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UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

GAVIN OSBOURNE

THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF  
PHILOSOPHY

MOSAICS OF POWER:  
SUPERSTITION, MAGIC AND CHRISTIAN  
POWER IN EARLY BYZANTINE FLOOR  
MOSAICS

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## SUMMARY

This thesis argues that some Early Byzantine floor mosaics had, in addition to a practical and decorative role, a supernatural function. By this I mean the images and words depicted within the mosaic were perceived as devices to attract powers from a supernatural dimension, for the benefit of those that walked over the mosaic or the building that housed it. The thesis is ultimately a discussion of the Byzantines' beliefs in the power of art and text, and how they were believed to intervene and affect everyday life.

My examination is carried out with a focus on the floor mosaics produced between the fourth and seventh centuries in the Byzantine Empire. Using an iconographic methodological approach, the thesis explores how certain images and words incorporated within mosaic designs can be seen in supernatural terms. To do so, comparable material objects with clearer supernatural functions will be examined. Primary sources that indicate how certain motifs were perceived to bring about powers will also be analysed. In this thesis, I analyse the different kinds of devices that were depicted to attract supernatural powers and explore why those devices were believed to have the ability to generate powers.

The thesis illustrates how power could be seen as being rooted in Christianity, magic or more unclear sources. Expanding on this discussion, I explore how a single mosaic could incorporate elements from several sources, dispelling scholarship that portrays the Early Byzantine period as predominately influenced by Christianity. The other key function of the thesis is to emphasise the fact that mosaics can be considered in terms of the conscious design process of their construction, placing them within the same category as gemstones and icons in terms of purposeful objects.

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I thank all of those that made the imperfections in this thesis less imperfect. Faults in this thesis are not a reflection on them; any faults are mine and mine alone.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Betz	Hans Dieter Betz (ed.), <i>The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation: Including the Demotic Spells</i> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> edn (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).
<i>DOP</i>	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
Mommsen <i>CT</i>	<i>Theodosiani libri XVI</i> , ed. Theodor Mommsen and Paul M. Meyer, Vol. 1 (Berlin: Apud Weidmannos, 1954).
<i>MRNA</i>	Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, <i>The Mosaics of Roman North Africa: Studies in Iconography and Patronage</i> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).
<i>PDM</i>	<i>Papyri demotica magicae</i>
<i>PG</i>	<i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus Series Graeca</i> , ed. by Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris, 1857-66).
<i>PGM</i>	<i>Papyri graecae magicae</i>
Pharr <i>CT</i>	Clyde Pharr (ed.), <i>The Theodosian Code and Novels and the Sirmondian Constitutions</i> (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1952).
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus Series Latina</i> , ed. by Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris, 1844-55).
Preisendanz	Karl Preisendanz (ed.), <i>Papyri graecae magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri</i> , 2 vols (Stuttgart: Verlag B. G. Teubner, 1974).

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## NOTE TO THE READER

To provide consistency in the thesis, where there are alternative spellings of a word I have conformed to that provided by the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*. Many names that in the English language have a Latin version are, in this thesis, given in the original Greek version. Thus, the demi-god Hercules becomes Herakles and the historian Procopius becomes Prokopios.

Symbols and patterns that are referred to conform to that given in both volume one and two of Catherine Balmelle et al.'s *Le décor géométrique de la mosaïque romaine*.

When Greek inscriptions have been cited, they have been provided in uppercase, rather than lowercase form. The Byzantines used the letter C rather than a capital *sigma* ( $\Sigma$ ); to provide more similarity to the Byzantine original, I have used the letter C. In addition, when the Byzantines used an *omega* in inscriptions they used what is now a lowercase ( $\omega$ ) letter rather than the uppercase ( $\Omega$ ); in order to provide better readability with the inscriptions, I have used the uppercase. When I have used parentheses within an inscription, this means a letter or a word has not survived and what is within the parentheses is what is thought to have been written. When a forward slash is used (/) it signifies a new line in a mosaic's inscription. Sometimes, half of a word is used at the end of a line and has to be carried over onto a new line; when this is the case I have used a dash and a forward slash (-/).

Images have been provided where appropriate. Some of the images are in the form of black and white photographs, which were taken in the early and mid-twentieth century. These photographs show the mosaics in their architectural context, something they are deprived of when they have been removed, resized and placed in modern museums. Some archaeologists and museum directors considered mosaics, including certain ones that are examined in this thesis, as not aesthetically pleasing or not as interesting as other examples; with these examples, the mosaics were documented, then reburied. In the latter case, the photographs are the only visual resources which remain. With this in mind, I acknowledge that the black and white photographs are not as ideal as colour ones, but they often provide a better perception of the mosaic than the images current-day museums provide.

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis argues that some Early Byzantine floor mosaics were designed to attract supernatural powers. By this I mean that there were fundamental beliefs that the words and images depicted on those surfaces were capable of garnering celestial powers to affect the earthly realm. I will show that floor mosaics can be considered in the same vein as other supernatural objects, such as magical gemstones, icons and relics in being surfaces that were believed to contain powers. My examination will show that the Byzantines regarded images and texts as potent tools in attracting supernatural assistance. By focusing on the supernatural aspect, this thesis discusses how we can be more precise about the function of mosaics in Early Byzantium.

I will discuss floor mosaics that were produced between the fourth and seventh centuries AD, the period widely recognised and classified as Early Byzantium. The Early Byzantine era is widely regarded as a period of transition and the link between the classical pagan world and the medieval Christian one. ‘Early Byzantium’ refers to the empire that governed lands across the Mediterranean, particularly the eastern half, at a time when various non-Roman tribes invaded the Roman Empire’s Western European provinces in the fourth and fifth centuries. The Byzantines did not refer to themselves as ‘Byzantines’ but as ‘*Romaioi*’, Romans: they considered themselves a continuation of the Roman Empire and were ruled by an emperor and empress.<sup>1</sup> During the timeframe that is under discussion, the boundaries of the empire expanded and retracted greatly. At its height in the sixth century, the empire stretched from what is now Italy through the Balkans to Asia Minor. It governed the Middle East and the so-called Holy Land. It administered Egypt and the North Africa coastline, not to mention the islands in the Eastern Mediterranean sea, significantly Cyprus and Crete. I have chosen the term ‘Early Byzantium’ to describe this period over alternatives such as ‘Late Antiquity’ or ‘the Later Roman Empire’ because the majority of the mosaics that I will consider come from areas that had Greek identities. Since the word ‘Byzantine’ tends to have connotations to Greek culture, I will refer to this period under that terminology.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Liz James, ‘Byzantium: A Very, Very Short Introduction’, in *A Companion to Byzantium*, ed. by Liz James (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010), 1-8 (p. 2).

