

“The Mosaic Pavements at Arsameia on the Nymphaios” (unpublished).
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X. THE MOSAIC PAVEMENTS AT ARSAMEIA ON THE NYMPHAIOS

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Mosaic pavement I (**Fig. 3**) was found in 1954 at the edge of the slope at the northwest side of the Eski Kale, at approximately one meter below the surface (Level 999.5 m.). Part of the center and the southwest corner of the mosaic, which originally covered an area of more than 80 square meters (H3-4/X 9 in Plan 3, in the original publication), was almost completely preserved, while scattered tesserae were found around the plateau and south slope.² The pavement is in many areas discolored probably as the result of a fire, indicating that much of the destruction took place in antiquity; the remains of the building to which the mosaic belongs were almost completely destroyed during the construction in the Middle Ages that began after the 10th century and later.³ Remains to a length of ca 13 m. exist of the western wall enclosing the room with the mosaic pavement and the adjacent rooms. Enough of the design is intact to permit reconstructing the original form of the mosaic as a rectangle measuring 10.60 x 8.30 m., with the long sides oriented almost exactly east-west, the short sides north-south.

The tesserae of the borders are roughly cubic in shape varying from 1 to 3 cm. on a side. They are of stone, of three main colors: black (bituminous limestone),⁴ pink (limestone), and white (limestone).⁵ Bits of red-dish terracotta seem to have been used occasionally.⁶ The elements of the central panel contain much smaller tesserae, down to 0.5 cm. and the tips of the flower petals are a more highly saturated shade of red. The tesserae are laid in rows, following generally the contours of the design. The variations in the size and shape of the tesserae however, give the design an uneven and imprecise character. The mortar is white, granular, and was not tinted to match the adjacent tesserae. The leveling of the uneven terrain was achieved with a filling layer of small and larger pebbles, set in white mortar.

The mosaic is composed of a series of decorative borders surrounding a central, rectangular panel.

¹ Plans, photographs, archaeological data, and specimens of tesserae were provided by the excavators. The writer has never seen the mosaics at Arsameia. Chapters and site plans referenced here may be found in the original publication: Friedrich Karl Dörner and Theresa Goell, eds., *Arsameia am Nymphaios. Die Ausgrabungen im Hierothesion des Mithradates Kallinikos von 1953-1956*, Berlin 1963 (of which this essay comprises pp. 191-6). I have retrieved the two concluding paragraphs from my original English version.

The abbreviations follow those of the German Archaeological Institute, which may be found at the URL: http://www.dainst.org/static/forschung_en_abk1.html

² See Chapter IX 2, in the original publication.

³ This terminus is derived from the ceramic finds of the Transitional Ware; see Chapter XII 3 in the original publication.

⁴ The color is actually a bluish gray, when it is wet it appears to be black.

⁵ The very pale and chalky appearance of the white limestone tesserae is certainly mostly a result of the fire that destroyed the area.

⁶ The excavators want to thank Thomas E. Brown and his colleagues at the American Overseas Petroleum Company in Ankara for their help in analyzing the tesserae.

Reading from the outside inward, the borders are as follows (**Figs. 1 and 3**)⁷:

- 1) a plain, white outer fill (**Fig. 1 B**).
- 2) a border of pink and white "crenellations," each section consisting of three merlons and three crenels (**Fig. 1 A and B**).
- 3) a pink and black wave-crest border (**Fig. 1 A and 2 A**)
- 4) a white and red step border (**Fig. 2 A**).
- 5) repetition of the wave-crest border (no. 3) in black and white.
- 6) a black and white meander framed with light red border⁸ (**Fig. 1 A**).
- 7) a white bead-and-reel on black background (**Fig. 3**).
- 8) an ivy-scroll border in which black stalks spring from the corners and sprout leaves as they curl toward the center of each side where they meet the stalk coming from the adjacent corner; the black scrolls are set against a white background (**Fig. 3**).
- 9) a second bead-and-reel (no 9), identical with the previous one.
- 10) a saw-tooth border in black and white framed at the outer side by a red border (**Fig. 3**).

