

# A MONOCHROME MOSAIC AT ISTHμία

(PLATES 97–101)

IN THE SPRING of 1976, Isthmia Excavations, under the direction of Paul A. Clement, uncovered a large monochrome mosaic pavement in Room VI of the Roman bath to the northwest of the ancient theater.<sup>1</sup> The extreme scarcity of black-and-white figured mosaics outside Italy and the good workmanship of the floor make this a discovery of considerable interest. In size (7.8 × 20.2 m.) the floor is comparable to the more ambitious Italian monochrome floors, and apart from a few swells and cracks the pavement is in almost perfect condition.<sup>2</sup> It is now covered with sand awaiting, we hope, a roof and re-laying in the near future.

<sup>1</sup> I wish to express here my gratitude to Prof. Clement for inviting me to study this mosaic, and for his enthusiastic support and encouragement at all times. I would like to thank Yannis Tzedakis for the photograph of the Chania mosaic (Pl. 101:b) with permission to reproduce it, Carlo Pavolini for permission to publish the Ostia mosaic (Pl. 101:a), and T. Leslie Shear, Jr. for his assistance in obtaining the photograph of the Antioch mosaic (Pl. 101:c).

Frequently used references will be abbreviated as follows:

- Balil A. Balil, "El mosaico romano de la Iglesia de San Miguel," *Cuadernos de arqueologia e historia de la ciudad. Barcelona* 1, 1960, pp. 21–74.
- Becatti G. Becatti, *Scavi di Ostia, IV, Mosaici e pavimenti marmorei*, Rome 1961.
- Blake I M. L. Blake, "The Pavements of the Roman Buildings of the Republic and Early Empire," *MAAR* 6, 1930, pp. 7–160.
- Blake II M. L. Blake, "Roman Mosaics of the second Century in Italy," *MAAR* 12, 1936, pp. 67–214.
- Blake III M. L. Blake, "Mosaics of the Late Empire in Rome and Vicinity," *MAAR* 16, 1940, pp. 81–130.
- Corpus de Tunisie* M. A. Alexander, M. Ennaifer, et al., *Corpus des mosaïques de Tunisie*, I, i, ii, iii, *Utique*, Tunis 1973, 1974, 1976.
- Hinks R. P. Hinks, *Catalogue of the Greek, Etruscan and Roman Paintings and Mosaics in the British Museum*, London 1933.
- Levi D. Levi, *The Mosaic Pavements of Antioch*, Princeton 1945.
- Parlasca K. Parlasca, *Die römischen Mosaiken in Deutschland*, Berlin 1959.
- Pernice E. Pernice, *Die hellenistische Kunst in Pompeji, VI, Pavimente und figürliche Mosaiken*, Berlin 1938.
- Stern H. Stern, *Gallia, Suppl. X, Recueil général des mosaïques de la Gaule, I, Province de Belgique*, i, ii, iii, Paris 1957, 1960, 1963.

<sup>2</sup> Our floor is 157.56 square meters as compared with 188.24 for the Ostia Neptune mosaic (Becatti, p. 48), or about 140 for Sassoferato (Blake II, p. 151). The giant Castel Porziano mosaic is 365 square meters (R. Paribeni, *Le terme di Diocleziano e il Museo Nazionale Romano*, Rome 1932, p. 90). At Isthmia the tesserae for the entire composition, including borders, are the same throughout, varying from 1.5 to 1.7 cm. for the most part. Though they are not very well squared, they are fitted together carefully. Beyond the borders the perimeter of the floor consists of much larger, plain white tesserae. Further technical aspects of the floor will appear in the final publication.

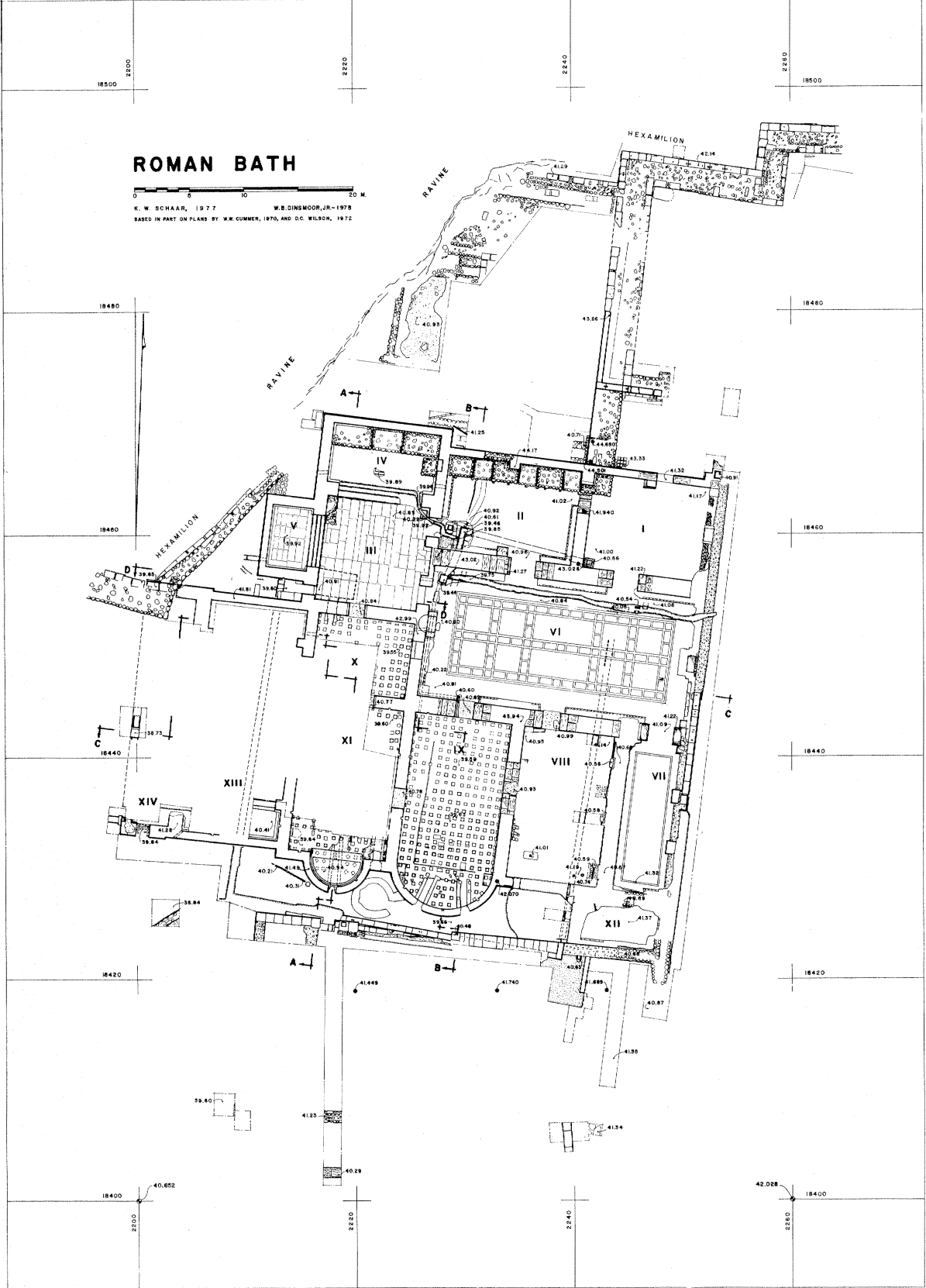


FIG. 1. Actual-state plan of the Roman Bath at Isthmia

The floor is composed of three equal sections, the central part figured, the two ends patterned (Pl. 97).<sup>3</sup> The central figured section is divided into two panels or registers, each with a Nereid lounging on the serpentine back of a Triton, with a generous accompaniment of sea life. The lower panel includes also an Eros standing on a dolphin. Each of the patterned end sections is subdivided into four square panels: a checkerboard, a trellis, a *semis*, and interlaced circles. Every panel is framed by a narrow black band, and around and between each of the panels runs a continuous border of pairs of rectangles alternating with single squares. Within the rectangles are lozenges inscribed alternately with dolphins and fleurs-de-lis; within the squares are concave diamonds inscribed with extended crosslets. This very decorative border forms the framework, clearly articulating the parts and unifying them into a whole.

With its geometric partitions and its emblema-style figured panels all facing in one direction, the Isthmia mosaic follows strictly in the Hellenistic tradition.<sup>4</sup> In the 2nd century after Christ the black-and-white mosaics in Italy broke with this tradition and adopted the rug style of composition in which the figures are not necessarily oriented in any one direction. Like an oriental carpet these compositions may often be viewed from any point and are arranged with respect to the shape or function of the architectural space being paved. By contrast, the Hellenistic panel-style compositions are intended to be viewed from only one direction, like a wall painting transferred to the floor. This restricts the figured panels to a size comprehensible from a single or very limited viewpoint. Panels of geometric designs often flank the figured panel either for decorative effect or to make the composition fill an area larger or of different shape.<sup>5</sup> These geometric patterns are often derived from textiles, though later patterns are less often textile than earlier ones. At Isthmia all four patterns could be textile.<sup>6</sup>

#### THE FIGURED PANELS (Pls. 98, 99)

Of the two panels the artist has devoted greater attention to the lower, perhaps because this is closer to the spectator viewing the entire floor from the south, the only "correct" direction. The figures here are more harmoniously designed and executed,

<sup>3</sup> The arrangement of the partitions falls into G. Salies' first and simplest category ("Untersuchungen zu den geometrischen Gliederungsschemata römischer Mosaiken," *BonnJbb* 174, 1974, pp. 2-3).

<sup>4</sup> Even the dolphins in the borders are oriented in the same way throughout, to be viewed from the south or the west, with one exception at the west end.

<sup>5</sup> Although an exact parallel for our composition has yet to be discovered anywhere, at Antioch figured panels are often flanked by patternwork panels in various arrangements, e.g., the Antonine House of the Red Pavement (Levi, p. 89, fig. 34), the Severan House of the Drinking Contest (pl. 31:a) and Portico of Nikostratus (pl. 19:a), and the 3rd-century House of the Boat of Psyches (pl. 35:a). In Corinth the north room of the Mosaic House (ca. A.D. 200; S. Weinberg, *Corinth*, I, v, *The Southeast Building. The Twin Basilicas. The Mosaic House*, Princeton 1960, pl. 54) has a somewhat similar division into panels, though of different sizes. In these cases, as at Isthmia, a continuous border divides and frames all.