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the terms ‘Early Byzantine’, ‘Late Antiquity’, and the ‘Later Roman Empire’ see Fiona K. Haarer, ‘Writing Histories of Byzantium: the Historiography of Byzantine history’, in *A Companion to Byzantium*, ed. by Liz James (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010), 9-21 (pp. 17-18).



My examination is undertaken with a focus on floor mosaics. The period under discussion represents the height of the popularity of floor mosaics in the Early Byzantine Empire. By the eighth century, the point in Byzantine history scholars refer to as the beginning of the so-called Middle Byzantine Period, mosaics were predominantly used to adorn walls, vaults and ceilings rather than floors. A mosaic consists of small individual pieces of stone, marble, terracotta, semi-precious stones, glass or clay being cut into cubes called tesserae. The tesserae were placed next to each other and arranged to create patterns, images and written words. The visual aspect often overlooks a mosaic's primary utilitarian function: they were made to be walked on. Because wall and vault mosaics were not walked upon and because they were not always within physical reach to a building's inhabitants, they had a rather different function to the mosaics that were laid on the floor. For this reason, and an attempt to provide a coherent and detailed examination as possible, I will focus solely on floor mosaics in a supernatural context.

Floor mosaics were surfaces that were laid in a variety of domestic, religious and civic buildings. But they represented just one media out of a wider choice that could be chosen to cover the surface of a floor. The floors within most Byzantine buildings, especially domestic ones, were covered with practical and affordable materials such as pounded earth tiles or wooden boards.<sup>3</sup> Buildings of the affluent, however, might have had floors covered with plain or elaborate marble slabs that were cut and arranged into geometric designs, called *opus sectile*.<sup>4</sup> Mosaic historians perceive *opus sectile* to have been a more expensive and prestigious surface when compared to mosaic, based on the esteemed perception of marble in ancient and medieval societies.<sup>5</sup> From surviving floor surfaces, it would seem *opus sectile* was not as common as floor mosaic. However, floor mosaics were also laid in buildings owned by wealthy individuals or institutions

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<sup>3</sup> Tatiana Kirova, 'Il problema della casa bizantina', *Felix Ravenna*, Vol. 102 (1971), 263-302 (p. 299).

<sup>4</sup> For *opus sectile* see, Urs Peschlow, 'Zum byzantinischen opus sectile-Boden', in *Beiträge zur Altertumskunde Kleinasiens: Festschrift für Kurt Bittel*, ed. by Rainer Michael Boehner and Harald Hauptmann (Mainz: von Zabern, 1983), pp. 435-447. Alessandra Guiglia Guidobaldi, 'L'opus sectile pavimentale in area bizantina', in *Atti del I Colloquio dell'Associazione Italiana per lo Studio e la Conservazione del Mosaico* (Ravenna: Edizione del Girasole, 1994), pp. 643-663.

<sup>5</sup> Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 254.

and they were surfaces that are thought to have been expensive commodities.<sup>6</sup> When patrons chose to have mosaic, this then led to the process of developing a design for the floor. Unlike other media, mosaic could incorporate inscriptions and imagery. There could be numerous reasons why words and images were depicted on a mosaic, perhaps because it was considered aesthetically pleasing, or to reflect a patron's taste or even to convey a message about the patron. But in this thesis I will show how a floor mosaic's content might also have been chosen for an additional purpose: that the designs were created to attract supernatural powers.

Floor mosaics were just one part of the decoration of a room. Other factors such as the decoration of the walls and ceiling might also be taken into account. For example, mosaic might be applied to walls and ceilings. Additionally, walls and ceilings might be covered in stucco, fresco paintings or textile fabrics, such as draperies and curtains.<sup>7</sup> However, aside from religious buildings, the walls and ceilings of many Byzantine structures have not survived, let alone the decoration that adorned them. In other words, to reconstruct a floor mosaic with the other elements of a room is usually not possible. Nevertheless, this should not discourage scholarship from acknowledging that floor mosaics were just one aspect of how a room was decorated, and that Byzantine viewers' attention might be drawn to the walls, ceilings or the furniture within a room, rather than assuming the designs on the floor were purposely contemplated.

The mosaics that I will discuss in this thesis have been chosen from a database that I created. The database was used to document a group of mosaics that can be discussed in supernatural terms. My database has seventy-six entries and is attached in

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<sup>6</sup> Dunbabin, *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World*, p. 326. Jean-Pierre Caillet, 'Le prix de la mosaïque de pavement (IVe-Vie s.)', in *VI Coloquio Internacional sobre Mosaico antiguo: Palencia-Mérida, Octubre 1990* (Guadalajara: Asociación Española del Mosaico, 1994) 409-414.

<sup>7</sup> For wall mosaics, see Frank Sear, *Roman Wall and Vault Mosaics* (Heidelberg: F. H. Kerle, 1977) and Otto Demus, *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration: Aspects of Monumental Art in Byzantium* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976). For the beginning of a discussion of frescoes, see Javier Acre et al., 'The Urban Domus in Late Antique Hispania: Examples from Emerita, Barcino and Complutum', in *Housing in Late Antiquity: From Palaces to Shops*, ed. by Luke Lavan et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 305-336 and Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994). For stucco work, see Laura Pasquini, *La decorazione a stucco in Italia fra Tardo Antico e Alto Medioevo* (Ravenna: L'Edizione, 2002) and Gisella Cantino Wataghin, 'Lo stucco nei sistemi decorativi della tarda antica', in *Stucs et décors de la fin de l'Antiquité au Moyen Âge (Ve-XII<sup>e</sup> siècle): Actes du colloque international tenu à Poitiers du 16 au 19 Septembre 2004*, ed. by Christian Sapin (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 115-124. For curtains and fabrics on walls see Eunice Dauterman Maguire et al., *Art and Holy Powers in the Early Christian House* (Urbana: Krannert Art Museum and University of Illinois Press, 1989), pp. 45-47.

the form of an appendix. In it I noted the site and the modern country where the mosaic was excavated. I listed the date when the mosaic was made (or thought to be made), the type of building the mosaic was laid in, and the specific part of the interior's space. I also noted why those mosaics could be considered in terms of supernatural power, as well as assigning each mosaic a label so that its power could be categorised under a term. For example, if a mosaic derived its power through an inscription, it was listed in the database under the term 'inscription'. Lastly, the database noted where further literature can be found on each mosaic.

