the Lost Ancient City*, Princeton, 2000, p. 62)



Fig. 61 The Triumph of Dionysus mosaic from *triclinium*,
The House of Dionysus, Nea Paphos
(after Kondoleon, *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World*, fig. 239)



Fig, 62 The House of the Red Pavement,
Room 1, Daphne
(after Cimok, Antioch Mosaics, fig. 11)



Fig. 63 Wall painting from Ostia Hermes with the ship *Isis Geminiana*
(after LIMC II s.v. ‘Hermes’, p. 517, no. & fig. 215)

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