About two thirds the central panel was recovered; at the north and east sides the borders had been destroyed but we can deduce from the preserved parts that the central panel was a rectangle. Its measurements are 2.62 m. from east to west and 0.64 m. from north to south, respectively 3.10 m. and 1.14 m. if we include border no. 10 and the adjacent red frame. The central panel shows a red "Rhodian" amphora⁹ with double handles and a pointed base before a black ground, 0.58 m. tall, flanked in heraldically by two white dolphins, whose eyes are green-yellow-red. At the ends of the panel are two floral designs each with six pink petals, the tips of which are red. At the four corners of an imaginary square enclosing each flower are small, white tendrils with black leaves. The orientation of the central motif of the panel, with the foot of the vase and heads of the fish located at the south side of the central panel, makes it probable that the main entrance to this room was located in the same direction, especially because the steep slope at the north side would not have provided enough space for an entrance.

In the year 1956 we discovered a little farther north in H 5-6/X7-8 (Plan 3, in the original publication) a second mosaic floor¹⁰ (**Fig. 2 B** and Fig. 26 of the original publication), which shows similar border patterns of crenellations, continuous steps and saw-teeth as the above described mosaic. The colors were similar as well; blue-black alternating with white and red.

⁷ The color values in Figs. 1 A and 2 A are misleading because of the impact of the fire; the white limestone has been blackened by the ashes. The lighter tone appearing in the borders is actually black, as can be seen in Fig. 1 B (photographed after cleaning and wetting).

⁸ The meander is unusual; because the bands run through and do not cross each other (Fig. 3). Fig. 1 A does not show the shape correctly because of the fire.

⁹ Among the ceramic finds were two examples of inscribed Rhodian handles; see the Addendum to Chapter XII 2 in the original publication.

¹⁰ Because the excavators only discovered the second mosaic at the end of the excavation in 1956, this paragraph was inserted in the year 1958 by Th. Goell.

The mosaic was also oriented north-south. So far, only a small area of 4.50 m. east-west and 3.30 m. north-south has been uncovered. The mosaic is located at the height of 999.7 m., under the latest layer of the ring wall from the last construction period, at one meter beneath its surface (see Pl. 44A, in the original publication) and almost at the same level as mosaic floor I. The north border of the floor is located directly at the edge of the plateau. It shows that here the steep slope was once bordered by a thick wall. This wall later came down and slid down the slope. Parts of it still lie at the foot of the slope. The pieces of the mosaic are made of the same material as the neighboring floor, but they are much bigger and cruder and include many irregular squares; their sides are up to 4 cm. long and their height varies tremendously. The black stones are river pebbles, split to show the flat face.¹¹ The uneven stone floor was first covered with sand onto which larger oval pebbles in white mortar were set as a layer and on top of this the mosaic floor was laid into white mortar as well. The observation of this second mosaic floor is very important. It shows that in Hellenistic times—as we know now—a larger complex of buildings had existed in this location. Because only a small area has been uncovered, it is not possible to tell if there is a direct connection between the two floors.

From the present findings of the excavation at the southern slope of Eski Kale and of the plateau one can deduce that the chief florescence of Arsameia was during the Hellenistic period. However, because neither inscriptions nor coins or ceramics were discovered together with the mosaics we must turn to their formal characteristics for indications of date. Of the decorative motifs in the borders the "crenellation" is most useful for this purpose, since it is relatively uncommon and seems to occur within a fairly limited period of time.¹² Examples are known in many Greek and Hellenized centers of the Mediterranean including Alexandria, Pergamon, Lykosoura, Malta, Delos, and Pompeii. And all the instances are datable in the second century B.C., or very close to it.¹³ The motif seems not to have existed

¹¹ Their size varies between 2.4-3.5 cm. The red mosaic stones are smaller; their size varies between 1.4-2.5 cm.