Some of the entries in the database are recorded because of my judgement that a mosaic had a supernatural function. Other entries have been included because other scholars have deemed a mosaic to have had the same function. In other cases, mosaics have been recorded where the decoration is more uncertain, but nevertheless warrant an inclusion as they demonstrate the fine line between establishing a mosaic's supernatural function from many other potential non-supernatural functions. The seventy-six entries are a relatively small number compared to the thousands of mosaics recorded and that I looked at in archaeological reports. Thus, the mosaics that are recorded in my database are just a partial sample in an ongoing project. Yet as my examples come from across the Byzantine Empire, they are representative and might be taken as illustrating a wider theme of supernatural functions within floor mosaics.

In this thesis, thirty-one out of the seventy-six entries in my database will be discussed. The sites that will be discussed are illustrated in Map 1. The majority of the mosaics come from the Eastern Mediterranean, in areas that increasingly grew to have Greek identities and that were familiar with the Greek language. Many examples come from the Middle East and an additional map has been provided to detail the mosaics that come from this specific area (map 2).

I have used archaeological records to research and analyse the mosaics that will be discussed. These invaluable resources show photographs of the surviving surfaces, suggest when the mosaic was made and some show diagrams with the mosaics in their architectural context. Mosaic historians have provided examinations of mosaics according to what era or area they were made. Yet studies on specific aspects of Early Byzantine mosaics have been few and far between. Most of the records that I have

consulted were found in the field of ‘Roman’ scholarship. Mosaics from most parts of the Roman and Early Byzantine empires have been studied in scholarship. These studies have looked at floor mosaics from the Middle East, North Africa, the Greek mainland and the Italian peninsula.<sup>8</sup> Historically the Balkans and parts of northeastern Europe are areas that have not received the same level of attention as other sites, but archaeological excavations in these areas are challenging mosaic scholarship to look away from the Italian peninsula, North Africa and the Middle East.<sup>9</sup> Other sources that I have consulted have had more specialised agendas. Doro Levi examined the mosaics from a single city, Antioch, while David Parrish’s study consisted of solely examining depictions of the Four Seasons in North Africa.<sup>10</sup> Other studies that have been useful have been dedicated to very specific periods of time, such as Elisabeth Alföldi-

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<sup>8</sup> In the Middle East, corpora of mosaics have been provided for Israel (including Palestine), Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. Ruth Ovadia and Asher Ovadia, *Hellenistic, Roman and Early Byzantine Mosaic Pavements in Israel* (Rome: “L’Erma” di Bretschneider, 1987). Pauline Donceel-Voûte, *Les pavements des églises byzantines de Syrie et du Liban: décor, archéologie et liturgie* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Département d’archéologie et d’histoire de l’art, 1988). Michele Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan*, ed. by Patricia M. Bikai and Thomas A. Dailey (Amman: American Center of Oriental Research, 1992). North Africa has varying corpora, with Egypt and Tunisia being singled out, while Katherine Dunbabin has considered the North African provinces as a collective whole. Wiktor Andrzej Daszewski, *Corpus of Mosaics from Egypt: Hellenistic and Early Roman Period*, Vol. 1 (Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1985). Michèle Blanchard-Lemée et al., *Mosaics of Roman Tunisia*, trans. by Kenneth D. Whitehead (New York: George Braziller, 1996). Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, *MRNA* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978). For Cyprus see Demetrios Michaelides, *Cypriot Mosaics* (Nicosia: Department of Antiquities, 1987) and Wiktor Andrzej Daszewski and Demetrios Michaelides, *Mosaic Floors in Cyprus* (Ravenna: Mario Lapucci, Edizione del Girasole, 1988). For Crete, see Rebecca J. Sweetman, *The Mosaics of Roman Crete* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). For the Greek Mainland, see Marie Spiro, *Critical Corpus of the Mosaic Pavements on the Greek Mainland, Fourth/Sixth Centuries, with Architectural Surveys* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1978). Also, see Stylianos M. Pelekanides, *Σύνταγμα τῶν παλαιοχριστιανικῶν ψηφιδωτῶν δαπέδων τῆς Ἑλλάδος I, Νησιωτικὴ Ἑλλάς* (*Corpus of the Early Christian Mosaics of Greece I, Greek Islands*) (Thessaloniki: Kentron Vyzantinon Ereunon, 1974) and Panajiota Assimakopoulou-Atzaka, *Σύνταγμα τῶν παλαιοχριστιανικῶν ψηφιδωτῶν δαπέδων τῆς Ἑλλάδος II, Πελοπόννησος – Στερεά* (*Corpus of the Early Christian Mosaics of Greece II, Peloponnesos-Stereia Hellas*) (Thessaloniki: Kentron Vyzantinon Ereunon, 1987). A broad, collective corpora of Italian floor mosaics, only some of which are Early Byzantine, can be found in six volumes dedicated to Rome (1967), Baccano (1970), Antium (1975), Ravenna (1976), Sardinia (1981), and Stabiae (1989). *Mosaici antichi in Italia*, 6 vols (Rome: Istituto poligrafico dello stato). Important individual studies from Italy include those at Piazza Armerina in Sicily, and Deseanzo, Ravenna, and Aquileia in the north. R. J. A. Wilson, *Piazza Armerina* (London: Granada, 1983). Raffaella Farioli, *Pavimenti musivi di Ravenna paleocristiana* (Ravenna: Longo, 1975). Ettore Ghislanzoni, *La Villa romana in Desenzano* (Milan: Fondazione Giovanni Treccani degli Alfieri, 1962). Giovanni Brusin and P. L. Zovatto, *Monumenti paleocristiani di Aquileia e di Grado* (Udine: Deputazione di storia patria per il Friuli, 1957).

<sup>9</sup> For example, John Mitchell is involved with works ongoing in Albania. See John Mitchell, ‘Strategies for Salvation: the Triconch Church at Antigoneia and its Mosaic Pavement’, in *New Directions in Albanian Archaeology: Studies Presented to Muzafer Korkuti*, ed. by Lorenc Bejko and Richard Hodges (Tirana: International Centre for Albanian Archaeology, 2006), pp. 261-276. See also Ruth Ellen Kolarik, *Tetrarchic Floor Mosaics in the Balkans* (Paris: Association Internationale pour l’Etude de la Mosaïque Antique, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> Doro Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*, 2 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1947). David Parrish, *Season Mosaics of Roman North Africa* (Rome: Giorgio Bretschneider Editore, 1984).