<sup>6</sup> According to M. L. Blake (Blake II, p. 126) all common 1st-century B.C. geometric patterns on mosaics are also documented on textiles. Although patterns quite similar to those at Isthmia can be woven on a simple four-harness loom, there is no evidence for the use of multi-harness looms until considerably later, and such designs must have been embroidered or woven pick-up fashion.

and the marine habitat is shown in greater detail than in the upper panel. The Triton glides to the right with wings where forelegs would appear on an ichthyocentaur.<sup>7</sup> They somewhat mask the poor transition between his serpent tail and frontal torso. In front of him he holds a large shield with both hands, and a cloak drapes from his left shoulder. Crustacean “claws” grow from his beardless head. A couple of coils in his back form a seat for the Nereid who balances on her left hip in a half-backwards position. She leans against one of the coils, steadying herself with her left hand on his shoulder. The right hand holds up her veil as a sail in an arc over her head in the usual manner (though one end disappears mysteriously behind her back). Her remaining garment, fallen below the waist, drapes softly over her legs, the right drawn up, the left stretched out across it. To the left of this peaceful group an Eros uses a switch to urge on the dolphin which he stands upon and controls with a rein. They are moving in the opposite direction from the Triton and Nereid, as are all the other creatures in the lower portion of the panel. These include two cuttlefish, a lobster (*palinurus*), an octopus with seven legs, and five fish apparently representing four types. The rear pair are probably intended to be the same variety, possibly mullet (*mullus*).<sup>8</sup>

In the upper panel the ichthyocentaur gallops along toward the left, his misplaced left foreleg hiding the juncture between his frontal human torso and the marine portion even less successfully than does the wing of his counterpart below. Again crustacean “claws” deck the beardless head. In front of him he holds in his right hand a tiny dolphin with lunate tail.<sup>9</sup> The cloak flying back from his left arm (which also cradles a *pedum*) gives an impression of haste in this panel. The marine body lacks the coils of his companion and makes a strangely elongated, nearly horizontal surface upon which the Nereid sits much as in the lower panel. In this case she is much further back and perches awkwardly without any convincing relationship between herself and her mount. Her right hand leans on his back, but the Triton’s body bends down just at the critical point leaving her legs without support. Her veil and garment are much stiffer and more abbreviated than those of the other, and her hair is wrapped in a sakkos as opposed to the elaborately curled coiffure of the lower Nereid. Behind this group a dolphin plunges into the deep, and below are an eel, a fish, and another dolphin.

<sup>7</sup> The term “ichthyocentaur”, which may properly be used to describe the Triton in the upper panel, does not appear until the 12th century (in Tzetzes on *Lycophr.* 34). Such a creature on the Pergamon Altar is simply called “Triton” (E. Schmidt, *The Great Altar of Pergamon*, London 1965, pl. 30).

<sup>8</sup> For the *palinurus* see D’A. W. Thompson, *The Fishes of Greece*, London 1947, p. 102 or O. Keller, *Die antike Tierwelt*, Leipzig 1909–1913, II, p. 490. For *mullus* see Thompson, *op. cit.*, pp. 264–265 or Keller, *op. cit.*, pp. 364–365.

<sup>9</sup> Miniature dolphins date back at least to Archaic vase painting and serve to demonstrate that the bearer is associated with the sea. In later times they continue to appear, perhaps more often with Neptune than with Tritons. Examples with Tritons occur on a Pompeian painting (S. Reinach, *Répertoire des peintures grecques et romaines*, Paris 1922, pl. 45:3) and on mosaics in baths at Herculaneum in the 1st century after Christ (A. Maiuri, *Visioni italiane: Ercolano*, Novara 1932, fig. on p. 37) and at Barcino in the 2nd century (Baill, p. 27, fig. 1). For further references see Levi, p. 223. The Pompeian Triton also carries a *pedum* and cloak and has a lengthy body like ours.

With the exception of the lone fish in the upper panel and the Triton in the lower panel, all figures swim to the left; but the main impact of the composition is produced by the opposed masses of the two Triton groups and the diagonals which they create. In the upper panel the mass of the figures is concentrated in the left side and is moving to the left. In the lower panel the location and movement are the reverse. This strong northwest-southeast diagonal is echoed by several smaller parts of the composition such as the Eros' torso and one arm and leg, and the checkerboard and interlace panels in the end sections reinforce this slant since they stand out more than the daintier *semis* and trellis panels. In the figure panels the opposite diagonal is also prominent and helps weave the two panels together into a single composition. In the upper panel the Triton's tail, legs and *pedum* follow this slant, as does the plunging dolphin. Below, the torsos of the Nereid and Triton make this diagonal.

The artist clearly gave considerable thought to the composition of both the figure panels and the floor as a whole, and the design was executed carefully. Discrepancies between the pattern panels at the two ends are quite minor, especially in consideration of the size of the project. Although the figures themselves are not without their charm, they do not appear to have been designed with the same expertise. The dolphins and the marine parts of the Tritons lack the plasticity of the more successful black-and-white Italian mosaics such as those in the Neptune Baths at Ostia. The figures also differ from their Italian counterparts in several matters of style which might be attributable to unfamiliarity with the black-and-white idiom. The faces are sharply separated from the hair by a distinct outline, and the features are rendered mostly as dots. In Italy these characteristics occur mainly on poorer mosaics and in the 3rd century and later.<sup>10</sup> Another, more unusual practice in the Isthmia mosaic is the use of white lines of varying width for interior detail. This occurs also in the Herculaneum bath cited above (footnote 9) near the beginning of the Italian black-and-white style, but is quite rare otherwise.<sup>11</sup> Since black-and-white figure decoration was virtually unknown in Greece after the demise of pebble mosaics, a native mosaicist attempting a monochrome composition would have had no established conventions to rely on, but would have had to make his own personal translation from the usual polychrome technique. It is perhaps not unwarranted, then, to conclude that a local mosaicist with good credentials (but unacquainted with the foreign black-and-white technique) was chosen to decorate the bath at this prestigious site in the latest Italian style, monochrome marine.

The use of marine creatures for the decoration of baths was a natural and popular choice. Such scenes appear all over the Roman world, and particularly in the Italian monochrome mosaics of the 2nd century. Most represent the marine thiasos described by Apuleius (*Met.*, IV.31) in the first half of the 2nd century. Sometimes the subject is

<sup>10</sup> Becatti, no. 414, pl. 142, no. 361, pl. 137, Isola Sacra Tomb 87, pl. 105; no. 63, pl. 141, no. 211, pl. 140, no. 271, pl. 138.

<sup>11</sup> The only exceptions are the wider white bands on a few veils: Ostia (Becatti, nos. 124 and 125, pl. 139); Tsarskoe Selo (Blake II, pl. 34:1).

more specific such as the birth or triumph of marine Venus, which was especially popular on the later floors of North Africa. The cortege of marine Venus would properly include Erotes, and they also belong in other marine-related scenes such as the wedding of Peleus and Thetis or of Poseidon and Amphitrite. By association with these marine deities they become common elements in any marine scene.<sup>12</sup> Erotes also appear in Dionysiac scenes, and other elements of the Bacchic thiasos are regularly incorporated into the marine thiasos as well.

At Isthmia the presence of the shield suggests that the arms of Achilles may be intended. Often a single item of armor suffices to establish the subject, and Tritons do on occasion share in the bearing of Achilles' armor. But never, it seems, is the armor carried only by the Triton rather than the Nereid.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore Erotes in such scenes are rare,<sup>14</sup> although they do appear with Thetis on other occasions, and the Dionysiac *pedum* is quite out of place if our two panels are to be associated with each other, as is probable. On sarcophagi Tritons sometimes carry a frontal shell or a clipeus bearing an inscription or portrait, and their position is much the same, but there is no association with the arms of Achilles there either.<sup>15</sup>

On balance the subject seems most likely to be a simple marine thiasos, and the explanation for the shield must lie elsewhere. The use of pattern books is generally presumed to account for the recurrence of certain figures in widely scattered locations and periods, although individual artists combined the various elements differently to create a new composition each time. One possibility is that our artist slightly misunderstood something he copied from a pattern book. Tritons on mosaics occasionally carry tambourines, as in the Ostia Neptune Baths.<sup>16</sup> This may have been the case with the cartoon which our artist used and "improved" upon by making the "shield" the proper size. Tambourines in these scenes are rare enough that the confused artist could well have mistaken one for a shield, knowing that armor is sometimes appropriate in scenes with Nereids and Tritons. Or perhaps he added the shield on his own initiative or copied a shield-bearing Triton irrationally, either oblivious or indifferent to the problems of iconographic consistency. A closer examination of the Isthmia figures themselves and how they relate to others in the Roman world should reveal something

<sup>12</sup> They appear apparently without any of these gods already on the Thermopylai frieze (S. Lattimore, *The Marine Thiasos*, Malibu 1977, pls. X, XI, figs. 14–16) and on the mosaic of a Tritoness in the House of Tritons at Delos (P. Bruneau, *Exploration archéologique de Délos, XXIX, Les mosaïques*, Paris 1972, no. 75, p. 177, fig. 89).

<sup>13</sup> Tritons sometimes carry armor or engage in battle when no Nereids are present. See É. Espérandieu, *Recueil général des bas-reliefs de la Gaule romaine* V, Paris 1913, nos. 4076, 4078, 4160, 4236; see also the Pergamon altar (Schmidt, *loc. cit.* [footnote 7 above]) and another Pergamene frieze (F. Winter, *Altertümer von Pergamon*, VII, *Die Skulpturen*, Berlin 1908, pl. 39, no. 385).

<sup>14</sup> A vase from Olynthos with the arms of Achilles had two Erotes (D. M. Robinson, *Excavations at Olynthos*, V, *Mosaics, Vases and Lamps*, Baltimore 1933, pls. 78, 79).

<sup>15</sup> A. Rumpf, *Die antike Sarkophag-Reliefs*, V, *Die Meerwesen*, Berlin 1939, nos. 55–90 and fig. 40, p. 26, no. 71, early 3rd century, lost.

<sup>16</sup> Becatti, pl. 131.

about the pattern books in view of the abundant mosaic evidence remaining for the marine thiasos.

The fish and dolphins constitute the supporting characters and the scenery. Their appearance assures that we make no mistake as to the setting since there is no other indication of water.<sup>17</sup> As usual in ancient art, the dolphins' form is governed by convention rather than by nature. The plunging dolphin has the bifurcate tail preferred by the Greeks and closer to nature than the elaborate and more decorative Italian trifurcate form.<sup>18</sup> The miniature dolphin held by our ichthyocentaur has the lunate tail popular earlier in Greek art but not so common by the Roman period. Our other dolphin tails (including those in the borders) are somewhere between the two but far from the full-fledged Italian version. Both types of tail appear again on dolphins quite like ours on the late 2nd-century octagonal mosaic in the Alpheos Baths at Olympia, while the hippocamps there have only trifurcate tails.<sup>19</sup>

The fish, like the dolphins, are undoubtedly conventionalized and varied primarily for decorative effect. The cuttlefish, eel, octopus, and lobster are clear enough, but fish in black-and-white are impossible to differentiate satisfactorily except for a few general shapes. Of all the fishes at Ostia, Becatti does not identify the majority, and rightly so since they are mainly just scenery. The Isthmia fish differ from the Ostia fish in having a single rather than double white line for the gills at the back of the head. Both fish and dolphins have a further characteristic rarely found elsewhere, the white patch on the side behind the head, presumably representing the pectoral fin. This occurs also on fish and dolphins on a Pompeian black-and-white mosaic, in Sicily on a dolphin, at Ephesos on a dolphin, and a few other times.<sup>20</sup> The usual Italian black-and-white fish have an outlined patch or scrolled line instead of a white patch. This evidence suggests that the light patch, like the bifurcate tail, may be a specifically Greek or Hellenistic element since it occurs at times and places known to have been influenced by Greek art.

