

# Work in Progress. Trade Depictions on the so-called Topographical Border of the ‘Yakto Mosaic’

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Since its discovery in 1932, the so-called Yakto mosaic<sup>1</sup> (fig. 1) – also called ‘Megalopsychia mosaic’ – has been declared as “an historical and topographical monument of the first order”.<sup>2</sup> The framing imagery frieze – the ‘topographical border’<sup>3</sup> – adds to a series of architectural depictions a crowning layer of descriptive toponyms. At least two buildings labelled *Κασταλία* and *ἡ Παλλάς* on the Southern corner of the border can with no doubt be attributed to two monumentally extended antique sources near Daphne, and another building labelled *τὸ ὀλυμπιακόν* actually shows the Olympic stadium of Daphne.<sup>4</sup> Presumably, the whole border refers to actual buildings in Antioch’s prominent suburb Daphne, maybe even in Antioch itself. While scholars have subsequently sought to understand the representational intent and pattern of the sequence of buildings,<sup>5</sup> the underlying narrative of the border becomes apparent when the mosaic is viewed as a whole: the central medallion shows the personification of generosity

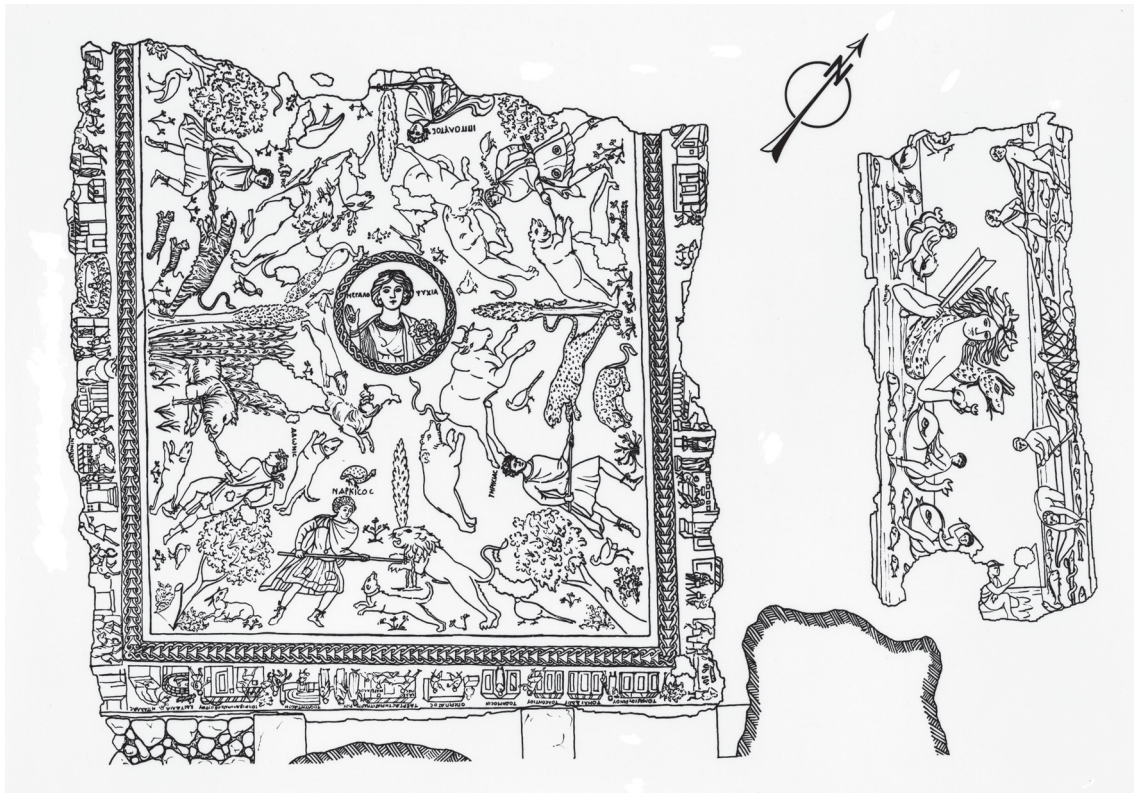


Fig. 1: Plan of Megalopsychia and Thetis mosaics. Excavated by Prost in 1932.

(Μεγαλοψυχία), a virtue the client obviously prides himself on.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, the topographical border shows and names buildings from the surrounding area in whose construction or renovation the client has rendered outstanding services, thus staging his munificence and patronage.<sup>7</sup>

For a long time the figural layer of the border, that is situated off the architectural depictions, remained rather untouched by these considerations. These figures have in most cases been considered to fill in the architectural scenery to provide an image of a lively city and its landscape, in which representatives of two social classes appear, each befitting their social status.<sup>8</sup> However, the exemplary observation of three figural ‘scenes’ on the Eastern corner of the border (fig. 2–3) shows that these images and their contribution to understanding the topographical border have been underestimated.

