

# Sectilia Pavimenta at Iasos

## Iasos'ta Sectile Döşeme

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### Abstract

*In Iasos, a town only partially investigated and with a small number of mosaics, three pavimenta sectilia were brought to light, dating from the beginning of the Roman empire to at least the late 3rd century. While the lithostroton at the propylaeum and the one in the prehistoric necropolis belong to the best known type - a white tessellated floor in which polychrome marble or stone crustae are inserted - the third example, located in front of the east gate of the agora, has special characteristics. The white background is reduced to a minimum, the crustae are closely spaced and linked by one or two rows of tesserae and surround an off-centre pseudo-emblema, equally made up of a sectile.*

*The type of pavement of the first two floors mentioned, which are actually the later ones, is very common in Rome and throughout the Italian peninsula; it is known in the western part of the empire and is very rare in the eastern part. The third one, on the other hand, dated between the Augustan age and the second half of the 1st century AD, finds comparisons only on very few specimens, respectively, in Cremona, Lucca, Pompeii, between the 1st century BC and the 1st century AD, and in Olympia in the 2nd century AD.*

*Faced with the almost total absence of attestations of this type of floor in the eastern Greek part of the empire and in the rest of Asia Minor, one wonders why, on the contrary, the craftsmen active in Iasos showed such a predilection over several centuries. It has been established that sectilia pavimenta were especially popular in Rome and throughout Italy; in Iasos the presence of numerous Italics who resided and worked there is epigraphically documented; also in the tessellated mosaics of the town, for example in the House of Mosaics, it is possible to identify some 'Italicisms' in the decoration and content, and even the presence of a cult dedicated to Heracles as protector of the town leads back to Italic environments.*

*All these elements allow us to think, in my opinion, that the presence of Italics in Iasos had important consequences on the cultural level, including a particular predilection for sectilia pavimenta.*

**Keywords:** *Sectilia pavimenta, tesserae, crustae, Italics, Iasos.*

### Öz

*Sadece kısmen araştırılmış ve az sayıda mozaiği olan bir kent olan Iasos'ta, Roma İmparatorluğu'nun başlangıcından en azından 3. yüzyılın sonlarına kadar uzanan bir aralığa tarihlenebilen üç adet sectile döşeme gün ışığına çıkarılmıştır. Propylaeum'daki ve prehistorik nekropoldeki litostraton en iyi bilinen tipe aitken - polikrom mermer veya taş kabukluların yerleştirildiği beyaz mozaik döşeme - agoranın doğu kapısının önünde yer alan üçüncü örnek, özel niteliklere sahiptir. Beyaz arka plan minimuma indirgenmiştir; kabuklar birbirine yakın aralıktadır; bir veya iki sıra tessera ile birbirine bağlanmıştır ve eşit olarak bir sektileden oluşan bir merkez dışı yarı-emblemayı çevrelemektedir.*

*Bahsedilen ilk iki döşeme daha geç tarihli olup Roma'da ve İtalya yarımadasında çok yaygındır; bu örnekler imparatorluğun batı kesiminde çok sayıda görülürken ve doğu kesiminde çok nadirdir. Augustus çağı ile İS 1. yüzyılın ikinci yarısı arasında tarihlenen üçüncüsü ise, İÖ 1. yüzyıl ile İS 1. yüzyıl arasında tarihlenen Cremona, Lucca, Pompeii ve İS 2. yüzyıla tarihlenen Olympia gibi çok az sayıdaki örneklerle karşılaştırılabilir.*

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*İmparatorluğun doğu Yunan kesiminde ve Küçük Asya'nın geri kalanında bu tip mozaik döşemelerin neredeyse tamamen olmamasına karşın, İasos'ta faaliyet gösteren zanaatkarların birkaç yüzyıl boyunca neden böyle bir tercih gösterdikleri merak uyandırmaktadır. Sectilia pavimenta'nın özellikle Roma'da ve tüm İtalya'da popüler olduğu tespit edilmiştir; İasos'ta burada yaşamış ve çalışmış çok sayıda İtalyan kökenli kişinin olduğu epigrafik olarak belgelenmiştir. Ayrıca şehrin tesellalı mozaiklerinde, örneğin Mozaik Evi'nde, dekorasyon ve içerikte bazı 'İtalizmler' tespit etmek mümkündür ve hatta şehrin koruyucusu olarak Herakles'e adanmış bir kültün varlığı, İtalyan kökenlere işaret etmektedir.*

*Tüm bu unsurlar, özellikle sectilia pavimenta'ya yönelik bir tercih de dahil olmak üzere İasos'ta İtalyan varlığının kültürel düzeyde önemli sonuçları olduğunun düşünülmesine izin vermektedir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sectilia pavimenta, tesserae, kabuklular (kavkılar), İtalyanlar, İasos.