One of the Isthmia dolphins has an Eros aboard, another stock figure of the marine thiasos. Dolphins with riders were no strangers to Greek art and myth, and especially to

<sup>17</sup> Water is often shown on mosaics by short lines, especially zigzag lines. Examples of this in Greece occur in the early 2nd-century Kronion Baths at Olympia (F. Adler *et al.*, *Olympia*, II, *Die Baudenkmäler*, Berlin 1892, plates vol., pl. CVI) and at Kos in the 3rd century (*BdA* 35, 1950, p. 236, fig. 64).

<sup>18</sup> The bifurcate tail was used on virtually all Hellenistic and earlier marine mosaics in Greece and far more often than not on later Greek mosaics. It is also fairly common on paintings and mosaics at Pompeii and the other Vesuvian towns, in Sicily, and elsewhere in Italy during the 1st century of our era. It was also used on Arretine ware and earlier on Etruscan cinerary urns. In the 2nd century it is rare except on sarcophagi, but in the 3rd it gradually reappears. At all times it is more often used for dolphins than for Tritons or sea-monsters. The remainder of the Roman world (with the exception of the northern provinces) perhaps clung to Hellenistic models longer, and the bifurcate tail persists alongside the trifurcate in the 2nd century and later (for example, the bath of Barcino: Balil, p. 27, fig. 1; the British Museum's mosaic from Gamarth near Carthage: Hinks, p. 79, no. 18a, fig. 85; and a mosaic from Kalaa des Beni Ahmed near Sétif: F.-G. de Pachtère, *Inventaire des mosaïques de la Gaule et de l'Afrique. Algérie*, Paris 1911, no. 328).

<sup>19</sup> Δελατ 22, B' 1, 1967 [1968], pls. 21 and 147.

<sup>20</sup> Blake I, pl. 22:4; L. Bernabò-Brea, *Musei e monumenti in Sicilia*, Novara 1958, p. 93; Hinks, no. 16, pl. XXVIII. It also shows up at Ostia-Brea on a late 2nd-century dolphin which also has a bifurcate tail (Becatti, no. 276, pl. 144).

Isthmia where Palaimon was said to have been brought ashore by a dolphin. He had his own temple there, and in the temple of Poseidon Herodes Atticus dedicated a statuary group including Palaimon standing on a dolphin.<sup>21</sup> Representations usually show him seated or lying on the dolphin, but a Corinthian coin also shows him standing, perhaps a reflection of Herodes' group.<sup>22</sup> Erotes standing on dolphins are not rare, but other positions are much more common for them also, and it could be more than coincidence that the standing position was chosen at Isthmia for both Palaimon and our Eros.<sup>23</sup>

Among the major characters, the Tritons are most striking with their elongated and nearly horizontal bodies, since elsewhere most have marine parts much more undulating and coiled. Parallels for this come from several mosaics in Greece, the closest being in the bath of the 2nd century from Chania in Crete (Pl. 101:b).<sup>24</sup> The ichthyocentaur there, in spite of being polychrome and facing right instead of left, is similar to ours in the relation of human to marine bodies though the horse legs are positioned a little differently. Other details are also quite like, such as the small fins along the body at several points, the upturned tail, and the position of the arms. Other Greek parallels, less exact, come from the Mosaic House in Corinth and from Ephesos, the latter now in the British Museum.<sup>25</sup> The Corinth Triton has a coil on which a Nereid leans, as in our lower panel, and again has an upturned tail.

Further afield, Tritons with lengthy and relatively horizontal bodies appear at Antioch, in Spain, and more notably in several North African mosaics, one at Acholla, the others in the British Museum from near Carthage.<sup>26</sup> Like the Greek parallels, all but the Spanish are polychrome. In each of these examples (except the Spanish which has

<sup>21</sup> Pausanias, II.1.8. For the temple to Palaimon, see O. Broneer, *Isthmia*, II, *Topography and Architecture*, Princeton 1973, pp. 99–112.

<sup>22</sup> F. Imhoof-Blümer and P. Gardner, "Numismatic Commentary on Pausanias," *JHS* 6, 1885, pl. L:B, no. ix. This Palaimon also has one arm raised like the Isthmian Eros.

<sup>23</sup> Erotes in nearly the same position as ours occur twice in the Neptune Baths at Ostia (Becatti, pls. 126 and 160), in the 3rd-century Prima Porta Bath (Blake III, pl. 17:3), and on a 3rd-century North African mosaic in the Louvre (*Corpus de Tunisie* I, iii, pl. XL). With other mounts similar Erotes appear in the Caracalla Baths (Blake III, pl. 13:3) and on sarcophagi (C. Robert, *Die antiken Sarkophag-Reliefs*, III, i, *Einzelmythen*, repr. Rome 1969, no. 88, pl. 25). Were it not for the wings and the occurrence of the same figure elsewhere, it would be tempting to identify our dolphin-rider with Palaimon and the Nereid in the panel with his mother Leucothea. As Ino she was the sister of Semele and helped raise the infant Dionysos. When she leapt into the sea with her son Melikertes, Ovid (*Met.* 4.523) reports that she called out "Euhoe, Bacche." Palaimon is also associated with Dionysos in the Iobacchic inscription (M. P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion* II, Munich 1961, p. 361). These associations would account for the bacchic element in our mosaic, and the subject would be most suitable for Isthmia, but I am afraid such speculation is rather far-fetched even without the obvious objections cited.

<sup>24</sup> Δελτ 25, B' 2, 1970 [1973], pl. 409.

<sup>25</sup> *Corinth* I, v, pl. 57; Hinks, no. 16, pl. XXVIII.

<sup>26</sup> Antioch, House of the Triumph of Dionysos (Levi, p. 100, fig. 39); Barcino bath (Balil, p. 27, fig. 1); Acholla, Marine Thiasos Baths (G. Picard, "Les thermes du Thiase marin à Acholla," *Antiquités africaines* 2, 1968, pp. 137–142, figs. 25–28); British Museum mosaics (Hinks, nos. 17a, 17b, p. 77, figs. 83 and 84; and no. 18a from Gamarth, p. 79, fig. 85). They occur also on paintings of Pompeii and Herculaneum though not without coils (Reinach, *op. cit.* [footnote 9 above], pls. 45:3; 41:1 and 2). The distribution implies that the elongated and horizontal body with few coils may again be a specifically Hellenistic characteristic.



no rider) the Nereid sits well back on the elongated body as at Isthmia. The Tritons on the British Museum panel from Gamarth, apparently Hadrianic, are quite like ours. One even has wings for forelegs as in our lower panel, a form less common in North Africa than in Italy. Also comparable is the simplicity of this composition.

On the Acholla mosaic one of the Tritons wears a nebris with the same ragged form as our ichthyocentaur's cloak. This nebris also appears on other Tritons with Dionysiac associations as in one of the North African panels in the British Museum (Hinks, no. 17b) where it is accompanied by a *pedum*. The same combination occurs again on the Triton in Corinth though the form of the cloak there is difficult to make out. In these cases the cloak is fastened around the neck, but in view of the similar form it is likely that ours is also intended as a nebris.<sup>27</sup> A slightly tattered cloak carried like ours over the arm appears at Ostia in the baths of the Cisiari.<sup>28</sup>

Several features of the Isthmia Tritons have little parallel elsewhere. The scalloped back of the ichthyocentaur is common on earlier sea-monsters<sup>29</sup> but rarely occurs otherwise. The outline of the attachment of the horse's leg in the same panel is unusual, though it is probably meant to look like a scale and is vaguely related to the practice of several mosaicists in Italy.<sup>30</sup> The line running the length of the body on Tritons and dolphins is common, but its continuation into the tail is apparently unparalleled in other black-and-white mosaics.

As with the Tritons, parallels for our Nereids come more from North African polychrome mosaics than from Italy, and again the majority are 2nd century. They sit with the upper legs nearly horizontal, knees apart, and the rear leg crossed behind the other with foot and ankle reappearing below. Nereids with these qualifications appear fairly often in North Africa, but most like ours in the upper panel is one in the Trajanic bath at Acholla.<sup>31</sup> Earlier in Greece a Nereid on the Thermopylai frieze sat in this position.<sup>32</sup> Italian Nereids often sit with their legs crossed, but until the 3rd century the rear foot is

<sup>27</sup> The nebris naturally does not always take this form. The Ephesos Triton with *pedum* has over his arm a cloak with spots which is presumably a nebris, and the British Museum panel no. 17a has a spotted but not tattered cloak together with a *pedum*.

<sup>28</sup> Becatti, no. 64, pl. 107.

<sup>29</sup> Examples are the mosaics at Olynthos (*Olynthus* V, plate facing p. 2), the Olympia temple pronaos (N. Yalouris, "The Mosaic Pavement of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia," *AAA* 1, 1968, p. 78), a Corinthian mirror ('Εφ'Αρχ., 1884, pl. 6:1 after col. 160), Arretine ware (H. Dragendorff, *Arretinische Reliefkeramik*, Reutlingen 1948, no. 33, pl. 3), and numerous earlier vases (Vienna 96, *CVA*, Vienna 1 [Austria 1], pl. 28 [28]:1, an Attic red-figured cup; *BCH* 96, 1972, p. 680, fig. 223, a red-figured lekythos in Patras; P. Jacobsthal, *Die melischen Reliefs*, Berlin 1931, fig. 57, p. 185, a red-figured pyxis lid; Copenhagen, Thorvaldsen 144, a Campanian cup interior, pl. 214:1 in A. D. Trendall, *The Red-Figured Vases of Lucania, Campania, and Sicily*, Oxford 1967).

<sup>30</sup> Ostia (Becatti, pl. 130); Bevagna (U. Tarchi, *L'Arte etrusco-romana nell' Umbria e nella Sabina*, Milan 1936, pl. CCLVI); Ciciliano (*NSc*, 1948, p. 300, fig. 4).

<sup>31</sup> M. Yacoub, *Musée du Bardo*, Tunis 1970, p. 201, fig. 133, lower right Nereid. A few others in this pose are at Timgad (J. Lassus, "Vénus marine," in *La mosaïque gréco-romaine*, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris 1965, pp. 175–191, fig. 5), Utica (*Corpus de Tunisie* I, ii, pl. XXXIV), and Hippo Regius (Lassus, *op. cit.*, fig. 7).