The best discernable and therefore best recognizable image (scene 2) shows two bare-footed figures dressed in short sleeveless tunics, standing on both sides of what seems to be an upright standing solid trunk. The figure on the left holds something onto the trunk, while it has its right arm raised above it. Comparing it to a funerary relief of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, nowadays displayed in Dresden,<sup>9</sup> we can identify this person as a butcher. He is holding a piece of meat onto the chopping block, whereas the meat

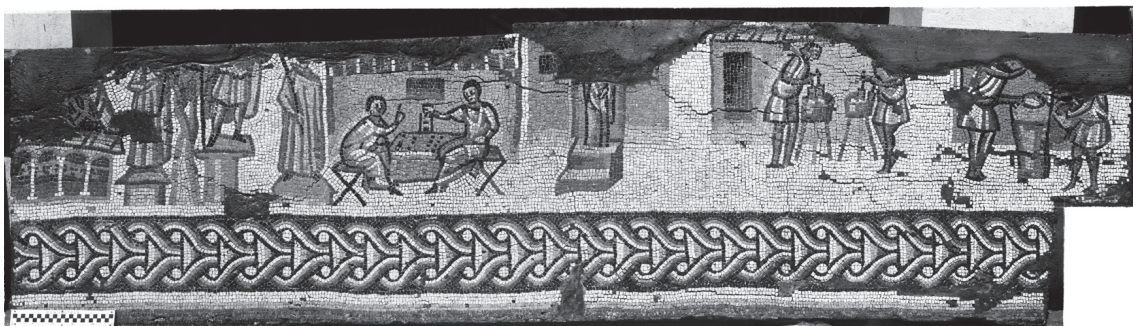


Fig. 2: Raised panel of topographical border on the Mosaic of Megalopsychia. Excavated in 1932. – Right: Scenes 1 and 2.



Fig. 3: Raised panel of topographical border on the Mosaic of Megalopsychia. Excavated in 1932. – Left (tilted by 90°): Scene 3.

chopper in the raised right hand must be reconstructed. The chopping block (*caudex*) differs from the Dresden example, which provides a three-legged version, but several other examples do show this trunk-shaped type of *caudex*.<sup>10</sup> The activity of the right figure, holding a vessel or bucket in his hands, can also be explained by looking at the large vessel standing on the other side of the *caudex* on the Dresden and the Ostia relief. It could have been used for collecting either waste or innards.<sup>11</sup>

The scene on the left (scene 1) once again shows two barefooted figures in short sleeveless tunics, each one standing beside something that clearly reminds of the three-legged *caudex* from the Dresden relief, which seems to be an indispensable feature of the preparation of meat and fish.<sup>12</sup> The key to understanding this scene lies in identifying the sort of utensils that is being used by the workmen: it resembles small shovels or large *spatulae*.<sup>13</sup> Despite the divergent scientific approaches, the red *tesseræ* which they treat could well show mince that is being prepared on the *caudices*.<sup>14</sup>

The third scene on the right brings to mind the broad series of everyday life depictions from Pompeii that show buyers and vendors behind their counters.<sup>15</sup> In this case, the vendor stands behind a large table, on which seven elongated objects lie, generally interpreted as fish.<sup>16</sup> He is dressed in a brownish sleeved tunic and reaches down to his customer on the right, holding another fish in his outstretched arms. The buyer is dressed in a short, sleeved tunic and wears high black boots. He has his right arm raised as to gesticulate or to receive the wares, whereas his left hand on his hips holds a small round object. Looking at other vendor scenes, e.g. a sarcophagus in Ancona,<sup>17</sup> where the left figure holds a small *marsuppium* in his right hand and thus can be identified as the customer, this small object on the topographical border could also be such a *purse*, leaving no doubt in interpreting this person as a buyer and the whole tableau as a *vending* scene.

Figural depictions are no indispensable feature within topographical friezes that show existing buildings or cities and name them by means of toponyms. In fact, prominent other 'topographical borders' do not contain such figural scenes, e.g. the mosaic pavements of the acropolis church in Ma'in<sup>18</sup> and the St. Stephen's church in Kastron Mefaa (Umm er-Rasas)<sup>19</sup> or the fragments of a textile hanging with a depiction of Daniel in the lion's den in Berlin.<sup>20</sup> Anyway, these three scenes on the topographical border of the Yakto mosaic provide a group of laborers and vendors, that unambiguously have to do with the production and distribution of meat and fish. Since this industry was often settled in an independently built market place – the *macellum*<sup>21</sup> – which formed an own topographical constant in antique and late antique cities, this group on the Yakto mosaic most likely refers to a real place in late antique Daphne or Antioch as do the architectural tableaus of Κασταλία and ἡ Παλλάς. After all, Malalas testifies an inner-city *macellum* in Antioch, probably constructed by Valens in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD.<sup>22</sup> Of course we still lack knowledge on whether the topographical border actually passes beyond Daphne, so these scenes do not necessarily show the Antiochean *macellum*. Nonetheless, the figural ensemble on this part of the border counterbalances the loss

of inscriptions and detailed architectural depictions and in fact can function as such a topographical hint for further examinations.<sup>23</sup>