Rosenbaum and John Ward-Perkins' study of mosaics dating to the reign of Justinian I (r. 527-565) in Libya.<sup>11</sup>

My thesis fits into the traditional framework of scholarship that looks at iconography: I attempt to understand the meaning of imagery in mosaics. I follow in the footsteps of, for example, Henry Maguire, who discussed the depictions of earth and ocean in floor mosaics.<sup>12</sup> It was the visual aspect of the floor that was the 'first point of call' for Maguire. He, and others like him, was interested in what the images could inform us, modern viewers, about Byzantine life.

This visual, iconographic method is rather different to a more archaeological emphasis, which is present in other parts of mosaic literature. The archaeological literature is more concerned with the materiality of mosaics, where questions arise as to where the stone and glass for mosaics was acquired from, how mosaics were made and the practical aspects of having or walking on a mosaic. This emphasis on materiality encourages the mosaic historian to remember that mosaics can be studied in more ways than just looking at how they were decorated. This is a useful avenue that has had consequences on my thesis because although I am indebted to traditional iconographic methods, I have also incorporated aspects of materiality in trying to understand how Byzantines interacted, used and walked upon floor mosaics.

Aside from the iconographic or materiality approaches, there are other questions that recur in mosaic scholarship. One of the traditional topics is estimating in what century a mosaic was produced. The dating that mosaic historians provide is not always secure. Sometimes mosaic inscriptions provide a date as to when that surface was first laid but this does not always account for the renovations that are visible, nor was it always the case that inscriptions were present in the design. In light of this, mosaic historians have contrived two methods for discovering when a mosaic was made. One is by establishing a *terminus post quem*. This is an archaeological method that seeks to find coins and other datable materials such as pottery underneath or on top of a mosaic.

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<sup>11</sup> Elisabeth Alföldi-Rosenbaum and J. B. Ward-Perkins, *Justinianic Mosaic Pavements in Cyrenaican Churches* (Rome: "L'Erma" di Bretschneider, 1980).

<sup>12</sup> Henry Maguire, *Earth and Ocean: the Terrestrial World in Early Byzantine Art* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987).

Because coins can be dated relatively easily, if a coin is found under the floor then the mosaic cannot have been made earlier than the date of the coin.<sup>13</sup> The other method for dating a mosaic involves an expert looking at the style and iconographic details of an image, studying the folds of drapery, the way trees are depicted or the way hands are portrayed, to judge and ascribe the image to a period of time when securely dated images were shown in a similar manner.<sup>14</sup>

Another central approach in mosaic scholarship is to determine the status of the mosaics' makers. Questions are asked about whether a mosaic was made by a few individuals or a larger workshop; whether it was made by mosaicists, but relied on other craftsmen to draw out or provide a plan; whether the craftsmen were local or travelled from afar; and whether a patron could choose what could be included in the design through pattern books. Mosaic historians tend to agree that mosaics were produced by groups of workers, whether a group of perhaps three or four travelling from place to place or an established workshop with a headquarters in a city.<sup>15</sup> The mosaicists were not paid as well as other professions and their standing in society has consequently been argued not to be high.<sup>16</sup> The Emperor Diocletian's price edict of 301 gave details of two kinds of mosaicists, a *tessellarius* (or ψηφοθέτή) who could get paid fifty *denarii* (Roman currency) a day and another type called a *musaearius* (or μουσιαρῖω κεντητή) who could get paid sixty *denarii* a day.<sup>17</sup> There is not an agreement in mosaic scholarship about what each of these terms exactly means and what activities they might refer to, but it is known that according to the same Diocletian edict that both types of

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<sup>13</sup> Philip Barker, *Techniques of Archaeological Excavation*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (London: Batsford, 1993), p. 153.

<sup>14</sup> To see the 'connoisseurial' approach being used to determine the date of a mosaic, see Ann Terry and Henry Maguire, *Dynamic Splendour: The Wall Mosaics in the Cathedral of Eufrasius at Poreč* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> For the status of mosaicists see Claudine L. Dauphin, 'A New Method of Studying Early Byzantine Mosaic Pavements (Coding and a Computer Cluster Analysis) with Special Reference to the Levant', *Levant*, Vol. 8 (1976), 113-149 (pp. 130-145). Catherine Balmelle and Jean-Pierre Darmon, 'L'artisan-mosaïste dans l'Antiquité tardive', in *Artistes, Artisans et Production Artistique au Moyen Âge*, ed. by Xavier Barral i Altet, Vol. 1 (Paris: Pircard, 1986), 235-249 (pp. 238-240). Michael Donderer, *Die Mozaizisten der Antike und ihre wirtschaftliche und soziale Stellung: eine Quellenstudie* (Erlangen: Universitätsbibliothek, 1989), pp. 40-50. Dunbabin *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World*, pp. 269-278. Rachel Hachlili, *Ancient Mosaic Pavements: Themes, Issues, and Trends* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 243-244.

<sup>16</sup> Balmelle and Darmon, 'L'artisan-mosaïste', pp. 241-243. Ilona J. Jesnick, *The Image of Orpheus in Roman Mosaic: an Exploration of the Figure of Orpheus in Graeco-Roman Art and Culture with Special References to its Expression in the Medium of Mosaic in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 1997), p. 58. Dunbabin, *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World*, p. 275.

<sup>17</sup> Diocletian, *Price Edict*; Tenney Frank (ed.), *An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome*, Vol. 5 (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), pp. 310-421.

mosaicists were paid a lower rate of pay compared to other crafts such as painting which paid either seventy or one-hundred and fifty *denarii* a day.

Little is known about how workshops divided up their activities. It is assumed that there were hierarchies, with an expert running the activities and laying tesserae on the challenging parts of the mosaic, a less experienced worker laying other parts of a mosaic, and apprentices and other workers laying borders and backgrounds, and performing menial tasks.<sup>18</sup> It should be noted that such assumptions seem suspiciously based on knowledge about Italian painting workshops in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.<sup>19</sup> Whether pattern books were consulted in the design of a mosaic remains an unresolved, contentious issue.<sup>20</sup> Mosaic historians have also discussed how mosaics were made, identifying the tools that were used, how foundations were laid, where the materials were obtained from, and if parts of a mosaic were made on site.<sup>21</sup> More experimental approaches, like those of Will Wootton, have tried to understand how mosaics were made through the eyes of the mosaicists, and have shed new light on how the craftsmen operated.<sup>22</sup> Wootton analysed individual tesserae and how the mortar bedding (into which the tesserae are pressed) was laid. This led to conclusions as to how mosaicists worked and how mosaics were created. For example, analysing the mortar has led to conclusions that mosaicists painted and incised designs onto the mortar (they

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<sup>18</sup> For workshop activities see Dunbabin, *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World*, pp. 275-277. Hachlili, *Ancient Mosaic Pavements*, pp. 243-273. Sweetman, *The Mosaics of Roman Crete*, pp. 126-128.