¹² The most recent discussion of the crenellation motif in mosaic pavements is that by K. Parlasca, *Die römischen Mosaiken in Deutschland*, Berlin 1959, 129 ff., and B. Brown, *Ptolemaic Paintings and Mosaics and the Alexandrian Style. Ptolemaic Paintings and Mosaics*, Cambridge, Mass. 1957, 71f.

¹³ Mrs. Brown places the Sophilos mosaic at Alexandria around 200 B.C. (ibid. 74, pl. XXXVIII). The northwest room of Palace V at Pergamon is dated by Th. Wiegand (*Altortümer von Pergamon*, I, Berlin-Leipzig 1930, 65ff. pl. 16) to the period of Eumenes II (197-159 B.C.); the preserved parts of the mosaic are now again on display in the Pergamon museum (compare W. v. Massow, *Führer durch das Pergamonmuseum*, Berlin 1932 (2nd ed. 1936), and *Baukunst der römischen Kaiserzeit*, Berlin 1954, 79ff. with information about the restoration that had become necessary because of the impact of the war and technical details of the work). Room 38 of the house of the Consul Attalos is dated around the middle of the second century B.C. by Dörpfeld (AM 32, 1907, 167ff. pl. 17.). For the Lykosoura pavement see below. The villa at Rabat, Malta, where the motif occurs in a mosaic between two columns in the courtyard, was formerly dated in the first century A.D., but the mosaics must be assigned to the second or early first century B.C. at the very latest (T. Ashby, JRS 5, 1915, 34ff. fig. 5; for the earlier date, cf. Brown, op. cit. 71, n. 211, with further references). The House of the Dolphins at Delos, where the design appears in the impluvium, is assigned by Chamonard to the late Hellenistic period (*Le Quartier du Théâtre*, Exploration archéologique de Délos, fasc. VIII, 2 Paris, 1924, 404 ff. pl. 53 = M. Bulard, Mon Piot 14, 1908, pl. 12); cf. Brown op. cit. 72 n. 214.

prior to that period, and—with few exceptions¹⁴—to have gone out of favor afterwards.¹⁵ This simple geometric design, therefore, provides an initial suggestion of the specific phase of Hellenistic development to which the Eski Kale mosaic belongs.

A second notable feature of the pavement is its general composition as a series of borders framing a central panel. This concentric principle of design has been observed as characteristic of Hellenistic pavements,¹⁶ although the specific form it may take, i.e., square, rectangular, or even round, varies considerably.¹⁷ The important consideration in this kind of design is that the central element is small in relation to the elaborate framing devices that surround it. Here again a chronological factor may be involved. Pebble mosaics, the only figurative pavements earlier than the group under consideration, rarely have more than two or three borders around the main composition, which occupies the greater proportion of the area covered by the mosaic.¹⁸ Similarly, in "Roman" pavements of the first century B.C. the borders are again reduced in number.¹⁹ By way of contrast, the floor of the northwest room of Palace V at Pergamon has seven figured borders, the circle-in-square pavement in the House of the Dolphins at Delos has at least eight. The Eski Kale mosaic, therefore, with its ten borders, fits very well into this environment.

A final point for comparison is the composition of the central panel of the Eski Kale pavement—an heraldically symmetrical arrangement of three main elements. This type of composition is known in

Miss Blake implies a second century B.C. date in her discussion of the pavement of House VII, vii, 5 at Pompeii, in which the motif is employed (MemAmAc 8, 1930, 38 and 73 pls. 2, 2 and 6, 2; cf. Brown op. cit.).