<sup>32</sup> Lattimore, *op. cit.* (footnote 12 above), pls. X, XI.

rarely visible, and even then it is not common. Two exceptions are a 1st-century mosaic in Naples and the 2nd-century Castel Porziano mosaic.<sup>33</sup> The Nereid on the latter sits, like ours, well back, as do the Nereids on the elongated Tritons discussed above.

The Nereid in our lower panel leans on the Triton's shoulder in a graceful but rarer pose.<sup>34</sup> The Naples Nereid leans on the Triton's shoulder, but he also holds her. Since our Triton needs both hands in front for the shield, perhaps the mosaicist departed from his cartoon and filled the gap between Nereid and Triton by putting her hand on his shoulder instead of in the more usual position by her side holding the end of the veil. Her hairstyle is also unusual. Aphrodite on a Corinthian mirror cover seems to have the same coiffure, and so does Thetis on an Arretine bowl.<sup>35</sup> The closest mosaic parallels for it come from Corinth and later from Kalaa des Beni Ahmed near Sétif where the hairstyle is really quite similar and the Nereid again has the crossed leg.<sup>36</sup> Several Nereids on the great Sousse Neptune mosaic and on Pompeian paintings have similar hairstyles.<sup>37</sup> An arrangement which might possibly be a more accurate version of what our mosaicist intended occurs on a "probably Antonine" mosaic from Hippo Regius;<sup>38</sup> or this hairstyle may be another example of a Greek fashion which persisted where there was Greek influence. The Nereid in the upper panel wears her hair in a sakkos as do many of her ancestors and contemporaries.<sup>39</sup>

The distribution of dates and places for the various parallels with our figures has suggested several possible features of Greek as opposed to Roman pattern books. These features are the bifurcate tail, the white patch for the pectoral fin, the elongated and nearly coilless marine body of the Tritons, the leg position of the Nereids, and possibly the hairstyle of the lower Nereid. All of these characteristics are rare or nonexistent on Italian monochrome mosaics during their prime, the 2nd century, although they are common during the 1st century in Sicily and at Pompeii and other Italian sites where Hellenistic influence was strong. When Italy moved on to new styles, other parts of the Empire seem to have kept the Hellenistic patterns somewhat longer, and these same features continue to appear in Greece and the East, North Africa, and even Spain. This

<sup>33</sup> Naples, Esposizione Oltramare (*AA [Jdl] 56*), 1941, cols. 585–586, fig. 103); Castel Porziano (Balil, p. 55, fig. 4).

<sup>34</sup> On a Roman sarcophagus of the mid-2nd century (A. Rumpf, *op. cit.* [footnote 15 above], no. 104, at Palazzo S. Severino) a Nereid leans with one arm on the shoulder of a Triton who holds out a round scallop shell as ours holds the shield.

<sup>35</sup> Lattimore, *op. cit.* (footnote 12 above), pl. XXII, fig. 30, in the Louvre; *NSc*, 1884, pl. II:1 after p. 113.

<sup>36</sup> T. L. Shear, *Corinth, V, The Roman Villa*, Cambridge, Mass. 1930, pls. 8 and 9 (Europa); and de Pachtère, *loc. cit.* (footnote 18 above).

<sup>37</sup> L. Foucher, *Inventaire des mosaïques. Sousse*, Tunis 1960, no. 57.119, pl. XXVIII; Reinach, *op. cit.* (footnote 9 above), pls. 42:4, 43:1, and 43:10; G. E. Rizzo, *La pittura ellenistico-romana*, Milan 1929, pl. CXXXVII (the rightmost of the three Graces), and pl. XLIII (Io in the Palatine House of Livia).

<sup>38</sup> E. Marec, *Hippone la Royale. Antique Hippo Regius*, Algiers 1954, p. 61, fig. 32.

<sup>39</sup> Olynthos (*Olynthus V*, plate facing p. 2), Delos (*Délos XXIX*, no. 75, p. 177, fig. 89), Corinth (*Corinth I*, v, pl. 57). In Italy at Ostia (Becatti, no. 146, pl. 143, no. 276, pl. 143, no. 271, pl. 138, and no. 211, pls. 140 and 142).

should mean that the North Africans and Greeks used pattern books with cartoons not included in the Italian books for the black-and-white style. It is uncertain whether the distinction should be between monochrome and polychrome pattern books or between Greek Hellenistic and Roman pattern books. The slight evidence from polychrome marine scenes in Italy and the northern provinces, and the occurrence of different geometric patterns in the East suggest the latter. Bianchi-Bandinelli has also noted that mosaics of the eastern Empire have more in common with Hellenistic art and Pompeii than with later Roman art, and has raised the possibilities that the patterns did not all originate in Italy and that the North Africans probably had their own books of cartoons different from those of the Italians.<sup>40</sup> Why not also the Greeks? There are still too few Greek marine mosaics to determine whether the Greek and North African books differed also from each other, but the characteristics which our mosaic shares with the North African mosaics must certainly be considered as specifically Greek in view of their history and appearance elsewhere at times and places known to have been strongly influenced by Hellenistic art.

#### THE BORDER (Pl. 100)

Geometric decoration often provides better evidence than the figures for the dating of Roman mosaics, and an abundance of comparative material for our patternwork makes it possible to study the geometric motifs in some detail.

The system of using the same continuous border both to separate the individual panels and also to frame the entire composition existed already at Delos where at least one paneled floor had such a frame (a double meander).<sup>41</sup> In the Anaploga villa at Corinth (late 1st century) a meander forms the continuous border, and in a 2nd-century villa at Chalkis the border is a guilloche.<sup>42</sup> As mentioned above (footnote 5), these borders are fairly common at Antioch, and the system also finds parallels in the West. A large Augustan paneled floor at Reggia Emilia and a 1st-century Pompeian example with four panels both have continuous guilloche borders.<sup>43</sup>

The boldness of the border at Isthmia contributes considerably to the over-all effect of the composition, particularly by contrast with the daintiness of some of the details. Something of this effect is shared by a floor at Amiens which has strong borders contrasting with more subdued geometric panels but lacks figured decoration.<sup>44</sup> Bold bor-

<sup>40</sup> R. Bianchi-Bandinelli, "La continuità ellenistica nella pittura di età medio- e tardo-romana," *Rivista Arch.*, ser. 2, 2, 1953, pp. 115 and 131.

<sup>41</sup> *Délos* XXIX, no. 325, p. 304, fig. 271 (Maison de Fourni).

<sup>42</sup> Stella G. Miller, "A Mosaic Floor from a Roman Villa at Anaploga," *Hesperia* 41, 1972, pl. 65; A. K. Andreiomenou, "Ψηφιδωτὰ ἐν Χαλκίδι," *Ἀρχ'Εφ.*, Γ', 1953-1954 [1961], pl. II after p. 304. The floor of the bath of the 3rd century or later at Kos has many simple geometric panels but has no continuous border uniting them (*BdA* 35, 1950, p. 231, fig. 52).

<sup>43</sup> *NSc*, 1964, p. 7, fig. 4; Blake I, pl. 27:4 (VI.8.5). Later examples are plentiful.

<sup>44</sup> Stern I, i, pl. 34. Another such floor, at Ouzouër-sur-Trézée, gives a slightly weaker impression (H. Stern, "Ateliers de mosaïstes rhodaniens d'époque gallo-romaine," in *La mosaïque* [footnote 31 above], pp. 233-241, fig. 12).

ders were apparently quite at home in Greece well before the Severan age when such strong contrasts were much appreciated in Italy.<sup>45</sup> A strong black-and-white border of waves was popular at Delos (as on the Delian floor already mentioned), and occurs also on an earlier floor from Maroneia, and later in the bath at Nisi Alexandreias.<sup>46</sup>

Our particular type of border in which rectangles (inscribed with lozenges) alternate with squares (inscribed with squares or with circles) apparently reflects ceiling coffers,<sup>47</sup> and indeed our entire composition may reveal the structure of the ceiling once above it.<sup>48</sup> Such borders appear already in the Pompeian First Style in the Casa del Centenario and slightly later in the Villa dei Misteri and the Casa di Marte e Venere.<sup>49</sup> This pattern and various arrangements of its components were sometimes used as all-over designs at Pompeii and elsewhere later,<sup>50</sup> but as a border it was rare in Italy before the 3rd century. In the northern provinces it was common enough in the 2nd century, but there again it most often becomes an integral part of the design for a whole floor as it frames and divides a multitude of tiny panels.<sup>51</sup> In Africa the story is much the same.<sup>52</sup> At Antioch, on the contrary, it was popular only as a border, and only there was it used as a true frame around panels of figure decoration. It is well represented there from the early 2nd century on, appearing first in the Calendar House (A.D. 115–120; Pl. 101:c).<sup>53</sup> In this case the elements of the border itself are individually framed by a small continuous border of diamonds,<sup>54</sup> rather than by white bands as at Isthmia, but it is similar to ours in that the outlines of the lozenges and their floral inner decorations are light on a darker ground. In Greece the pattern appears in the 2nd century as a border at Kenchreai and in its all-over form at Corinth in Colonnade R west of the Odeum Court, but it is not common until later.<sup>55</sup> A related border which omits the rectangles and squares

<sup>45</sup> Even in Italy they appear before the Severan age. E.g., Serravalle Scrivia, an outer border of peltae (*NSc*, 1914, p. 120, fig. 5), or a Republican mosaic in Rome (*NSc*, 1935, p. 252, fig. 4).

<sup>46</sup> Πρακτικά, 1973 [1975], pl. 107:a; 1966 [1968], p. 26, fig. 1.

<sup>47</sup> Levi, *passim*, especially pp. 381ff. The alternation of two rectangles for each square at Isthmia is unusual, but the basic idea clearly is not. The pairs of rectangles occur also at Antioch (House of the Boat of Psyches, Levi, pl. 103:f).

<sup>48</sup> Nothing is preserved of the ceiling to this room, but Room VIII had a vaulted ceiling with incised decoration which presumably represents coffers.

<sup>49</sup> Blake I, pl. 18:1; Pernice, pl. 22:3; Blake I, pl. 18:2.

<sup>50</sup> Pernice, pl. 25:6 (I.6.4); Blake I, pl. 40:1 (Torino); Becatti, no. 300, pl. 24 (Ostia, Palazzo Imperiale, mid-2nd century; here Plate 101:a).

<sup>51</sup> Take, for example, Attricourt (Stern I, iii, no. 361a, pl. 46, polychrome, second half of 2nd century). A Swiss use of the border is a little more like ours (V. von Gonzenbach, *Die römischen Mosaiken der Schweiz*, Basel 1961, no. 117:2, early 3rd century, St. Prélix).

<sup>52</sup> *Corpus de Tunisie* I, i, pl. X (Utica, ca. A.D. 100, Maison de la Cascade).

<sup>53</sup> Levi, p. 37, fig. 12. In parts of this frame pairs of rectangles alternate with single squares as at Isthmia.

<sup>54</sup> As also at Kouklia (*BCH* 85, 1961, p. 294, fig. 46:a).