In the limited mosaic heritage of Iasos it is striking to find three floors decorated with marble or stone *tesserae* and *crustae*<sup>1</sup>. Brought to light by the excavations of the Italian Archaeological Mission, they are different in type, in the function of the room they decorate, at least in the two cases in which it can be recognized, and, probably, in chronology.

The first one (Figs. 1-2) is located in the middle of the eastern *stoa* of the *agora*, in the columned vestibule in front of the monumental entrance which allows access

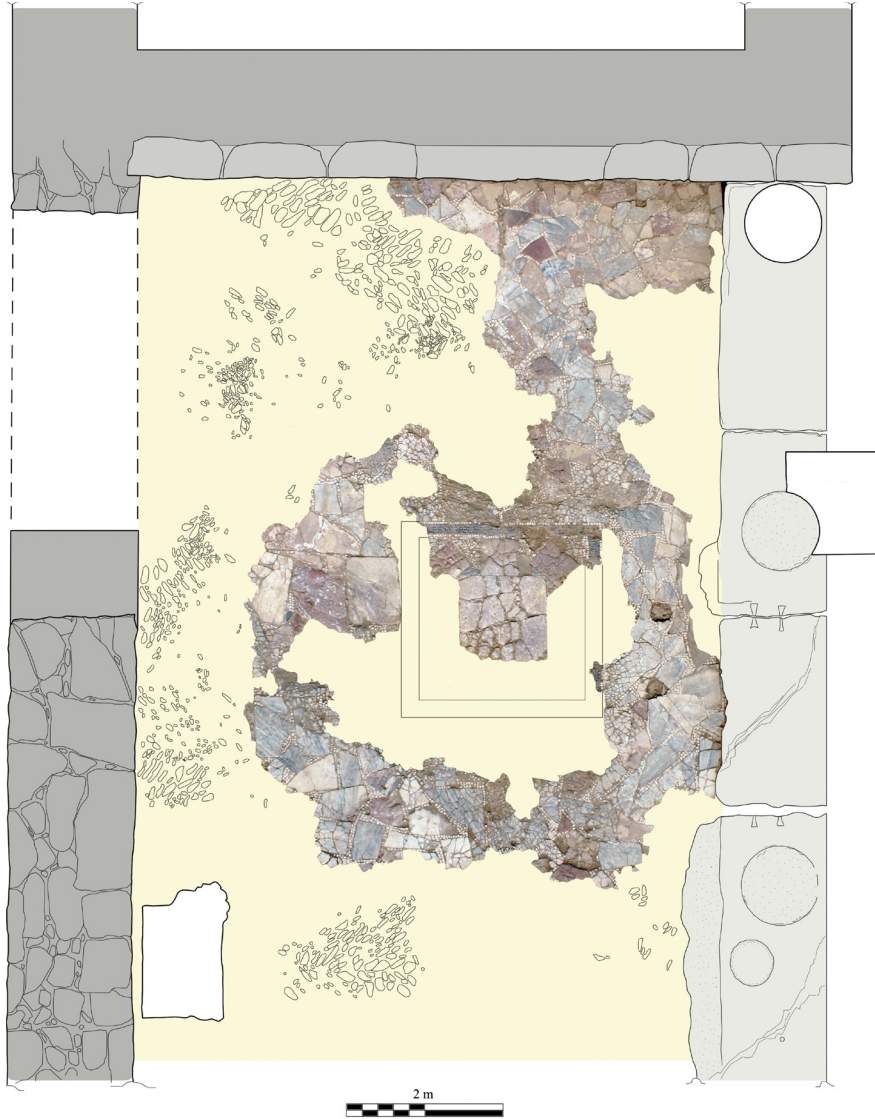


Figure 1  
Iasos, Eastern gate of the *agora*: *pavimentum sectile* of the vestibule in front of it (drawing by Maurizio Molinari, Italian Archaeological Mission).