<sup>19</sup> Michelle O'Malley, *The Business of Art: Contracts and the Commissioning Process in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 90-96. Michelle O'Malley, *Painting Under Pressure: Fame, Reputation and Demand in Renaissance Florence* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), pp. 160-171.

<sup>20</sup> For those that argue pattern books were consulted see Roger Ling, *Ancient Mosaics* (London: British Museum Press, 1998), p. 13. Michael Donderer, 'Und es gab sie doch! Ein neuer Papyrus und das Zeugnis der Mosaiken belegen die Verwendung antiker Musterbücher', *Antike Welt*, Vol. 36 (2005), pp. 59-68. Other mosaic historians tend to follow-suite such as Ovadiah and Ovadiah, *Hellenistic, Roman and Early Byzantine Mosaic Pavements*, p. 181. Dunbabin, *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World*, p. 97, 300-303. Claudine L. Dauphin, 'Byzantine Pattern Books: a Re-examination of the Problem in the Light of the Inhabited Scroll', *Art History*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (1978), pp. 400-423. For those that are sceptical about potential pattern books see Robin Cormack, 'Painter's Guides, Model-books, Pattern-books and Craftsmen: or Memory and the Artist?', in *L'artista a Bisanzio e nel mondo Cristiano-orientale*, ed. by Michele Bacci (Pisa: Edizione della Normale, 2007), pp. 11-29. Also, see Philippe Bruneau, 'Les mosaïstes antiques avaient-ils des cahiers de modèles?', *Revue Archeologique*, Vol. 2 (1984), pp. 241-272.

<sup>21</sup> Dunbabin, *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World*, pp. 279-290. Joaquin Chavarria, *Arte e tecnica del mosaico* (Milan: Il Castello, 2004).

<sup>22</sup> Will Wootton, 'Ancient Mosaic Techniques and Modern Conservation: An Archaeologist's Perspective', in *10<sup>th</sup> Conference of the International Committee for the Conservation of Mosaics. Conservation: An Act of Discovery* (London: Maney, 2009), pp. 120-131. Will Wootton, 'Making and Meaning: The Hellenistic Mosaic from Tel Dor', *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 116, No. 2 (2012), pp. 209-234.

worked on site, not in workshops); that mosaicists worked from the centre of a room and worked outwards from there, placing wooden boards over the mortar so the mosaicists could walk over the floor while working; and that mosaicists might use fragments of material they found on site that had been left by construction workers.

Each of the above studies has provided essential information on mosaic practices, resulting in a greater ability to compare mosaics that come from different regions and challenging long-held assumptions. But in this thesis I just focus on the function of floor mosaics, how they were perceived, how they were interacted with and what purpose they had. Taking inspiration from the historian G. W. Bowersock, I will consider the mosaics in cultural terms and attempt to discover what these surfaces can tell us about the social and cultural events of the time.<sup>23</sup> Though using a well-established theme of focusing on the visual aspect of mosaics, what made Bowersock's study notable was his discussion of the content of floor mosaics and how they reflected cultural activities and concerns of the time. It provided a more cultural perspective on mosaics to the questions that are usually asked, informing us of why images might have been chosen on those surfaces. He regarded mosaics as a vehicle to understand something of the nature of the Middle-Eastern societies and the cultures of that period.

## THE AIMS OF THE THESIS

Having introduced the time frame and the media that will be discussed, the remaining part of my introduction is divided into five further parts. In this first section I will outline the aims of the thesis. I will later provide a literature review to make the reader aware of proceedings in previous scholarship. Later in the introduction I clarify what is meant by the word 'supernatural' and explain the Byzantines' beliefs in the potency of objects and images. I end the introduction by outlining the chapters in the thesis.

In this thesis I will argue that the images and inscriptions depicted on floor mosaics suggest those surfaces had supernatural functions. I set out to ask four questions: What were floor mosaics for? What can a supernatural function of a mosaic

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<sup>23</sup> G. W. Bowersock, *Mosaics as History: the Near East from Late Antiquity to Islam* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006).



tell us about Early Byzantine culture? What imagery and words were used to attract powers? And by what means was power invested in the floor?

The meanings of the images depicted on floor mosaics were multivalent. There was not a set way to interpret an image. How one person reacted to an image could be very different to another. Images could hold multiple meanings depending on whether one puts oneself in the position of the patron, the mosaic's designer, or the observer, while the images might gain different meanings over time. In addition, the images could be interpreted literally, metaphorically, allegorically, morally or in imperial terms. Henry Maguire recognised this wealth of potential interpretations as the polyvalence of images.<sup>24</sup> In this thesis, I acknowledge that the images under discussion might hold other potential meanings, but I will focus solely on how certain images were understood to bear supernatural meanings.

I will discuss the visual aspect of mosaics, arguing that it was the images and words that gave mosaics their supernatural powers, rather than the materials themselves. Taking Bowersock's approach and building on the work established by mosaic historians, I will examine what kinds of imagery and words were used for supernatural purposes. Essentially this thesis will use an iconographic approach. Iconography is a well-known art historical method that was developed by Erwin Panofsky.<sup>25</sup> He proposed that there were three stages that could be used when trying to understand the meaning or significance of an image. The first part of the method is to interpret the lines and shapes of the image, noting at a basic level what is depicted; whether a person, an animal, or a tree. The second stage, or the iconographic stage, is to recognise what happens in the image at a broader level and to connect motifs with the historical period. For example, in a Byzantine context, a man with a beard, wearing a diadem and carrying an orb might be interpreted as a Byzantine emperor. The third and last stage, also known as 'intrinsic meaning' or the iconological stage, is to put the image into a historic or cultural context and explain why the image is significant in period terms: it might identify the characteristics of an era, a nation or an artist. On the basis of this method of treating iconography, I will demonstrate in this thesis that one meaning Early Byzantine imagery

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<sup>24</sup> Maguire, *Earth and Ocean*, pp. 8-13.

<sup>25</sup> Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 3-17.

could have was to attract what was represented. Crucially, though, I do not hold up Panofsky's method as perfect. Scholars such as Otto Pächt have questioned the method, while others such as Paul Taylor have attempted to update it when trying to understand the meaning of images.<sup>26</sup> The use of iconography in this thesis is as a tool in understanding Early Byzantine mosaics. I will go beyond the attempt to understand the meaning of a work of art, as this method is too concerned with what an artist's or a patron's intent was. The method does not account for future generations' interactions with a work of art, nor how meanings and interpretations change over time.