<sup>55</sup> Δελτ 21, B' 1, 1966 [1968], p. 143, plan 2; O. Broneer, *Corinth, X, The Odeum*, Cambridge, Mass. 1932, p. 70, fig. 44. Notable later are the Spartan (Δελτ 19, B' 1, 1964 [1966], pl. 144) and the Epidaurian (Ἄρχ'Εφ, 1918, p. 182, fig. 24) examples. For another all-over use of the motifs, see the Nisi Alexandreias bath (Πρακτικά, 1966 [1968], p. 26, fig. 1).

and simply alternates lozenges and circles (dark with lighter filling decorations) occurs three times at Corinth at the beginning, middle, and end of the 2nd century.<sup>56</sup>

The lozenges in the Isthmia border are made with a thick, white outline on a dark background. In the earliest Pompeian and Antiochean examples cited above this was also the case, and a 2nd-century villa at Eleusis has such lozenges on thresholds.<sup>57</sup> In the late 2nd century such light-outline lozenges appear in a border at Diekirch in Germany and at Nizy-le-Comte in Belgium.<sup>58</sup> In most places where this border occurs, the interiors of the lozenges have geometric decoration if any at all. Levi asserts that this type of pattern is connected with *opus sectile*,<sup>59</sup> and it is easy to imagine it in that technique. In our case the centers consist of four white fleurs-de-lis radiating from the four corners of a small central diamond toward the corners of the framing lozenge (Pl. 100:a). These would have been difficult in *opus sectile* (though certainly possible<sup>60</sup>) and were in all probability influenced again by ceiling coffers with floral decoration such as those found associated with a wall of the Second-Style at Pompeii or in Hadrian's villa at Tivoli.<sup>61</sup> The lozenges in the border of the Pompeian Casa di Marte e Venere cited above (footnote 49) have a light-on-dark filling of quite floral looking thunderbolts. At Antioch the Calendar House offers a further parallel in its use of floral decoration (rosettes) inside the lozenges (Pl. 101:c), and the House of Cilicia has another light-on-dark floral-filled lozenge.<sup>62</sup> A German floor of the first half of the 2nd century has lozenges with a floral fill, as does a 3rd-century lozenge border in Italy.<sup>63</sup> Very similar in shape to our floral is a black-on-white fleur-de-lis type of filling in large squares surrounded by a border of our style at Ostia (Pl. 101:a).<sup>64</sup> Light-on-dark floral borders (polychrome and without lozenges) were common enough in Hellenistic mosaics and appear sporadically on mosaics of the 1st and 2nd centuries after Christ.<sup>65</sup>

Alternate lozenges in the Isthmia border are filled with dolphins.<sup>66</sup> These do not seem to exist elsewhere within lozenges, but inspiration may again have come from stucco ceiling decoration such as in the Valerii Tomb<sup>67</sup> which depicted a great number

<sup>56</sup> Southeast Building (*Corinth* I, v, pl. 14:3), Roman villa (*Corinth* V, pls. 3 and 10), and Mosaic House (*Corinth* I, v, pl. 55).

<sup>57</sup> Πρακτικά, 1936 [1937], p. 37, fig. 3.

<sup>58</sup> Parlasca, pl. 23:1; Stern I, i, no. 49B, pl. 18.

<sup>59</sup> Levi, p. 376.

<sup>60</sup> Blake I, pl. 10:2 (Pompeii I.7.10–12).

<sup>61</sup> V. Spinazzola, *Le arti decorative in Pompei e nel Museo Nazionale di Napoli*, Milan, etc. 1928, pl. 164; E. L. Wadsworth, *MAAR* 4, 1924, pl. 17:1.

<sup>62</sup> Levi, pl. 95. Earlier at Delos a black lozenge was inscribed with a rosette (*Délos* XXIX, no. 267, p. 281, fig. 236).

<sup>63</sup> Parlasca, pl. 14A:1 (Stühlingen); Blake III, pl. 14:2.

<sup>64</sup> Becatti, no. 300, pl. 24.

<sup>65</sup> Rhodes (*Ἔργον*, 1976 [1977], p. 168, fig. 145); Pompeii V.5.3 (Pernice, pl. 24:3, Second Style); Antioch, House of Iphigenia (Levi, pl. 21, late 2nd century).

<sup>66</sup> It is clear from the style of the border dolphins that different workmen laid different parts of the mosaic. The border of the east end shows greater variations in the floral sprays and crosslets as well. One fleur-de-lis at the east end is incomplete (Pl. 100:c).

<sup>67</sup> Wadsworth, *op. cit.* (footnote 61 above), pl. 22.

of mythical sea creatures. Such creatures would have been impossible to execute as mosaic miniatures in the border lozenges, but the dolphin here is simple, suitable, and decorative. Although there is presumably no connection, we may perhaps recall the popularity of animal borders on earlier Greek mosaics, and also the preference of those earlier mosaics for light-on-dark figure decoration.<sup>68</sup>

The other major element of our border is a square inscribed with a white concave diamond (or “curvilinear square”) enclosing a black extended crosslet. Squares inscribed with concave diamonds are fairly common in Italy in the 1st century after Christ and earlier, beginning with a house of the First Style in Pompeii, and at least once they occur as an all-over pattern.<sup>69</sup> At Chalkis a 2nd-century mosaic has an all-over pattern composed of concave diamonds and lozenges in a rather different arrangement.<sup>70</sup> The motif is associated again with lozenges on one of the Pompeian floors, at Utica, and once at Ostia (the floor mentioned above with the floral related to ours; Pl. 101:a).<sup>71</sup> The latter two are rare examples of concave diamonds as filling for the squares in borders of our general type and are thus our closest parallels in over-all form. On a 1st-century Syracusan floor and on a 3rd-century floor at Antioch, lozenge-and-square borders of this type have some but not all of the squares inscribed with concave diamonds.<sup>72</sup>

The extended crosslet used as interior decoration within each of the concave diamonds is composed of a large central diamond (25 tesserae, just as in the lozenges) with each of the four arms consisting of a smaller (4 tesserae) diamond and a single-tessera diamond at the end.<sup>73</sup> Crosses with large centers and strings of two or more smaller diamonds for the arms occur first in Greece in the Kladeos Baths at Olympia and in the 2nd-century villas at Eleusis, Corinth, and Chalkis.<sup>74</sup> Unlike the Isthmia crosslets, the arms on these have but a single size of diamond. At Antioch the simple crosslets are fairly common beginning with the House of Cilicia and the House of Nar-

<sup>68</sup> The latter occurs sporadically later, as in an Augustan house at Pompeii with white birds as fill on dark squares (Pernice, pl. 40:3); for animal borders take, for example, the Olynthos House of the Comedians (*Olynthus* V, pl. 17).

<sup>69</sup> Pernice, pl. 13:3 (IX.8.6). A glance through the plates in Pernice, L. Barré's *Herculaneum et Pompéi* V, 6th ed., Paris 1875, Blake I, and Becatti reveals a number of other examples down into the 2nd century. The all-over pattern is Barré, *op. cit.*, pl. 10.

<sup>70</sup> Andreiomenou, *loc. cit.* (footnote 42 above).

<sup>71</sup> Pernice, pl. 25:6 (IX.8.6, Second Style); *Corpus de Tunisie* I, i, pl. X, Maison de la Cascade (ca. A.D. 100); Becatti, no. 300, pl. 24 (ca. A.D. 150).

<sup>72</sup> *NSc*, 1951, p. 151, fig. 1; Levi, pl. 48:d (House of the Buffet Supper). The concave diamond seems not to have been used at Antioch before the 3rd century.

<sup>73</sup> The central diamond sometimes has only 16 tesserae, and a couple of crosslets at the east end have an extra dot at the end of each arm.

<sup>74</sup> E. Kunze and H. Schleif, *OlymBer* IV, Berlin 1944, pl. 29; Πρακτικά, 1936 [1937], p. 37, fig. 3; *Corinth* V, pl. 10; Andreiomenou, *loc. cit.* (footnote 42 above). Later 2nd-century Greek examples come from Corinth, the Mosaic House (*Corinth* I, v, pl. 55) and Colonnade R west of the Odeum Court (*Corinth* X, p. 70, fig. 44); and Kenchreai (Δελτ 19, B' 1, 1964 [1966], pl. 113). At Naousa (Δελτ 18, B' 2, 1963 [1965], pl. 253), as at Isthmia, the crosslets have a very large size difference between the central diamond and those around it.

cissus in the first half of the 2nd century, and Antioch also offers one of the few examples other than our own of a crosslet with three sizes of diamonds.<sup>75</sup> Levi states that “Hadrianic art has a predilection for this kind of slender filling ornament,” but on mosaics in Italy this particular ornament cannot have been very common at that time since I have yet to find there an example of that date.<sup>76</sup> By the beginning of the 3rd century we have an example from Germany,<sup>77</sup> and soon after the crosslets appear in Italy but with a mixture of large and small diamonds in the arms.<sup>78</sup> A more elaborate crosslet which occurs only once (in our top border near the east end; Pl. 100:b) may be a reflection of coffer decoration such as has been reconstructed for a Pompeian ceiling.<sup>79</sup> Everywhere the extended crosslet is used alone as a *semis* or, more often, as interior decoration for a square or occasionally a concave diamond. In the latter case these concave diamonds are in every instance but one the result of interlaced designs rather than being concave diamonds within squares as independent motifs.<sup>80</sup>

#### CHECKERBOARD (Pl. 100:a)

At each end of the floor the upper left panel is a checkerboard with sixteen squares to a side, or four complete chessboards. The squares are seven tesserae wide in both panels, and a single row of white tesserae separates the pattern from its frame. In the east panel but not the west each square is dotted with a single tessera of the opposite color in the very center (Pl. 100:b).

According to Blake,<sup>81</sup> the checkerboard became popular as a minor motif in Italy in the 2nd century, and it appears at that time from Africa to England.<sup>82</sup> At Ostia there are examples of the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th centuries.<sup>83</sup> The only checkerboard at Antioch is already 4th century and is oriented diagonally.<sup>84</sup> In Greece the pattern appears in the 2nd century in the Naousa and Eleusis villas, and with diagonal orientation again in the Roman villa at Corinth (in polychrome), the Odeum at Patras, and scattered later

<sup>75</sup> Levi, pls. 10:a and 95:b; the House of the Boat of Psyche in the 3rd century, pl. 39:b. Another is in a late Roman villa in Athens (Δελαρ 24, B' 1, 1969 [1970], pls. 7:b and 8:a) where some of the crosslets have three sizes of diamond.

<sup>76</sup> Levi, p. 381. Blake II, pl. 10:3 may be a 2nd-century example, but the photograph is not clear enough to be sure. An earlier, 1st-century example occurs at Reggio Emilia, also with floral decoration (*NSc*, 1960, p. 255, fig. 8).

<sup>77</sup> Parlasca, pl. 84:1 (Kreuzweingarten).