<sup>1</sup> There is an extensive bibliography dedicated to the terminology to be used for this type of flooring: *lithostrota* (Bruneau 1967), *scutulata pavimenta* (Morricono Matini 1980) and *sectilia pavimenta*, the Latin translation of *lithostrota* (Guidobaldi 2016).

Figure 2  
Iasos, the *pavimentum sectile* in front of the Eastern gate of the *agora* (photo by Maurizio Molinari, Italian Archaeological Mission).



to the area of the city where is the theatre<sup>2</sup>. The floor of the room, which rests on a *rudratio* of edgeways stones arranged in a herringbone shape to give solidity to the walking surface, consists of polychrome marble *crustae* of irregular shape and size closely joined together by white *tesserae*, generally one or two rows but sometimes the irregularity of the slabs required more of them. In this *sectile* is inserted, off-centre relative to the sides of the vestibule, an *emblema* framed by rows of white and black *tesserae*.

The *emblema* too (Fig. 3) consists of a *sectile*, but, unlike the rest of the floor, here it is possible to read a design that unfortunately is only partially preserved: at the centre is a white square to which are tangent, in the middle of the sides, a small white square and at the corners a red rectangle. The resulting space between the rectangle and the frame of the *emblema* is occupied by an equilateral triangle in grey *tesserae*, while smaller triangles in black *tesserae* mark the spaces between the central square and the rectangles. The background is made of white *tesserae*. The marbles have not been classified, but F. Berti, who directed the excavation and studied the floor (Berti 1999), recognized the Rosso Antico, the grey of Mylasa and the red of Iasos. One of the slabs is shaped with a double moulding: so reused or waste materials were also employed for this *sectile*.

The lack of a stratigraphic investigation underneath the pavement deprives us of reliable external elements for a chronology; therefore, we have to consider

<sup>2</sup> About the excavation see Baldoni 1995: 7-8. About the floor: Berti 1997: 63-64; 1999; 2015: 273-275; Scheibelreiter 2007: 159.



Figure 3  
Iasos, the *emblema* of the *pavimentum sectile* (photo by Simonetta Angiolillo, Italian Archaeological Mission).

the context in which the floor is placed, the history of the agora and its building phases, the technical data of the *sectile* and the diffusion of this type of flooring.

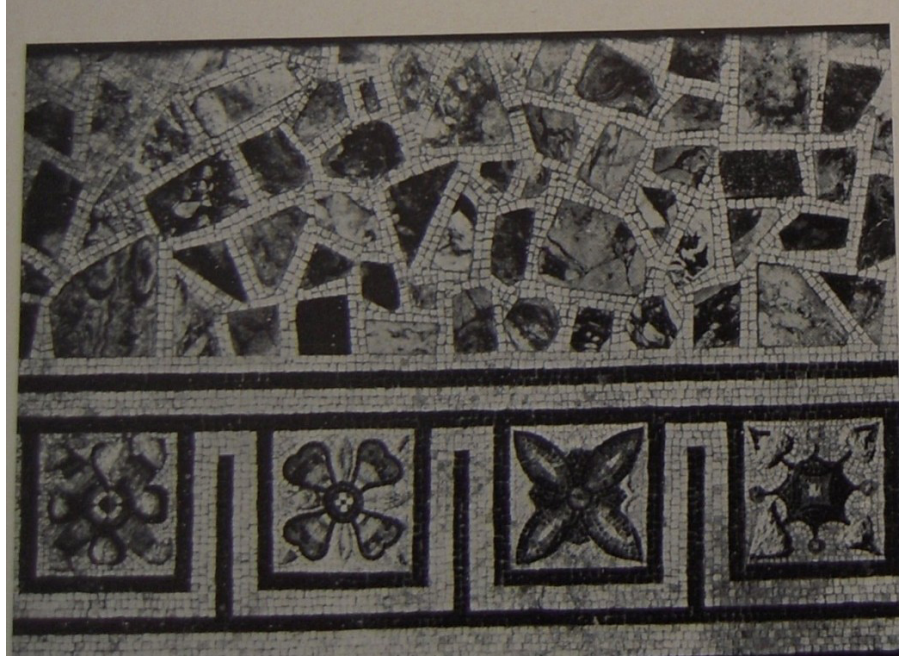
Two inscriptions, respectively dedicated to the emperors Hadrian and Antoninus Pius, inform us that under these emperors the colonnades of the eastern stoa were rebuilt, either completely or in part (Blümel 1985: 8-9; Pagello 1985), but the area of the eastern entrance to the square contains evidence of a more ancient life. The vestibule is in fact bordered to the north by a bulging ashlar wall, a masonry technique attested in the district of the theatre in a building that stratigraphic investigations date to the last quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, and to the south by a heroon. In its currently visible state it is contemporary to the arrangement of the stoa, but one must postulate a first phase of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, if not even earlier, because it rises above two tombs, one of which is archaic and the other of the Hekatomnid period (Donati 1999).