¹⁴ Examples probably of a later date are: Pompeii, house VIII, iv, 15, dated by Miss Blake in the first century A. D. (ibid. 12 n. 7 and 106 pl. 31, 1); Tivoli, Villa Adriana (P. Gusman, *La Villa impériale de Tibur*, Paris 1904, 225 fig. 327; cf. Parlasca op. cit. 131 n. 6, where the crenellated border is dated in the late republican-augustan period); an additional example, perhaps of the second century A.D., occurs at Itálica in Spain (A. Parladé, "Excavaciones en Itálica," in: *Junta superior del Tesoro Artístico, Sección de Excavaciones, Memorias*, 1933, pl. XXVII).

¹⁵ As Mrs. Brown observes (op. cit. 72 n. 214), the abstract design in these Hellenistic mosaics is not the same as the imitations of actual fortifications which appear in the borders of other, generally later, pavements (concerning which cf. R. Herbig, *Germania* 9, 1925, 138 ff., with further references; Parlasca op. cit. 130ff.).

¹⁶ R. P. Rinks, *Catalogue of the Greek, Etruscan and Roman Paintings and Mosaics in the British Museum*, London 1933, p. LIII.

¹⁷ The Sophilos mosaic in Alexandria, and the pavement of the northwest room of Palace V, Pergamon, illustrate the principle in square floors; it is employed for rectangular areas at Lykosoura and in the Eski Kale floor itself; in the impluvium mosaic of the House of the Dolphins at Delos, the system is applied to the circle-in-square type of composition that had occurred in earlier pebble mosaics such as that at Palatitsa (BCH 81, 1957, 603 fig. 11).

¹⁸ Even in pebble mosaics there may have been a tendency to multiply the friezes that commonly surround the main panel, in addition to decorative borders. A mosaic found at Sparta showing a triton in a small central square framed by several friezes and borders, recalls pebble mosaics in certain respects, though it does not itself seem to have been executed in that technique (cf. ADelt 4, 1918, 177 ff. fig. 1). While the vagueness of the chronology of this period renders any hypothesis speculative, it may be possible to regard such a work as exemplifying one aspect of the transition from pebble to tessellated pavements.

¹⁹ One of the tendencies of this period is to expand the central area as a field for a decorative design, usually a uniform pattern, surrounded by a relatively simple framing system; the floor thus appears more as an abstract carpet than a field for one large figural composition as in the pebble mosaics. This then becomes an important characteristic of mosaics of the first century A.D. (cf. Blake op. cit. 96).

pebble mosaics,²⁰ but again the closest parallels are among the same group of pavements we have been discussing. At Delos it appears twice in the House of the Masks: in room e, where two centaurs in diamond-shaped panels flank the famous emblem of Dionysus,²¹ and, much closer to the Eski Kale design, in room 1, where an amphora is placed between two circular rosettes, all within the long rectangular panel that forms the central element of the floor.²² Finally, the central panel of the pavement of the Temple at Lykosoura also has this kind of design,²³ two animals face each other heraldically and though an ancient repair obliterated most of the motif between them, it must have provided an axis for the composition.²⁴

In view of the similarities with these floors, we are justified in suggesting that the Eski Kale mosaic cannot be far removed from them in time. Now the House of the Masks at Delos was assigned by the excavator to the first half of the second century B.C.,²⁵ and, with the exception of the Dionysus *emblem* in room e, this dating is supported by Mrs. Brown, the scholar most recently to consider the question.²⁶

The Lykosoura pavement is more problematic. The temple has been given dates from the fourth century B.C. to the time of Hadrian; and certainly more than one building period is involved.²⁷ On the other hand, the cult statues of the temple, by Damophon of Messene, are by now generally accepted as dating from a renovation in the first half of the second century B.C.²⁸ While there is evidence that the mosaic too was a replacement for an original flagstone covering of the cella,²⁹ it is of course not necessary to assume that it was installed at the same time as the cult statue.³⁰ The lack of adequate reproductions makes it impossible to judge from details of style, so that we can only consider the composition of the floor as a whole. Since this, as we have seen, is closely linked to other pavements of the early second century, this seems for now to be the most reasonable classification.³¹

From all these observations, we conclude that the Eski Kale floors are related to mosaic pavements of the second century B.C., particularly those which appear to belong to the early part of that

²⁰ It occurs, for example, in the pebble mosaic found at Tarsus (H. Goldman, *Excavations at Gözlü Kule, Tarsus*, I, Princeton 1950, 10 figs. 12 and 13; at a level dated late third-early second century B.C.).

