

Zeugma as the provenance of 12 mosaic fragments at Bowling Green State University

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Bowling Green State University (BGSU) in Ohio is the current owner of 12 sections of floor mosaic dating to the 2nd-3rd c. A.D. Purchased by the university in 1965, these mosaic fragments were believed to be from the site of Antioch. In 2010-11, the mosaics were conserved and installed in BGSU's Wolfe Center. In the following year the first-named author, organizing a symposium to celebrate the new display of the mosaics, invited R. Molholt to be the keynote speaker. During the course of preparing their respective papers for the symposium, she and Molholt uncovered evidence that an Antioch provenance for the mosaics was most unlikely, and Molholt determined that the mosaic fragments were almost certainly from the site of Zeugma. We offer here a preliminary publication of the fragments, along with evidence to support our proposed provenance.¹

Description of the mosaic fragments

There are 12 figural fragments, ranging in size from 0.50 x 0.58 m to 0.91 x 0.76 m, along with smaller pieces and loose tesserae not on display and not discussed here. The fragments employ a wide variety of colors (black, white, yellows, greys, reds, greens, and browns) as well as limited use of blue and green glass or paste (noticeable especially in vegetation and plumage). The foundations appear to be preserved up to c.10 cm.² The work is generally skillful,³ the figures being rendered illusionistically. Eleven of the fragments (nos. 1-11) were once part of the same floor, for each shares an identical square frame connected to a colorful geometric and floral pattern. The edges are otherwise irregular, suggesting that these figural elements were deliberately, if somewhat roughly, cut out from a floor. The 11 fragments depict naturalistic masks of Pans (2, although one may be a young satyr), 1 tragic mask, 1 comic mask, and birds (7).

Fragments 1-4 (figs. 1-4) show the main figural element, a mask, on a simple white background. Each mask is framed within an illusionistic design using black, pink, yellow and white tesserae, and giving a sense of depth to the frame, placed on a background shaded in greys. Two dark grey triangles were once at the diagonal corners of each frame, either at lower left and upper right (no. 1) or at lower right and upper left (nos. 2-4). The isometric frame is further enclosed within 2 rows of white tesserae followed by 2 rows of

1 While the basic story has already been released to the media, the full discovery, as well as the evidence for it, both art-historical and archival, has not been formally documented for scholarly purposes. The discovery of the Zeugma provenance was made by R. Molholt, who unfortunately was unable to take part in writing this article. Langin-Hooper conducted the archival research and authored the archival documentation analysis. Martin authored the description of the mosaic fragments. Both Martin and Langin-Hooper contributed to formally documenting, and providing additional evidence for, the proposed Zeugma provenance. Information concerning the Zeugma excavations, as well as photographic documentation, was provided by Önal.

2 More detailed inspection is hindered by the mosaic's installation in glass floor cases in the Wolfe Center at BGSU.

3 Some of the incoherent passages may also indicate repairs were made sometime after the floor was laid.