No help have we from the types of marble used in the *sectile*, since those which have been identified (Rosso Antico, grey marble from Mylasa, red from Iasos) are all already attested before the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC (Berti 1999: 339).

Nor a noteworthy contribution to the dating of the floor comes from the examination of the other pavements of this type, which are arranged along a chronological arc that goes from at least the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. Compositions of tesserae and crustae are very common especially in the Italic peninsula<sup>3</sup>, rare is on the contrary the particular rendering we find in the agora, of which, to my knowledge, only four close comparisons can be reminded. In Cremona (Fig. 4), in a living room of the Domus del Labirinto, the floor, framed by a metope border with floral motifs, consists of a white mosaic with polychrome marble inserts of various shapes and sizes; the crustae occupy most of the available space and are only outlined by tesserae. For stylistic considerations the floor is dated between 25 BC and 25 AD (<http://tess.beniculturali.unipd.it/web/scheda/?recid=16285>). In Lucca the pseudo-*emblema* of a *cocciopesto* floor

3 On this kind of flooring see Blake 1930: tables 11-15; Morricone Matini 1980. The bibliography concerning the various specimens of *sectilia pavimenta* in Italy is very extensive, to start with it is useful to see <http://tess.beniculturali.unipd.it>.

Figure 4  
Cremona, *pavimentum sectile*  
(Blake 1930, table 15, 4).



is performed according to the technique of marble inlay: the result is very similar to the sectile of Iasos. It has been dated to the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC (Ciampoltrini - Rendini 1996: 575), once again on the basis of comparisons. In Pompeii too, the impluvium of the atrium of the Casa dei quadretti teatrali, of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC with Augustan restorations (Fig. 5, PPM I 6, 11: 367 fig. 7), is decorated with slabs of various shapes and different sizes linked together by rows of tesserae. Finally, very close to the Iasian specimen are also few floors in the Baths of the

Figure 5  
Pompei I 6, 11 Casa dei quadretti  
teatrali; *atrium* (PPM: 367, fig. 7).



Cladeus at Olympia, which is dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD (Kankeleit 1994: 210-211 kat. 120 D1, Taf. 38; 39, 3; <https://www.kankeleit.de/kladeosthermen.php>): in this case the white background tesserae have a larger space than in the floors examined so far.

Nevertheless, there are many pavements that, despite the fact that their decorative syntax and tessellated-*sectile* ratio are very different from those of the floor of the *agora*, show the same liking for the contemporary use of different techniques and for the decorative function of the marble inlay, often chosen to form an *emblema*.

Many and very interesting are those from Pompeii; let's see only a few ones. In the Casa del Sacerdos Amandus and in the *thermopolium* I 8, 8 the cocciopesto floor of the *triclinium* is embellished with an *emblema* formed by marble tiles and underlined by rows of white *tesserae* (PPM I 7, 7: 589 fig. 4; PPM I 8, 8: 806 fig. 4). We see a similar situation also in the *tablinum* (d) and *triclinium* (e) of the Casa dei Ceii, of the period of the III style (PPM I 6, 15: 439 fig. 47 and 441 fig. 51), while in the floor of the *atrium* of the Casa di M. Fabius Amandio (PPM I 7, 2, 3: 560 fig. 11), of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, a white rectangular tessellated square stands out with quadrangular, triangular, and hexagonal marble inserts, which highlight a central marble disk profiled with black *tesserae*.