²¹ J. Chamonard, *Les Mosaïques de la Maison des Masques*, Exploration archéologique de Délos, fasc. XIV, Paris 1933, 11ff. pl. 2.

²² Ibid. 36ff. pl. 8; for the dolphins cf. 40 fig. 12.

²³ *AEphem* 1899, cols. 43 ff. pl. 3.

²⁴ Ibid. col. 45.

²⁵ Délos Fasc. XIV 11.

²⁶ Ibid. 75 ff.

²⁷ Cf. E. Meyer in *RE* XIII (1927) col. 2428 ff.

²⁸ Ibid. cols. 2429f; cf. M. Bieber, *The Sculpture of the Hellenistic Age*, New York 1955, 158 f.

²⁹ J.G. Frazer (ed.), *Pausanias*, IV, London 1898, 368.

³⁰ As Miss Blake observes, *op. cit.*, 74.

³¹ Prof. Phyllis Williams-Lehmann, Smith College, has recently conducted investigations at the temple at Lykosoura which it is hoped may shed further light on these problems.

century. It seems unlikely, however, that the Eski Kale mosaics are actually contemporary with these works. By comparison with the mosaics of Pergamon and Delos they are rough and inelegant, with relatively large tesserae, irregularly cut and irregularly set. In fact, they have all the earmarks of a provincial reflection of a style, technique, and design imported from more sophisticated centers. For this reason we should probably allow for an appreciable interval between the sources of inspiration and this by-product. It seems safest, therefore, to conclude that the Eski Kale mosaics were produced late in the second or early in the first century B.C.³²

This dating derived from the comparable material relates quite well to the results the excavations in Arsameia have produced so far. The plateau belongs without a doubt to the areas of the Hierothesion that Mithradates Kallinikos had built, according to the large inscription excavated at the southern slope of Eski Kale,³³ however, it received its magnificent decoration only from his son Antiochus.³⁴ The archeological evidence does not permit us to determine whether the mosaic floors date from the construction period under Mithradates Kallinikos, who reigned at the end of the second and the beginning of the first century B.C., or were executed during the beautification under Antiochus.³⁵

The special importance of the mosaic floors in Arsameia, dating slightly earlier than or contemporary with the sculptures at Karakusch and Sesónk, antedating the great tomb of Antiochus I at Nimrud Dagħ, lies in the witness they bear to the direct relations between the early rulers of Kommagene and Hellenistic culture. We would, of course, like to know how this artistic transaction worked, if native masters followed imported pattern books or if Greek craftsmen were responsible—a question that has been asked in other areas, ceramics as well as sculpture, to which there is at present no satisfactory response. In any case, the pavements' stylistic relationship to these monuments is indeed remarkable; it reveals a much closer affinity to Hellenistic principle than do the tomb sculptures, with their hybrid style and iconography.³⁶ Possibly the explanation for these differences is a matter of chronology. The mosaics may represent the pure if provincial form of Hellenism from which the sculptures were a subsequent development wherein that imported style was brought to terms with local oriental tradition. Certainly this would conform to the general process of "reorientalization" that took place as the minor Hellenistic kingdoms of the near east asserted their independence.³⁷ But other explanations are possible, and any

³² One may point out in this context that the two Rhodian amphora handles discovered in Arsameia may be dated to the second half of the second century B. C., one of them probably around 125 B.C. (see Addendum to Chapter XII 2, of the original publication).

³³ See Chapter IV 3 lines 28 ff., of the original publication.

³⁴ See Chapter IV 3 lines 35 ff., of the original publication.