Some mosaic scholarship tends to regard mosaics as art, if not explicitly, then at least implicitly. By considering mosaics as art, scholarship can treat mosaics on a purely aesthetic basis: such a definition shapes the kinds of questions that are asked, and the way the surfaces are treated. These discussions deal with the mosaics in a non-cultural way; they do not say much about how the mosaics were interacted with nor how they were treated. In this thesis I will take a different approach. I will not consider floor mosaics as works of art, but as objects. This approach has been inspired by the work of Katherine Dunbabin who, coming from a more archaeological background, was explicit in seeing mosaics as surfaces that formed a practical function and as things that were a significant part of the architecture of a building.<sup>27</sup> My emphasis on mosaics as objects is also inspired by Robin Cormack's study of art in Byzantine societies. When dealing with works of art that no longer survive, Cormack analysed Byzantine written sources to look at who used the art and why; he did not and would not comment on the aesthetics of the image.<sup>28</sup> Taking the approach of Dunbabin and Cormack, I am less interested in the aesthetics of the mosaics, and more how the mosaics may have been perceived and used. By looking at the mosaics as objects, my concern is not to comment on the style of mosaics, how they were made, in what century they were produced, nor to comment on the status of mosaicists. This thesis, instead, will look at what mosaics 'did'. I will argue that, in addition to being a practical surface to walk over, some floor mosaics were also meant (or believed) to have a function in providing supernatural power.

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<sup>26</sup> Otto Pächt, *Methodisches zur kunsthistorischen Praxis: Ausgewählte Schriften* (Munich: Prestel, 1977). Paul Taylor (ed.), *Iconography Without Words* (London: Warburg Institute, 2008), 1-10.

<sup>27</sup> Dunbabin, *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World*, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Robin Cormack, *Writing in Gold: Byzantine Society and its Icons* (London: George Philip, 1985).

The concept of sympathetic magic will be referred to throughout the thesis. It was a term coined by Sir James George Frazer in the late-nineteenth century, who argued that people believe, or believed, in the laws of sympathy (sympathetic magic).<sup>29</sup> He argued it takes two forms. The first is what he called homeopathy where it is believed that 'like produced like'. For example, piercing a clay figurine of a hated foe with a needle is believed to provide actual harm to the person represented in the figurine. Frazer named the second form of sympathetic magic as contagion, in which it is believed that objects carry essences of their owners which still exert a sense of control or can influence the object. For example, touching the bones of a martyr or a piece of the True Cross was perceived as a way of being cured or to acquire advantages in life: because those objects had touched or belonged to holy figures, it was believed holy associations could likewise be gained from them. Subsequent anthropologists have refuted many of Frazer's theories, but his identification of sympathetic magic is still seen as persuasive by anthropologists and psychologists in understanding how people act and think about the world.<sup>30</sup> In terms of the study of images and words, Frazer's method could be seen as the belief that by adding decoration onto an object, a person believes they can repel or attract what the depiction stood for.

When I use the term 'attracting powers' I mean a belief in which supernatural essences are believed to reside in objects and images. The believer thought that by possessing a certain image or an object with that image on, they could gain essences from a supernatural realm which would then benefit them in the terrestrial world, whether that person's desire for that essence was for beneficial or malevolent purposes. It is a belief in the efficacy of the visual sphere and it was deemed capable of affecting, or being available, to all. That these essences could be attracted might then be considered in the terms of the word 'power'.

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<sup>29</sup> James Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1890), pp. 8-9.

<sup>30</sup> It has most recently been used by Alison Jing Xu et al., 'Washing Away Your (Good or Bad) Luck: Physical Cleansing Affects Risk Taking Behaviour', *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, Vol. 141, No. 1 (2012), 26-30. Also see David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 272-274. John Skorupski, *Symbol and Theory: A Philosophical Study of Theories of Religion in Social Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 138-139.

Another method that will be used in this thesis is to compare the images and inscriptions on floor mosaics with objects that had clearer supernatural functions. Objects such as magical gemstones, papyri spells, icons, relics and the stone lintels placed above doors were objects that were deemed capable of attracting powers. Not all gemstones had magical functions, but there is a great amount of scholarship dedicated to those that did have supernatural functions.<sup>31</sup> The way they are identified as ‘magical’ tends to be based on an analysis of the words and images engraved onto the gems, which have links to the content in surviving papyri spells. If an image or a text was used on a magical gemstone then it suggests that it was considered potent. If the same image or text were depicted on a floor mosaic then it can be argued that the motif had the same associations on the floor. This comparison method is a useful resource, as Byzantine written sources on floor mosaics are lacking. It is a conceptual approach that raises questions about images and objects when textual sources are scarce.

## APPROACHING MOSAICS OF POWER

Having discussed the aims and the methods that will be used in the thesis, in this part of the introduction I will discuss the previous literature relating to the topics that this thesis covers. My topic brings together different themes; the power of imagery, the concept of the supernatural and mosaics. I will begin by discussing each of these in turn before clarifying Byzantine beliefs in the supernatural in the next section.

### *The Power of Imagery*

A big theme in this thesis is that the Byzantines perceived objects to be powerful; these objects could affect the terrestrial realm, bringing fortune, health, prosperity or misfortune, natural disasters and deaths. For many in the Early Byzantine Empire, power was believed to be *in* objects. This was an area of scholarship that was neglected by art historians for a long time. Yet when the supernatural function of objects has been examined, it provides a great deal of cultural information about a society. For example, Ernst Kitzinger’s discussion of images that were venerated in the sixth and seventh centuries showed how the Byzantines formed relationships with

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<sup>31</sup> Campbell Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets: Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1950). Simone Michel, *Die magischen Gemmen im Britischen Museum* (London: British Museum Press, 2001). Jeffrey Spier, *Late Antique and Early Christian Gems* (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2007).

objects.<sup>32</sup> He argued that the way images were kissed and adorned with accessories was deemed to provide protection. He additionally discussed how some Christians might venerate images, which led to a mistrust of the use of images and which led to iconoclastic tendencies. Other studies have sought to understand the topic in more detail. David Freedberg's *The Power of Images* argued that art history overlooks how imagery was perceived to be powerful in past societies.<sup>33</sup> He showed how Western cultures have learnt to suppress natural urges and emotions when we interact with images; we prefer instead to disguise our real emotions with idle talk of the artist, the aesthetics, the material or the technique by which it was made. In reality, he argued, images instil emotions in us; they scare us, arouse us, move us to tears, can provoke anger, and, crucially, are perceived to contain supernatural essences. Freedberg focused on how people respond to images; this approach shifted attention away from aesthetic factors to place the emphasis back to how past societies interacted with an image.