Examples of a similar decoration based on the relationships between geometrically shaped *scutula* and tessellated sectors have been also found at Tindari, in the baths, dated to the first centuries of the empire (Boeselager 1983: 113-121). Here in two floors the field is bordered by a high band occupied by *scutula* of different sizes and more or less regular geometric shape profiled by white *tesserae* and it is decorated by a black and white central figure, respectively a triskeles and a bull. In a third case some frames in *opus sectile* surround a black and white tessellated carpet with marble inserts of regular geometric shapes; in the centre there is a white tessellated roundel on which four dolphins swim around a rhomboidal slab.

After reviewing the available data for a dating, I think that the floor of the eastern *stoa* of the *agora* can be attributed to the time span between the Augustan age and the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD<sup>4</sup>.

As we have seen above, two other *sectilia pavimenta* have been unearthed in Iasos<sup>5</sup>. The first, still in situ, furnishes the latrine of a *domus* near the Propylaeum, on the southern tip of the island (Fig. 6, Berti 1999: 340-341); the *tesserae* are white, and the *scutula* mainly white and grey. They are not closely joined together by one or two rows of *tesserae*, on the contrary are almost inserted in a tessellated background. The stratigraphic investigations underneath the floor yielded sherds of Hellenistic period, which gives us a very generic *terminus post quem*, but the mosaics that decorate other rooms of the building are later than the middle of the third century.

The last *sectile* was found in the prehistoric necropolis (Fig. 7) and is documented by an archival photo and a brief report in the excavation diary of Clelia Laviosa<sup>6</sup>. Apparently, the decoration is entirely white, while the *scutula* are surrounded only by one or two rows of *tesserae*. The investigation of the area has shown a series of overlapping phases: upon a late Roman agricultural building are set some tombs "alla cappuccina", devoid of funerary equipment and covered by other buildings. Room (s) with the marble inlay work belongs to these late structures, which are regarded as early Christian in the report. On the basis of these indications, therefore, the floor should be ascribed to a definitely late period.

This kind of floor with *crustae* is by far the most widespread, therefore we can examine many comparisons starting from the republican age, in Rome (Morricone 1980) and throughout the Peninsula (<http://tess.beniculturali.unipd.it>).

4 For other dating suggestions: 1<sup>st</sup> century BC (Berti 1999), Augustan period (Berti 2015).

5 Scheibelreiter 2007: 160, among the other *sectilia pavimenta*, takes into account also two floors located in the Quarter of the Theatre, Is. I, *atrium* 24 and corridor 31, but their state of preservation does not allow to understand whether the *tesserae* and the edgeways stones really make up a single floor, or, on the contrary, the stones constitute the *ruderatio*.

6 Unpublished, preserved in the archives of the Italian Mission.

Figure 6  
Iasos, the *lithostroton* near the Propylaeum  
(photo by Simonetta Angiolillo, Italian  
Archaeological Mission).



Figure 7  
Iasos, *pavimentum sectile* in the prehistoric  
necropolis (SAIA C 14271).



As far as I know, the case of Iasos, with three floors executed in the technique of the marble inlay, is unique in Asia Minor, or more generally in the Greek and Greek-Eastern area, with the only exception of Ephesus, where two pavements of this type have been brought to light; but they are different from those of Iasos because white tessellated bands are separated by marble strips (Scheibelreiter-Gail 2011: 225 Kat. 27). Close to the decorative layout of the *agora* of Iasos, however, is the specimen from Olympia, already examined.

We have now to consider several aspects. First of all, the finding of three white tessellated floors with marble inserts in a city only partially investigated and with not so many mosaics at the present time. Moreover, the floors are of different types and not contemporary with each other. Of sure more ancient is that of the *agora*, probably dating back to a period between the end of the republican age

and the 1<sup>st</sup> century of the empire; it is more refined, polychrome, with a focus on the marble elements. More recent are the other two: after the half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century that of the domus of the Propylaeum and presumably later that of the necropolis. In both cases the interest in polychromy has been lost and the tessellated space has been increased.