<sup>78</sup> Blake III, pl. 14:1 and 14:4. Extended crosslets in which the diamonds of the arms are only one tessera each occur earlier in Italy (Pernice, pl. 18:5); and in Germany, at least, crosses with all the diamonds of equal size are more common. At Antioch, on the contrary, it seems the diamond size varies on all extended crosses.

<sup>79</sup> Pompeii I.10.7 (*NSc*, 1934, pl. X).

<sup>80</sup> Parlasca, pl. 14C:2, but in this the diamonds in the cross are all of equal size.

<sup>81</sup> Blake II, p. 187. For an earlier example, see Barré, *op. cit.* (footnote 69 above), pl. 9.

<sup>82</sup> Acholla, House of the Triumph of Neptune (Picard, *op. cit.* [footnote 26 above], p. 118, fig. 14); Fishbourne, room N 13 (M. Rule, *Floor Mosaics in Roman Britain*, London 1974, p. 28).

<sup>83</sup> Becatti, no. 187, pl. 34, *ca.* A.D. 120; no. 224, pl. 35, *ca.* A.D. 130; no. 335, pl. 199, 3rd century; no. 334, pl. 57, 4th century.

<sup>84</sup> Constantinian villa (Levi, pl. 53).

examples.<sup>85</sup> None has our dotted squares, but on the Patras floor the white squares do have a simple and inconspicuous filling ornament. A late 2nd-century floor in Cologne has a border of dotted checkers, and much earlier in Malta dotted squares appeared, though not in a true checkerboard.<sup>86</sup>

#### TRELLIS (Pl. 100:a)

The upper right patternwork panel at both ends is a trellis whose lines are composed of strings of four-tesserae squares set obliquely to each other with four such squares between intersections. Indented diamonds form the filling decorations. Along the left side of the west panel the intersecting points of the lattice are missing, evidently a result of poor planning, and on all edges of the west panel the filling decoration is cut off one row sooner than at the edges of the east panel.

Although a reticulate of simple crossed lines was widespread in Italy from Pompeii on, the trellis composed of multi-tesserae squares apparently does not occur in Italy before the 3rd century. When it finally appears it is apt to be more complex than the Isthmia example. The northern and western provinces also seem not to have favored this style of decoration, nor did the North Africans.<sup>87</sup> In the East, however, the trellis was a popular pattern, and it was common at Antioch from the early 2nd century on. Most like the Isthmia example is a late 2nd-century floor in the House of Iphigenia<sup>88</sup> which is polychrome but otherwise differs only in having six to seven squares instead of four between the intersections. The trellis was also more common in Greece. Near by at Corinth it was used in the South Stoa and again in the Roman Villa.<sup>89</sup> Another trellis much like the latter appears at Miletos around A.D. 200.<sup>90</sup>

#### SEMIS (Pl. 100:a)

The lower left panel at each end is a *semis* with two motifs alternating, a simple cross of five tesserae, and a larger indented diamond. Around the edges of the east panel a single row of white tesserae separates the pattern from the frame.

<sup>85</sup> Πρακτικά, 1964 [1966], pl. A opposite p. 32; 1936 [1937], p. 37, fig. 3; *Corinth* V, pl. 7; Δελατ 16, 1960 [1962], pl. 117.

<sup>86</sup> Cologne, Zeppelinstrasse, late 2nd century (Parlasca, pl. 64:1); Malta (Pernice, pl. 2:5).

<sup>87</sup> There are a few early North African examples, e.g., at Tripoli (S. Aurigemma, *L'Italia in Africa* I, i, Rome 1962, pl. 56, 1st or 2nd century). An interesting trellis occurs at Utica ca. A.D. 200 in which the squares of the lattice are alternately large and small (*Corpus de Tunisie* I, i, pl. XVI, Maison de la Cascade).

<sup>88</sup> Levi, pl. 21.

<sup>89</sup> In the South Stoa of ca. A.D. 100 (O. Broneer, *Corinth* I, iv, *The South Stoa and its Roman Successors*, Princeton 1954, pl. 30) there are five squares between intersections. There are two trellises in the probably Antonine villa (*Corinth* V, pls. 7 and 11, the latter light-on-dark). Both are polychrome. As at Isthmia both have four squares of lattice between intersecting points, and both have interior decoration of (hollow) indented diamonds. A trellis of ca. A.D. 200 at Ulpia Oescus in Bulgaria has the same scheme (T. Ivanov, *Une mosaïque romaine de Ulpia Oescus*, Sofia 1954, pl. 6).

<sup>90</sup> H. Knackfuss, *Milet*, I, vii, *Der Südmarkt und die benachbarten Anlagen*, Berlin 1924, pl. 7. Some other Greek trellises: Miletos Humeitepe bath (A. von Gerkan and F. Krischen, *Milet*, I, ix, *Thermen und Palaestren*, Berlin 1928, pl. 37), Thebes Kadmeion (Δελατ 3, 1917, p. 20, fig. 14), Veroia (Δελατ 25, B' 2, 1970 [1973], p. 383, fig. 4), and Kos (*BdA* 35, 1950, p. 231, fig. 52).



The *semis* as an all-over pattern on a light ground was quite popular at Antioch. It was sometimes used in panels as at Isthmia<sup>91</sup> but more often forms broad border areas between panels with other decoration. The late 2nd-century House of Porticoes at Seleucia<sup>92</sup> is the first to employ two different motifs alternately in the same area as at Isthmia. In the 3rd century the House of the Boat of Psyche<sup>93</sup> again combines two more elaborate motifs. In Italy at Pompeii and elsewhere light-on-dark was the preferred system, gradually giving way to dark-on-light by the mid-2nd century, after which the *semis* apparently went out of style.<sup>94</sup> Though the *semis* was not especially common in North Africa, two houses at Utica around A.D. 100 had panels of *semis* (one dark-on-light, the other the reverse).<sup>95</sup> They rarely appear on German floors except as a narrow border in light-on-dark, but one 2nd-century mosaic has a whole floor consisting mainly of simple crosses but occasionally alternating them with indented diamonds like ours.<sup>96</sup> Likewise in Greece the use of *semis* is mainly restricted to narrow border areas, and the Isthmia example seems to be the only case of its use as an actual panel.

The specific motifs used here are not exclusively characteristic of any particular area or period. Indented diamonds occur in Italy from Pompeii on<sup>97</sup> though they are more common later. At Antioch the House of the Evil Eye and the House of the Drinking Contest provide early 2nd- and 3rd-century examples.<sup>98</sup> At Corinth they appear as filling ornaments in the 2nd century in the villa, in the Southeast Building, and as a narrow outer border in the Mosaic House.<sup>99</sup> The form with light or hollow centers was more popular in Greece than our solid variety.

The simple crosses are less common than might be supposed since the more usual forms have the tesserae set obliquely to each other rather than directly adjacent as in ours, or they omit the central cube of the cross. Our type appears at Pompeii in the Villa dei Misteri, and in an early 1st-century example in the museum at Este.<sup>100</sup> In the

<sup>91</sup> Levi, pl. 97, DH 24-S (second half of 2nd century); and the House of the Drinking Contest, p. 157, fig. 59 (mid-3rd century).

<sup>92</sup> Levi, pl. 100.

<sup>93</sup> Levi, pl. 39.

<sup>94</sup> At Pompeii dark-on-light *semis* were certainly not unknown (e.g., VII.7.5, Blake I, pl. 2:2; VIII.2.1, Blake I, pl. 25:1; or VI.8.5, Blake I, pl. 27:4). Ostia gives us light-on-dark *semis* on the earlier floors (Beccatti, no. 387, pls. 10, 11, Augustan; no. 384, pl. 11, early 1st century; no. 227, pl. 10, ca. A.D. 130) and the reverse later (Palazzo Imperiale, no. 301, pl. 59, ca. A.D. 150). Some 1st-century dark-on-light examples remain in Rome, Via Nomentana (M. L. Morricone Matini, "Mosaici a cassettoni del I secolo a.C.," *ArchCl* 17, 1965, pl. 28:2) and Via Trionfale (*NSc*, 1920, p. 291, fig. 3).

<sup>95</sup> *Corpus de Tunisie* I, ii, pl. XII (Maison au Grand Oecus) and pl. XIX (Maison Ouest).

<sup>96</sup> Parlasca, pl. 19:2 (Oberweis).

<sup>97</sup> E.g., Blake I, pl. 2:2 (VII.7.5, Second Style); *NSc*, 1939, p. 142, fig. 1 (Mileto Nuovo, 1st century after Christ, as fill in a reticulate).

<sup>98</sup> Levi, pl. 93; p. 157, fig. 59.

<sup>99</sup> *Corinth* V, pls. 7 and 10; *Corinth* I, v, pl. 15:2; *ibid.*, pl. 55. Also in the first half of the 2nd century at Kouklia and at Eleusis as a fill motif (*BCH* 85, 1961, p. 294, fig. 46:b; and *Πρακτικά*, 1936 [1937], p. 39, fig. 8).

<sup>100</sup> Pernice, pl. 22:2; Blake I, pl. 11:2.

2nd century it was used as a *semis* in the above-mentioned German floor. In Greece it occurs around A.D. 100 in the *caldarium* of the baths on the Kladeos at Olympia, and in later Roman times as a filling decoration in Rhodes and as a *semis* in Samos.<sup>101</sup>

#### INTERLACE (Pl. 100:a)

On each side of the figured panels the lower right panel of patternwork is composed of black-on-white circles interlaced in such a way as to produce rows of black quatrefoils. The white curvilinear squares remaining as background each have a black filling decoration of dotted crosslets (the arms being single-tessera dots, the center a square of four tesserae). In the west panel the spaces between the tips of the "leaflets" tend to be one tessera wider than those in the east panel, and at the edges on all sides of the west panel the pattern stops one row sooner than in the east panel.

The pattern of interlaced circles was popular all over the Roman world. Blake enumerates some examples in Italy from the 1st century and earlier,<sup>102</sup> both dark-on-light and the reverse. This simple interlace appears again in black-on-white at Hadrian's villa,<sup>103</sup> and in the early 3rd century at Ostia,<sup>104</sup> but from the 2nd century on more elaborate forms such as the hexagonal interlace predominate in Italy. The Isthmia variety, when it does occur after the 2nd century, is apt to have fancier filling decorations and "leaflets" in outline or with interior decoration. The 2nd-century and earlier examples in Italy most often lack filling decorations.