³⁵ The architectural remains of this area have been analyzed by Th. Goell in Chapter IX 2, of the original publication.

³⁶ F. Krüger, *Orient und Hellas in den Denkmälern und Inschriften des Königs Antiochos I von Kommagene*, Greifswald 1937.

³⁷ M. Rostovtzeff, *Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World*, Oxford 1941, II, 841 ff., esp. 849.

solution depends upon whether the mosaics are an isolated instance or representative of a broader phenomenon. This also is a question to which our present state of ignorance concerning the art-history of this period and area does not permit a definitive answer.

The most we can say is that the Eski Kale mosaics are of interest primarily because of their location. They demonstrate the presence of a powerful Hellenic element in a very remote part of Syria, long after the time of Alexander and before the Roman domination. They suggest that the general background of Hellenism against which much of near eastern art during those two eras must be understood, was not wholly interrupted in the period between them.



A

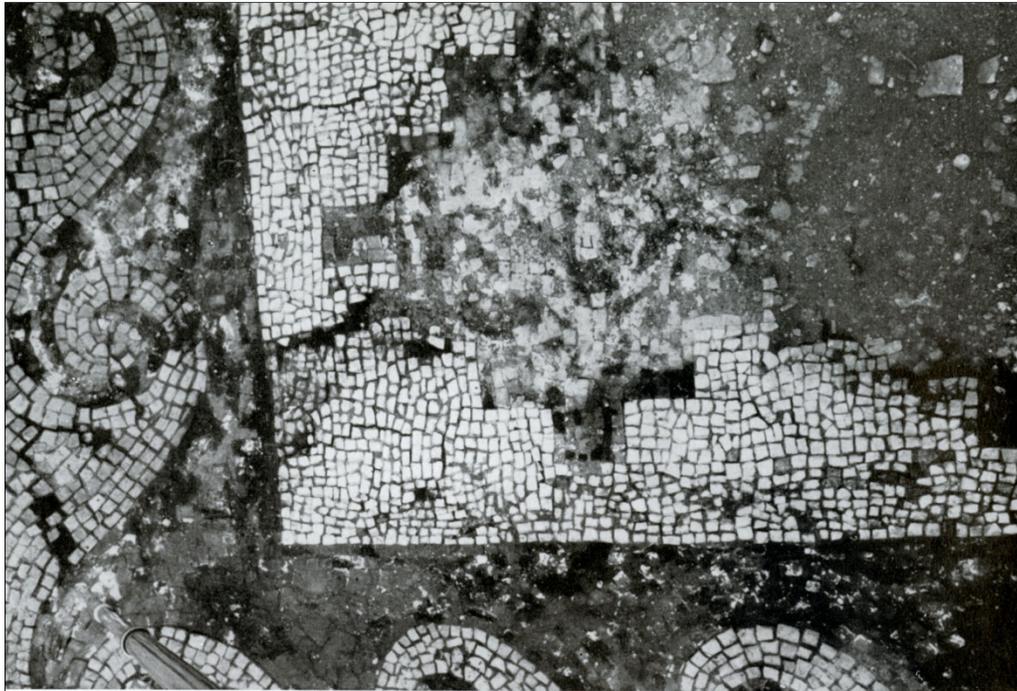


B

Fig. 1 Hellenistic mosaic pavement I at the northwestern side of the plateau

- A. Southwestern corner at the begin of the excavations. Shown here from the South (before cleaning).
- B. Crenellation border (border no 2) and wave-crest pattern (border no 3). Detail of the southwestern corner. Shown from the West.

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A



B

Fig. 2 Hellenistic mosaic pavement I and II

- A. Mosaic pavement I at the northwestern side of the plateau. Detail of the step pattern (border no 4).
- B. Mosaic pavement II at the northern edge of the plateau. Border with crenellations and remains of the foundations of pebbles. Shown from the north.

