

## Book Review - Kitap İncelemesi

Reyhan ŞAHİN\*

**Die Mosaiken Westkleinasiens (Tessellate des 2. Jahrhunderts v. Chr. bis Anfang des 7. Jahrhunderts n. Chr.)**, Veronika Scheibelreiter-Gail, 712 pages, 638 figures, bibliography, Österreichisches Archäologisches Institut Sonderschriften Band 46, Wien 2011, EUR 139, ISSN 1998-8931, ISBN 978-3-900305-60-4.

Revised version of the V. Scheibelreiter-Gail's PhD dissertation submitted to the University of Vienna in 2001, presents one of the most extensive study about the Ancient Mosaics, as it offers a detailed discussion, up-to-date bibliography, catalogue of 229 pages and 638 figures. Since the mosaics constitute the main subject of the book, the glossy paper and letter quality of the pictures fit for the purpose best.

The Author's significant contribution for the Mosaic Researches shows itself in her art of dealing with the theme. Instead of the sole description of the available material, Scheibelreiter-Gail discusses the different aspects of evaluating the tessellated pavements.

### Research History and Framework

In her Introduction chapter Scheibelreiter-Gail summarises the research history of the mosaics with an extra title of Asia Minor. She refers a deficiency of an extensive national corpus of mosaics from Turkish territory. She argues the inconsistent number of available publications in terms of geographical distribution of Mosaics within the Asia Minor They also vary in their content and quality. These remarks reveal the significance of "Die Mosaiken Westkleinasiens".

In the same Chapter she defines the framework clearly: Post Hellenistic Mosaic Art from the western part of Asia Minor (including Province Asia, Lydia and Karia), from the establishment of the Province Asia to the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D..

Again in 1<sup>st</sup> Chapter she describes the precessors of the Hellenistic tessellatad mosaics (preconditions of mosaic research in eastern part of the Roman Empire). She gives examples from Levant, Greece and western part of Asia minor. After pebble mosaics and polygonal stone mosaics, tessellatum technique was invented in 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. in western Asia Minor. Pergamon was an important center for the production of the tessellatae (in the evidence of palaces, dwellings and temples). In this way the author presents a brief overview about the development of the technique and the use of the mosaics.



\* Reyhan ŞAHİN, Department of Archaeology, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Uludag University, 16059 Görükle – Bursa, Türkiye.  
E-mail: reyhansahin@uludag.edu.tr

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Prof. Dr. Mustafa Şahin for giving me the idea to write out this review.

## Different dating criteria

Since some motifs were for longer periods in use and some mosaics show qualitative differences in workmanship, stylistic features are not always determinative for the dating. In 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter author argues the importance of considering the other dating criteria. Among them: Archaeological and historical evaluation of the building in which the mosaics are available. She deals with the epigraphical evidences among the dating criteria. Building inscriptions, mosaic inscriptions. Also in 7<sup>th</sup> chapter she classifies the different types of mosaic inscriptions and exemplifies them through the finds from western Asia Minor. The original inscriptions in Greek and Latin, and their translations keep the text from the monotony.

Another dating criteria which are mentioned in 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter are the coins and ceramics in context. At the end of second chapter there is a list, which includes the mosaics from western Asia Minor, their dates and the dating criteria.

Author refers Ephesos “Hanghaus 2” as case example for the mosaics in whole context and emphasizes its significance for holding the different dating criteria at once.

## Technical requirements

In 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter the author summarises technical principles of mosaics and proceeds to analyze the terminology (p. 57-64). She classifies the tessellated mosaics combined with other elements in three main groups: Mortar floor screed decorated with tesserae; floors of irregular shaped stone tesserae; floors of regular shaped slabs and cubes. She refers the available Latin *termini* for the main and sub-concept if available. For example: *opus sigininum* (Mortar floor screed decorated with tesserae); *opus scutulatum* (chips of stone and tesserae)

In the second part of the same chapter Scheibelreiter-Gail introduces the material for the tesserae manufacture: Stone, glass, ceramics. Material acquisition and work process. Design principles of the mosaics are also presented in the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter. She also discusses the criteria for classifying different mosaics to a single workshop.

## Mosaics in architectural context

In 4<sup>th</sup> Chapter the author classifies the mosaics from dwellings, public and cult buildings. She gives examples from different centres in western Asia Minor and she deals with these examples according to the chronological order. In this way the reader gains an insight about the impression of the Roman and Late Antique mosaic pavements of floors, walls and ceilings.

## Ornaments

In 5<sup>th</sup> chapter the author deals with the figural scenes on the mosaics in different contexts arguing that they extensively come from the dwellings in the investigated area. Different aspects including popular subjects in different periods and households (rich/poor), philosophical reflections on the subjects are also discussed in this part.

In 6<sup>th</sup> chapter mosaics ornamented with geometric and floral motifs are classified according to their ornament patterns. Also an index of the patterns is in 9<sup>th</sup> chapter available.

## Catalogue

The voluminous catalogue (pp. 191-420) of imperial Roman and Late Antique Mosaics is arranged according to alphabetic order of find places and comprises the detailed description for each mosaic pavement: Architectural building and unit where the mosaic was laid, intended purpose of the building and/or unit, preservation place and state, description of the ornament, date (through the context or analogy with relevant references). Also for every example in the catalogue the bibliographic information is given.

The figures comprise the colour pictures of the mosaic pavements. Their location are shown in the plan of the Building, in which they were presented.

Instead of using footnotes the Author provides the essential informations and visual material to the reader. These features makes the work irreplaceable reference book (The author states this intend in p. 31).

## Summary

Chapters 10, 11, 12 are reserved for the extensive summary of the book, which is written in three languages: German, English and Turkish.

In conclusion Scheibelreiter-Gail's work presents rich material to establish an overview about the decoration of the mosaic surfaces over the course of time. Investigated geographical area and time interval provide sufficient material for outlining the variety of technical development and design principles. The book with its text part and extensive catalogue constitutes a real step forward in the research of the ancient mosaics.