The plain interlace producing curvilinear squares was quite popular in the northern provinces between the late 1st and early 3rd centuries, more often dark-on-light than the reverse, and more often with filling decorations than without.<sup>105</sup> In Africa a 2nd-century dark-on-light interlace occurs in the Marine Thiasos Baths at Acholla.<sup>106</sup> At Antioch the pattern was common from the early 2nd century (House of Polyphemus) until *ca.* A.D. 500 (Kaoussie Church).<sup>107</sup> Here the pre-Severan examples are almost exclusively dark-on-light, the Severan and after mostly light-on-dark, and most have filling decorations (the later the more elaborate). The closest parallels to Isthmia, including the filling decoration, are both 2nd century: Antioch DH 24-S, and Trier.<sup>108</sup> The filling decoration in an interlaced pattern of the late 2nd or early 3rd century at Ulpia Oescus in Bulgaria is identical to ours.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Kunze and Schleif, *op. cit.* (footnote 74 above), pl. 30; Δελτ 22, B' 2, 1967 [1969], p. 532, fig. 9; Δελτ 23, B' 2, 1968 [1969], p. 377, fig. 2.

<sup>102</sup> Blake I, pp. 109f.

<sup>103</sup> Blake II, pl. 12:3 in the background.

<sup>104</sup> Becatti, no. 319, pl. 40.

<sup>105</sup> E.g., Parlasca, pl. 62:1 (Cologne, Apostelnkloster); Stern I, ii, pl. 37 (Téting). A simple 4th-century example comes from Horkstow, Lincolnshire (Hinks, no. 36, p. 111, fig. 122).

<sup>106</sup> Picard, *op. cit.* (footnote 26 above), p. 106, fig. 6.

<sup>107</sup> Levi, pls. 2 and 139.

<sup>108</sup> Levi, pl. 97:a; Parlasca, pl. 17:1 (Wytttenbachstrasse).

<sup>109</sup> Ivanov, *op. cit.* (footnote 89 above), pl. 1.

In Greece the pattern was also well represented from the 1st century on.<sup>110</sup> Here again there is a preference for dark-on-light interlaces on the pre-Severan floors and the reverse later, but the division is not as consistent in Greece as at Antioch.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Final determination of the date of the Isthmia mosaic will have to await further study of the bath itself, but parallels cited for the figures suggest a date in the mid-2nd century after Christ. Closest are the Tritons in the Marine Thiasos Baths at Acholla, and especially the Chania Triton (Pl. 101:b), both in the first half of the century. The uncluttered composition also suggests such a date.

Patternwork is often considered a better basis for the dating of mosaics than the iconography and style of figured scenes. This is partly due to the belief that the pattern books caused similar scenes to be repeated at widely scattered locations and dates, as we have in fact found, while the geometric decorations tend to be more specific to certain periods. On the Isthmia mosaic the simplicity of the geometric designs in the patternwork panels affords rather scanty evidence for any conclusions as to the date, but some slight hints may be valid if they reinforce the indications from other elements of the floor.

Since interlaced circles occur everywhere in the Roman world and in all periods, they would seem to be of little use, but in fact they may be more helpful than the other panels because in Greece dark-on-light interlaces are most often pre-Severan. In Antioch the same tendency is even more marked, and in Italy already in the 2nd century more elaborate forms of interlace began to replace our version although there is apparently no correlation between color preference and date there. Our simple trellis, though the form does not appear in Italy until the 3rd century, occurs in Greece and at Antioch from the 2nd century on. The checkerboard spans the same dates in Greece and became popular in Italy and the West about the same time or a little later (but was not popular at Antioch). Finally, the use of *semis* in panels is perhaps without parallel in Greece. It is uncommon in Italy except for whole rooms, and even in that case is rare after the 2nd century. At Antioch, on the contrary, it is common, though not so often in panels. Indented diamonds appear in Greece from the 1st century on, in Italy from Pompeii on (becoming common in the 2nd century), and at Antioch from the early 2nd century. All of this would allow a date for our mosaic any time from the 2nd century on. The interlaced circles suggest more emphatically some time during the 2nd century, though they do not rule out a later date.

<sup>110</sup> There are late 1st-century interlaced circles in the villa at Anaploga (Miller, *op. cit.* [footnote 42 above], pl. 73), in the Kladeos Baths at Olympia (Adler, *op. cit.* [footnote 17 above], pl. CXI), and in the Odeum at Patras (Δελτ 16, 1960 [1962], pl. 117). Second-century examples come from the villas at Corinth (*Corinth* V, pls. 3 and 10), Eleusis (Πρακτικά, 1936 [1937], p. 40, fig. 9), Chalkis (Andreiomenou, *loc. cit.* [footnote 42 above]), and Naousa (Δελτ 19, B' 3, 1964 [1967], pl. 422), and a house in Athens (Δελτ 21, B' 1, 1966 [1968], pl. 72). In the 3rd century the pattern is represented at Kos (*BdA* 35, 1950, p. 231, fig. 52), Miletos (*Milet* I, vii, pl. 7), and Sparta (Δελτ 20, B' 1, 1965 [1967], pl. 153). I hardly need add that this list is only a sampling of the many floors with this pattern from these centuries, and that the pattern continued to be popular in later centuries as well.

The border is not quite as ordinary as the patternwork panels, and the motifs used in it offer further and perhaps better clues. The use of a strong continuous border such as this is often an indication of a Severan date. In dating a Greek mosaic, however, the greatest weight should presumably be accorded the Greek parallels. As indicated earlier, such borders had already appeared in Greece several times by the middle of the 2nd century after Christ, not to mention their long history in the country prior to that time. Our particular type of border also occurs at Antioch (Pl. 101:c) in the early 2nd century, so it would seem that such bold borders are part of the Eastern tradition and should not necessarily be judged by current Italian standards.<sup>111</sup> In fact the influence may sometimes have gone in the other direction, as is likely to be the case with our type of trellis and the extended crosses. The latter seem to have been more popular in Greece and Antioch than in the West in the 2nd century. On the other hand, it is clear that influence went both directions. In the case of the Isthmia mosaic it is certain that the idea of monochrome figure decoration at least was imported. Black-and-white geometric decoration does occur elsewhere in Greece, but polychrome was more popular. Although a time lag between the introduction of new elements to mosaics in Italy and their arrival elsewhere is sometimes assumed, particularly with the black-and-white technique, Blake advises that some of the same patterns appear contemporaneously in Italy and Germany in the 2nd century.<sup>112</sup> Therefore our mosaic need not automatically be dated later than it would be had it been found in Italy. Another possible import from the West to Greece may be the square inscribed with a concave diamond. This occurs in the West fairly often in the 1st and 2nd centuries but not until later in the East. The 2nd-century Greek and Antiochian parallels for the border, and the Hadrianic character of the interior decoration in the lozenges and concave diamonds point again to the mid-2nd century as a likely date.

The mid-2nd century was a period of considerable building activity on the Isthmus. Existing structures were refurbished and new buildings erected, many by a wealthy high priest of Poseidon, Iuventianus, and Herodes Atticus likewise bestowed favors on the site.<sup>113</sup> After that time there was apparently no major construction apart from military structures, so a 2nd-century date for the mosaic seems appropriate historically as well as stylistically.

The Isthmia mosaicist was probably a native Greek who used local pattern books to design a pavement in the Hellenistic tradition but in the current Italian monochrome style.<sup>114</sup> Panel-style decoration and figured scenes divided into registers were Hellenistic

<sup>111</sup> Our particular type of border did occur at Pompeii in the 1st century and earlier, and in the 2nd century at Ostia and elsewhere (see pp. 337–338), but it was not used in the West as a frame around figured panels until later (e.g., P. L. Zovato, *Mosaici paleocristiani delle Venezie*, Udine 1963, pp. 65–66, no. 60, p. 135, no. 133).

<sup>112</sup> Blake II, p. 123, note 1.

<sup>113</sup> For a brief history of the site, see O. Broneer, "Excavations at Isthmia," *Hesperia* 28, 1959, pp. 338–342. On Herodes Atticus' benefactions to Corinth and the Isthmus, see P. Graindor, *Un milliardaire antique. Hérode Atticus et sa famille*, Cairo 1930, pp. 209ff.

<sup>114</sup> A combination of Greek and Roman characteristics occurs also in the theater at Isthmia in the remodeling of the second Roman period, probably in the third quarter of the 2nd century. See E. Gebhard, *The Theater at Isthmia*, Chicago 1973.

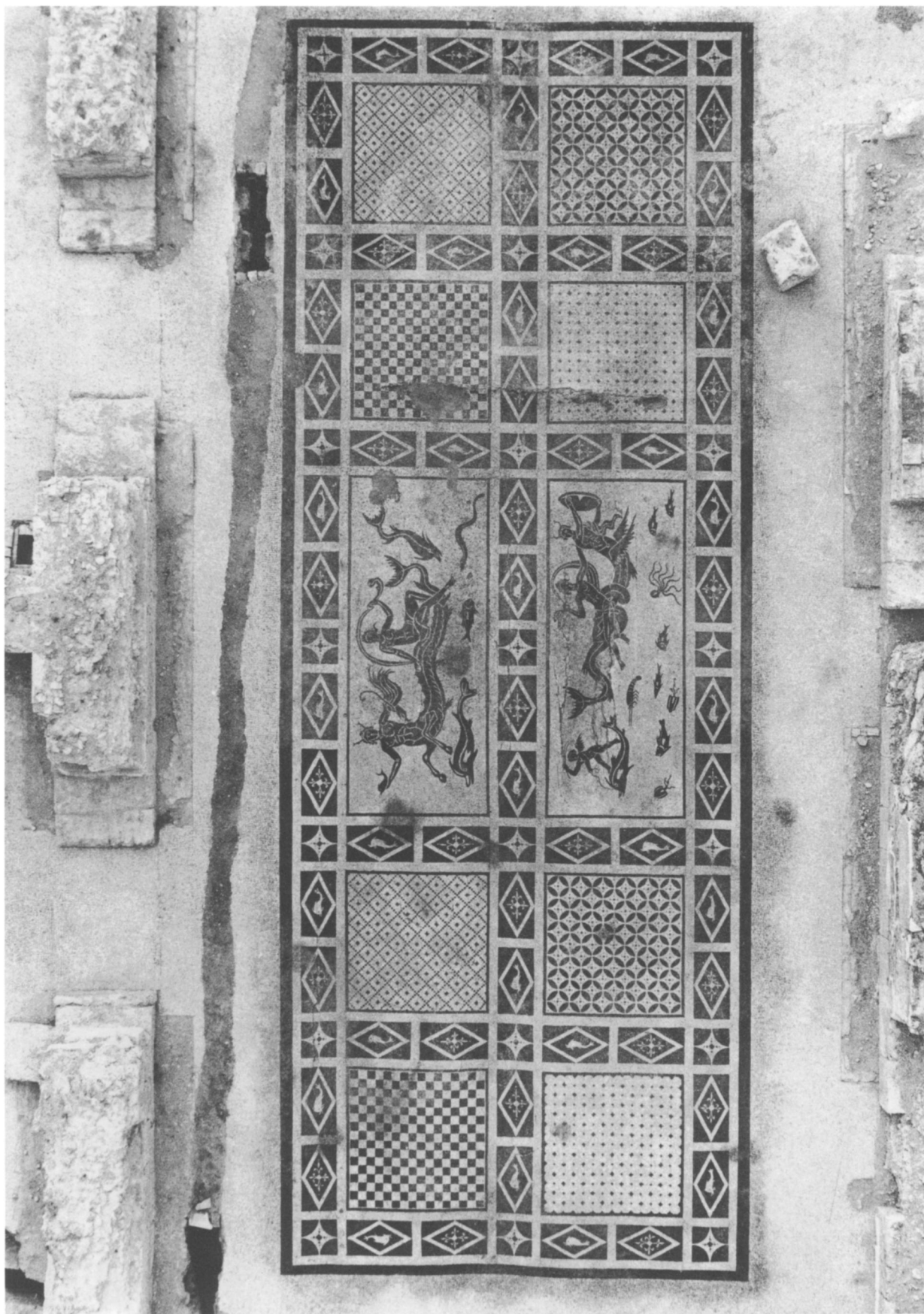
characteristics known at Pompeii<sup>115</sup> but not favored in the 2nd-century and later black-and-white mosaics of Italy. Several aspects of the Isthmia figure decoration likewise are almost without parallel in the black-and-white mosaics but are not uncommon in Pompeian art, Greek art (both Hellenistic and Roman periods), and in North African mosaics.<sup>116</sup> These features are apparently Hellenistic and remained in the Greek and North African pattern books after the Italian books abandoned them. Thus the Isthmia mosaicist has combined elements of the native Greek tradition with the current Italian trends and from rather common components has produced a highly original work of art.