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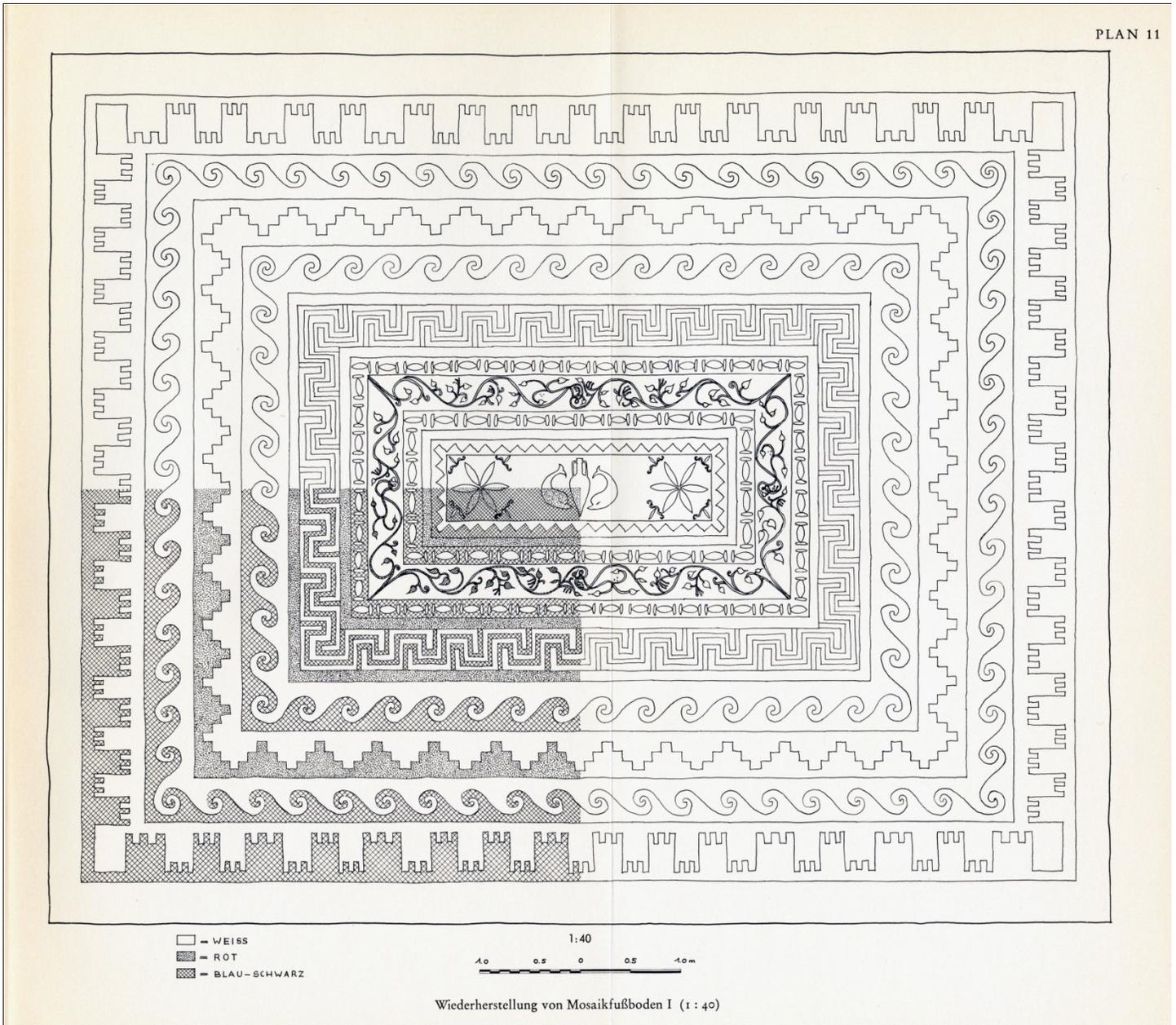


Fig. 3 Reconstruction of mosaic pavement I