The debate about the relationship between the image and what was represented on an object, how it was portrayed, and whether or not they were one and the same, is one of the key disputes that comes up in Iconoclasm, and one of the key areas that is argued over by art historians dealing with the period of Iconoclasm. Iconoclasm has notably been discussed by Charles Barber who reviewed the events that led to the Iconoclastic developments in the seventh, eighth and ninth centuries.<sup>34</sup> Barber regarded the visual aspect of icons, what was written and portrayed on them, as a key factor that led to distrust of the role of images in Christian worship.

Hans Belting discussed the beliefs, the supernatural tales and the worries about imagery dating from antiquity to the 1500s.<sup>35</sup> Belting, like Cormack and Freedberg, was not interested in aesthetic matters; instead his emphasis on how images were used led him to cultural conclusions where images were perceived to have the presence of the divine in them. The anthropologist Alfred Gell also discussed the perceived powers in

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<sup>32</sup> Ernst Kitzinger, 'The Cult of Images', 83-150.

<sup>33</sup> Freedberg, *The Power of Images*.

<sup>34</sup> Charles Barber, *Figure and Likeness: On the Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002).

<sup>35</sup> Hans Belting, *Bild und Kult: eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1990). For a translation in English see Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

objects in cultural terms.<sup>36</sup> He argued people give power to objects, whereby they behave as social agents; in other words, objects make people do things and they form a significant part in human actions and relations. We can perceive objects as not just pieces of materials, but as invested with essences through the use of form and decoration. Gell's work is a reminder to the art historian that social and cultural factors often underlie the way people interact with supernatural objects and images. Some art historians have since tried to implement some of the above authors' approaches in raising the significance of powerful imagery in art historical terms. More recently this led Jane Garnett and Gervase Rosser to study how societies in Liguria, in northeast Italy, venerated and perceived powerful images from the 1500s right to the present day.<sup>37</sup>

### *Supernatural Theories*

The topic of acquiring powers through objects and images has been almost exclusively labelled as magic. Yet there are a number of discrepancies in the academic world about magic, mostly because authors cannot agree as to what magic actually is. To us, magic is an ambiguous word that can be used to refer to something supernatural, as well as being used metaphorically. The problems with the word 'magic' have been best summarised by the Canadian and American psychologists Carol Nemeroff and Paul Rozin, who have said that even though magic is commonly discussed, it has become a word that covers several things.

“‘Magic’ is a word that encompasses many things from UFOs, to sleight-of-hand tricks, to folklore, to false beliefs, or just to be in a state of awe. There is no true category of magic in these associations. ‘Magic’ has become a label for a residual category: a garbage bin filled with things that we do not know what to do with”.<sup>38</sup>

The ambiguous and questionable use of the word 'magic' can be seen in much modern scholarship. With the exploration of magic in ancient societies across the humanities, in the 1970s Ernst Kitzinger could refer to the Byzantines' beliefs in the potency of cross depictions as 'magical efficacy' rather than 'Christian efficacy'; by labelling the power

<sup>36</sup> Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

<sup>37</sup> Jane Garnett and Gervase Rosser, *Spectacular Miracles: Transforming Images in Italy from the Renaissance to the Present* (London: Reaktion, 2013).

<sup>38</sup> Carol Nemeroff and Paul Rozin, 'The Makings of the Magical Mind', in *Imagining the Impossible: Magical, Scientific, and Religious Thinking in Children*, ed. by Karl S. Rosengren et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 1.

of the cross as magic, he portrayed the potency of those symbols as un-Christian and, on some level, heretical.<sup>39</sup> In a similar vein, the lack of understanding of the connotations of the word 'magic' was still prevalent over twenty years later when the psychologist Stuart Vyse, referred to superstitions as an aspect of 'magical thinking', despite his argument that magic and superstition were two different things.<sup>40</sup> Even after the millennium there has been, and continues to be, uncertainty and a misuse of the word 'magic'. In 2008, Derek Collins referred to the power of imagery in the ancient Greek world as 'image magic': using the word 'magic' in this way, his terminology associated powerful images with sorcery and overlooked how images could be still be powerful through religious means, rather than through heretical ones.<sup>41</sup> It might be said then, that the word 'magic' is used a lot by modern cultures and we have a lot of differing connotations of what it means. In modern scholarship the word 'magic' holds the same connotations as it did in the twentieth century. When we use this word and apply it to past societies, it immediately creates problems as to whether that society regarded magic in the same way that we do.

Anthropological studies have traditionally taken an interest in the topic of magic. Before the 1950s, many anthropologists made varying definitions of what they considered magic to be and questioned the difference between magic and religion. Frazer argued there were two forms of magic, positive magic which attracted desirable events, and negative magic, which tried to avoid unwanted outcomes.<sup>42</sup> Other anthropologists made important contributions, such as Émile Durkheim's argument that beliefs in magic were broader than Frazer's positive and negative magic labels; instead we see things in terms of being sacred or profane, the former being related to religions, the latter as being magical.<sup>43</sup> Branisław Malinowski noted that people tend to use magic when in uncertain situations such as looking to the future, whereas religion was used

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<sup>39</sup> Ernst Kitzinger, 'The Threshold of the Holy Shrine: Observations on Floor Mosaics at Antioch and Bethlehem', in *Kyriakon: Festschrift Johannes Quasten*, Vol. 2, ed. by Patrick Granfield and Josef A. Jungmann (Münster Westf: Aschendorff, 1970), 639-647 (p. 640).

<sup>40</sup> Vyse, *Believing in Magic*, pp. 3-6, 26-54.

<sup>41</sup> Derek Collins, *Magic in the Ancient Greek World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), p. 24.

<sup>42</sup> Frazer, *The Golden Bough*.