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Antakya, Hatay Arkeoloji müzesi, Inv. 1016; ca. 7,25 × 6,75 m (Brands 2016, 258<sub>3</sub>); find spot: Harbiye, 7 km south of Antakya, Turkey (Lassus 1934, 114; Brands 2016, 258; for Claude Prost's excavation report cf. Lassus 1934, 114–116); color photographs: Cimok 2000, 251–274; Archut – Kremser 2019, pl. 9. 15–22. – The mosaic has been dated to the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century AD by most scholars (Campbell 1934, 202; Lassus 1969, 139; Levi 1947, 323; Downey 1961, 31<sub>21</sub>. 472 etc.), arguing that it refers epigraphically to Ardaburius iunior, *magister militem per Orientem* in 453–466 (cf. Martindale 1980, 135–137 s. v. Ardabur [1]). In fact, a doubtless dating still lacks reliable examinations.

<sup>2</sup> Campbell 1934, 202.

<sup>3</sup> In its actual state of preservation the border measures about 19,30 m in length (Lassus 1934, 128; Lassus 1969, 138).

<sup>4</sup> Lassus 1934, 129. 132; Downey 1961, 325. 649f.; Brands 2016, 261<sub>11</sub>. 268–280; Archut – Kremser 2019, 195f. 210f. – The mosaic's find spot Harbiye is identical with antique Daphne.

<sup>5</sup> Lassus 1934, 128–151; Downey 1961, 662–664; Levi 1947, 326; Lassus 1969, 140 etc.

<sup>6</sup> Raeck 1992, 71–75.

<sup>7</sup> Lassus 1969, 139f.; Brands 2016, 265; Archut – Kremser 2019, 161. 180f.

<sup>8</sup> Lassus 1934, 128. 153; Lassus 1969, 146; Levi 1947, 326; Kondoleon 2000, 115. – Deckers is the only one to attest priority to the figural layer and therefore prefers to talk of a “sociographical border” (Deckers 1988, 338).

<sup>9</sup> Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Skulpturensammlung, Inv. 415, marble, 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. AD (Zimmer 1982, 94f. no. 2, fig. 2).

<sup>10</sup> E.g. a funerary relief in Ostia, Museo Ostiense, Inv. 133, marble, 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. AD (Zimmer 1982, 95f. no. 4, fig. 4); Rome, Villa Albani, Inv. 11, marble, 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. AD (Zimmer 1982, 96f. no. 5, fig. 5) etc.; see also Zimmer 1982, 18<sub>91</sub>.

<sup>11</sup> Zimmer 1982, 18.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. also a funerary relief in Bologna, Museo civico, Atrium, Inv. 7, limestone, 1<sup>st</sup> cent. AD (Zimmer 1982, 93f. no. 1, fig. 1); for fish production cf. a Sicilian bell krater, Cefalù, Museo della Fondazione cultural Mandralisca, Inv. 2, 380–370 BC (Hellenkemper 1998, 186, no. 119).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Levi 1947, 331; Pitarakis 2012, 402.

<sup>14</sup> Lassus 1934, 138.

<sup>15</sup> E.g. a fresco from the *tablinum* of the Casa del panettiere (VII 3, 30), Museo archeologico nazionale di Napoli, Inv. 9071 (Kraus – von Matt 1973, 180 no. 235; Coarelli 2002, 139).

<sup>16</sup> Lassus 1934, 137f.; Levi 1947, 330; Lassus 1969, 143 etc. Form and colour resemble the fish in the mosaic depiction of the last supper, Ravenna, Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, *in situ*, ca. 500 AD (Dresken-Weiland 2016, 138).

<sup>17</sup> Ancona, Museo nazionale, marble, mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century AD (Zimmer 1982, 218f. no. 177, fig. 177).

<sup>18</sup> *In situ*, ca. 719–720 AD (Piccirillo 1989, 229–232; Piccirillo 1993, 200 f., fig. 308–310).

<sup>19</sup> There are two concentric friezes *in situ*, 8<sup>th</sup> century AD (Piccirillo 1989, 285–293; Dunbabin 1999, 203 f., fig. 217). The inner stripe provides figural scenes, but must inevitably be called a Nilotic frieze, thus embellishing this topographical border of the Nile Delta (cf. Dunbabin 1999, 203).

<sup>20</sup> Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, Inv. 9658, 6<sup>th</sup> cent. AD (?) (Schrenk 2002).

<sup>21</sup> De Ruyt 1983.

<sup>22</sup> Downey 1961, 632 f. 636. 406 f.; de Ruyt 1983, 36. 265. 270 f.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. the latest extensive examination of the border's iconography and its potential referencing to late antique Daphne and/or Antioch: Archut – Kremser 2019.

### Image Credits

Fig. 1–3: Antioch Expedition Archives, Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University, nos. 5661. 5647. 5649 (with special thanks to Julia Gearhart, Director Visual Resources Collection).

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