How can we explain the liking for this kind of pavement in Iasos, moreover attested over a few centuries?

A first motivation may be economic: it was certainly a resistant type of pavement, impressive and not particularly expensive, as the *crustae* mostly came from spolia or processing waste. We know that Caria in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC had been hit by a serious financial crisis (Delrieux 2010), which therefore could explain the choice of a *pavimentum sectile* even for an important and representative public building like the *agora*.

But these considerations do not seem sufficient to answer our question. Moreover, one may wonder through what channels the models of the *pavimenta sectilia* may have reached Iasos. Cementitious and tessellated floors with stone or marble inserts are frequently found in Rome, throughout the Italian peninsula and in Sicily, although, as we have already seen, the examples close to that of the *agora* are rare, unlike the other two of Iasos. In the rest of the empire, a few cases are known in Gaul (Rebourg 1999: 846 no. 12, Lyon; Balmelle - Darmon 2017: 78 fig. 90, Nîmes) and in the Iberian peninsula (Perez Olmedo 1996: 146-155) for the western area, while in the eastern area they are even rarer. Apart from the specimen already examined from Olympia and two white tessellated floors interrupted by bands of marble in Ephesus (Scheibelreiter-Gail 2011: 225 Kat. 27, SR 14 and SR 22), in the eastern Greek Mediterranean we know mainly chip pavements, a sort of reinterpretation of pebble mosaics: floors of marble chips tightly joined together so as not to allow the bottom to be seen. Starting from the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, attestations of these are known in Delos, in Olynthus, in Athens, in Vergina-Palatitsa (Dunbabin 1979).

From what we have seen so far, it is evident that the use of *sectilia pavimenta* is mainly linked to the culture of Rome and Italy, with some extension to the western part of the empire. It is logical to wonder, then, if the unusual liking of the Iasii for this type of pavement could have something to do with the presence of Italics in the city. We know them by inscriptions from the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC (Mastrocinque 1994); mostly are they lists of epebes (Blümel 1985: 270-274, 277-279, 281-282, 284), but many other epigraphs suggest the importance of people from Italy in the Carian *polis*: honours rendered to deserving citizens by Iasian institutions along with the Ρωμαῖοι οἱ ἐν Ἰασῶι πραγματευόμενοι (dedication of a statue to Dionysius, priest of Agrippa Postumo and Hermes, Blümel 1985: 90; Franco 2020) or, conversely, honours rendered by the city to Italics (C. Iulius Capito, Blümel 1985: 99; Delrieux 2013: 183).

But *sectilia pavimenta* are not the only sign of a special attention paid to the culture of Rome and the peninsula by Iasos. In fact, with regard to floor decoration, in the first centuries of the empire the mosaics of Iasos, as has been pointed out by W. Jobst (Jobst 1977: 78-79), are characterized by a closer link and a more rigorous resumption of Italic models than in the rest of the western part of Asia Minor, which, nevertheless, is equally attentive to what happens in Rome<sup>7</sup>.

7 On this aspect see Angiolillo - Pilo 2014.



And in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, the hunting scenes, or animal fights, depicted on the floors of the House of Mosaics and in the building near the *Propylaeum*, re-propose traditional Roman values (Angiolillo - Pilo 2014; Angiolillo - Parodo 2020), exalt the *virtus* of the *dominus* and remind observers of the *venationes* that took place in the amphitheatres, and which, together with the gladiatorial *ludi*, symbolically represented the Roman ideology of the victory of the strongest over the weakest, of order over disorder, of good over evil.

Finally, with regard to cults, evidence of a devotion to Heracles as protector of the city (Berti 2013, Delrieux 2018) significantly matches with the cults attested at Pompeii and Delos among the Italics (Malgieri 2008).

So, even with every caution, I do not think we can assume that the various 'Italicisms' we encounter in Iasos are independent of the presence of the Italics. As for the long life of this type of flooring in the Carian city, we can see in it the sign of a tradition, or the perpetuation of a motif dear to a local workshop; the paucity of the mosaic heritage so far known in Iasos does not allow hypotheses of another kind.

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