PAMELA M. PACKARD

LOS ANGELES

<sup>115</sup> Bianchi-Bandinelli, *op. cit.* (footnote 40 above), p. 136.

<sup>116</sup> See p. 335–336.



General view of the mosaic pavement

PAMELA M. PACKARD: A MONOCHROME MOSAIC AT ISTHMA



North figured panel

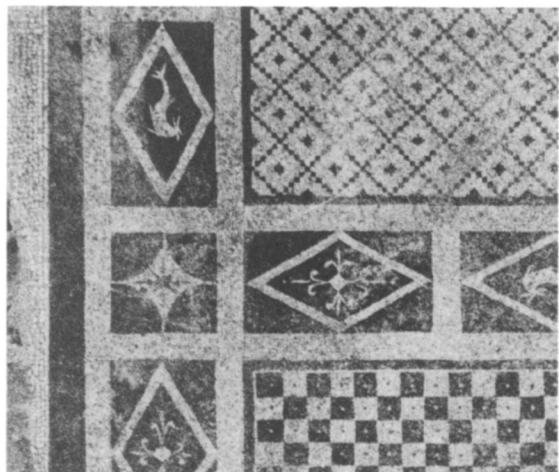
PAMELA M. PACKARD: A MONOCHROME MOSAIC AT ISTHMIA



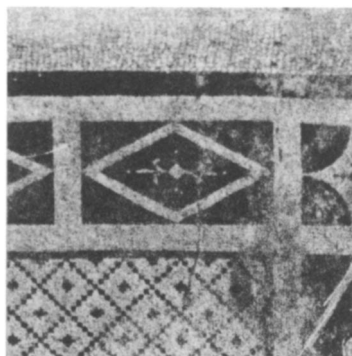
South figured panel

PAMELA M. PACKARD: A MONOCHROME MOSAIC AT ISTHμία

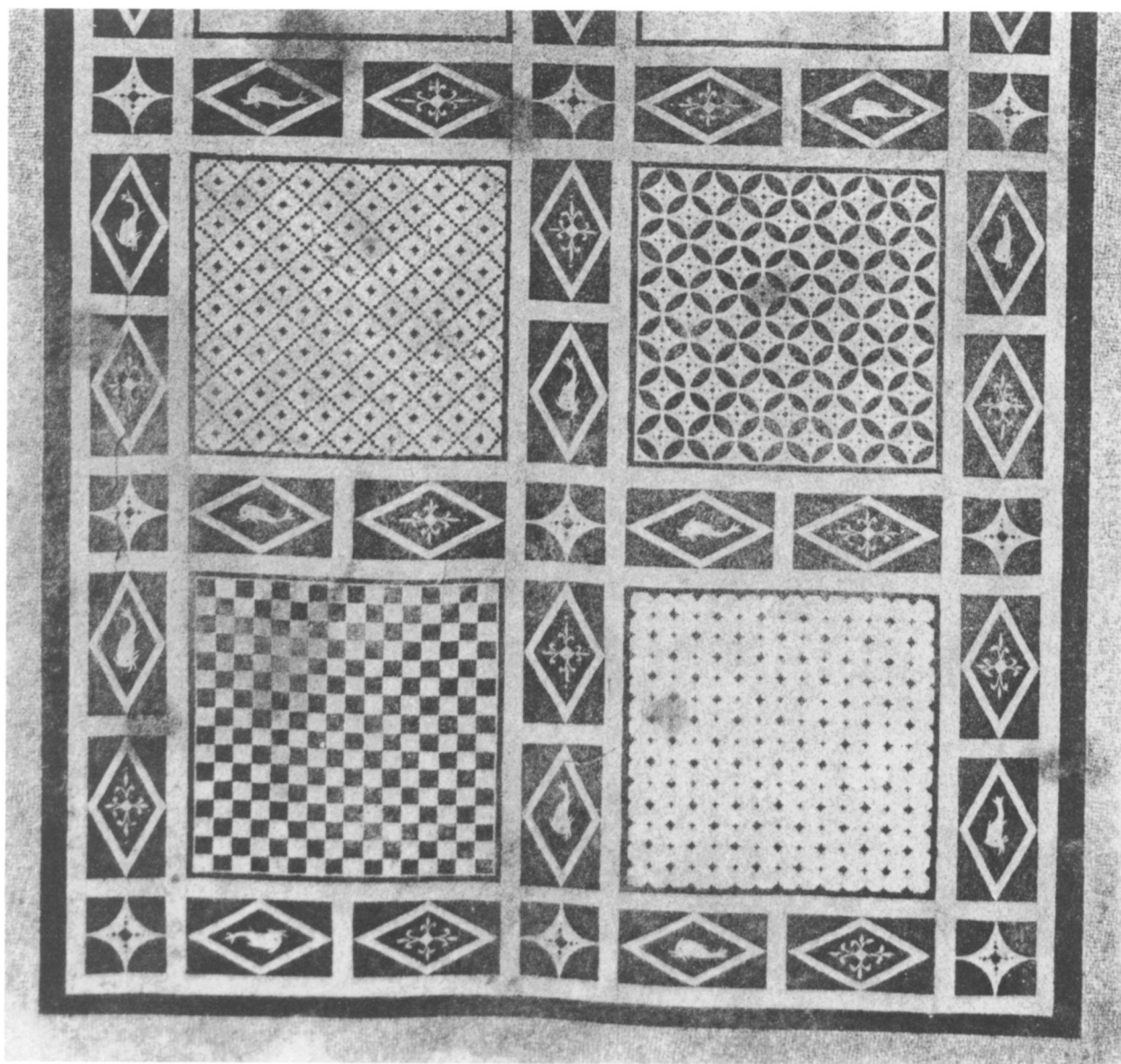




b. East end: detail



c. East end: detail



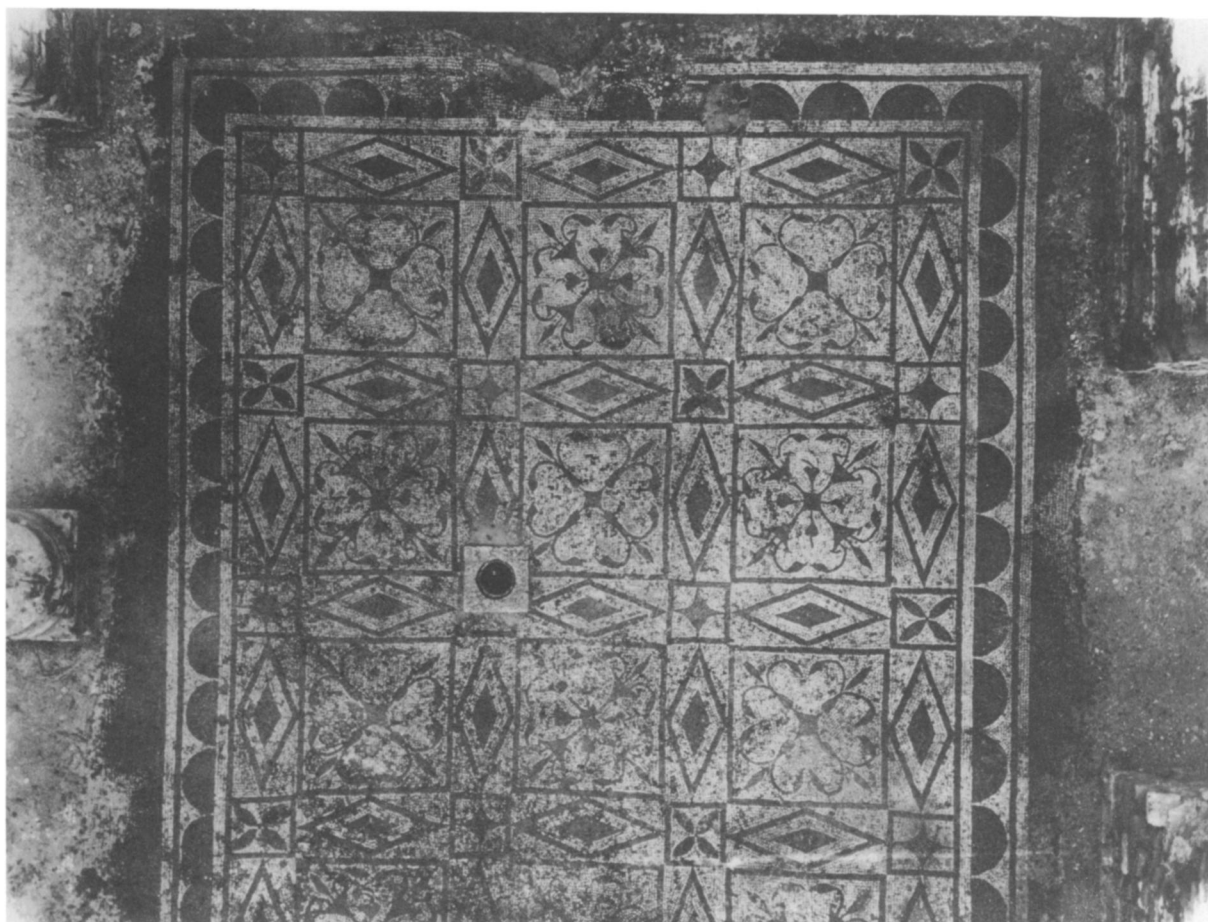
a. West end



b. Chania mosaic  
(photograph,  
Yannis  
Tzedakis)



c. Antioch, Calendar House (photograph, Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University)



a. Ostia, Palazzo Imperiale (photograph, J. Paul Getty Museum)