<sup>43</sup> Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life: A Study in Religious Sociology*, trans. by Joseph Ward Swain (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1915).

when in current crises.<sup>44</sup> Marcel Mauss argued magic was actually a collective, social phenomenon that draws on religion, sciences and technology.<sup>45</sup>

After the 1950s, other disciplines such as history and archaeology developed an interest in the supernatural dimension of the word 'magic'. Their emphasis was not in treating magic as a human phenomenon, but on understanding how it was understood by past cultures. Magic has received attention in Byzantine studies, especially since the late 1980s. Maguire edited a volume on the topic, with authors detailing a different aspect of magical practices.<sup>46</sup> The volume hinted that even the Byzantines were not always clear what magic was; some saw the Evil Eye as magic, while to others, saints' miracles were considered as magic. More recently, attempts to clarify magic have seen Paul Magdalino and Maria Mavroudi explore the topic further by editing a volume on the occult sciences. Focusing on the Middle or Later centuries of the Empire, they concentrated on technology and alchemy rather than rituals and spells.<sup>47</sup> Jan Breemer and Jan Veenstra also edited a volume that was concerned with documenting how perceptions of magic changed from Early Byzantium to the Middle Ages.<sup>48</sup> Its emphasis was to show how the concept of magic changes over time; a fourth-century Byzantine definition was different to a twelfth-century one. However, like the anthropologists, historians have been unable to agree what constituted as magic to the Early Byzantines. Perhaps the best comment on this matter has come from Silke Trzcionka, who preferred not to define magic at all and instead recognise that whatever magic was, there were people who engaged with supernatural entities for protection and assistance in beneficial or malevolent actions.<sup>49</sup>

Building on the work of anthropologists, some historians of religion have discussed magic. A starting point has been the so-called magical texts, a series of papyri spells that have been excavated across the empire. Karl Preisendanz translated a

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<sup>44</sup> Bronisław Malinowski, *Magic, Science, Religion and Other Essays* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1948).

<sup>45</sup> Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, trans. by Robert Brian (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972).

<sup>46</sup> Henry Maguire (ed.), *Byzantine Magic* (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1995).

<sup>47</sup> Paul Magdalino and Maria Mavroudi (eds), *The Occult Sciences in Byzantium* (Geneva: La Pomme d'or, 2006).

<sup>48</sup> Jan N. Breemer and Jan R. Veenstra (eds), *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period* (Leuven: Peeters, 2002).

<sup>49</sup> Silke Trzcionka, *Magic and the Supernatural in Fourth-Century Syria* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 10.



collection of them from ancient Greek into German and these have been invaluable in documenting beliefs and customs of ancient cultures.<sup>50</sup> Hans Dieter Betz translated them into English in the late 1980s.<sup>51</sup> Georg Luck attempted to divide many of the spells into broad themes.<sup>52</sup> Marvin Meyer and Richard Smith collated Christian magic spells, showing that Christians had their very own branch of magic.<sup>53</sup> Aspects of early Christian culture have been compared to magic, with many authors pointing out similarities between the two and implicitly suggesting the line between them was very vague.<sup>54</sup> Closely related to this, a specialist topic has emerged called 'demonology', where texts discussing demons are examined.<sup>55</sup>

Historians dealing with magic have been more active in Roman scholarship and some aspects relating to Early Byzantium can be found in these resources.<sup>56</sup> Matthew Dickie detailed the position of magicians in the Roman period, whilst also including a chapter discussing magicians from the fourth to seventh centuries. He showed how a person's reputation could be harmed if they were accused of being a magician, threatening their livelihood and their standing in society.<sup>57</sup> Dickie detailed how many professions and individuals were accused of having associations to magic, whether

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<sup>50</sup> Karl Preisendanz (ed.), *Papyri graecae magicae: die griechischen Zauberpapyri* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1928-1931).

<sup>51</sup> Hans Dieter Betz (ed.), *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic spells* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986). Hans Dieter Betz (ed.), *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation: Including the Demotic spells*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>52</sup> Georg Luck (ed.), *Arcana Mundi: Magic and the Occult in the Greek and Roman Worlds* (Wellingborough: Crucible, 1987).

<sup>53</sup> Marvin W. Meyer and Richard Smith (eds), *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

<sup>54</sup> A good overview of magic in relation to Early Christianity is David E. Aune, 'Magic in Early Christianity', in *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic in Early Christianity: Collected Essays* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 368-420. Stephen Benko, 'Early Christian Magical Practices', *Society of Biblical Literature, Seminar Papers*, Vol. 21 (1982), 9-14. Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (London: Gollancz, 1978). A. A. Barb, 'The Survival of Magic Arts', in *The Conflict Between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, ed. by Arnaldo Momigliano (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 100-125. See also Morton Smith, 'How Magic was Changed by the Triumph of Early Christianity', *Graeco-arabica*, Vol. 2 (1983), 51-58.

<sup>55</sup> Richard P. H. Greenfield, *Traditions of Belief in Late Byzantine Demonology* (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1988). Harry. J. Magoulas, 'The Lives of Byzantine Saints as Sources of Data for the History of Magic in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries A.D.: Sorcery, Relics and Icons', *Byzantion*, Vol. 37 (1967), 228-269. Cyril Mango, 'Diabolus Byzantinus', *DOP*, Vol. 46 (1992), 215-223. Brown, 'Sorcery, Demons and the Rise of Christianity', 17-45. Sophie Lunn-Rockcliffe, 'Visualising the Demonic: The Gadarene Exorcism in Early Christian Art and Literature', in *The Devil in Society in Premodern Europe*, ed. by Richard Raiswell (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2012), pp. 439-457.

<sup>56</sup> A good introduction to Roman magic is Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*.

<sup>57</sup> Matthew W. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 273-321.

bishops, 'drunken old women', Jews, haruspices, charioteers, wrestlers, theatre-workers, prostitutes, amulet makers and even educated men. Elsewhere in Roman studies, there is a greater use of material culture where magical objects are discussed alongside primary texts to discuss the past.<sup>58</sup>

Byzantine art historians have discussed magical objects. Gary Vikan and Molly Heintz have highlighted how some Early Byzantine objects were depicted with imagery in order to aid healing.<sup>59</sup> They discussed items that have Christian iconography but were nevertheless perceived as magical objects, rather than Christian ones. Their studies lead to questions as to whether the Byzantines differentiated between magical imagery and Christian imagery. The implication is that it is the material or the function of an object, not the iconography, which makes it magical. However, Maguire has reiterated many times that imagery could have magical functions in Early Byzantium.<sup>60</sup> He noted the ambivalent relationship between magic and Christian cultures, observing overlaps between Christian imagery and magical imagery. He has argued that objects such as textiles, coins, combs, cutlery and floor mosaics were depicted with images, both Christian and non-Christian, to attract what the images were associated with. For Maguire, the process by which this happened was a magical activity. Campbell Bonner, Simone Michel and Jeffrey Spier have discussed magical gemstones, where each of them noted that it was the material of the gemstone that was perceived as more powerful

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<sup>58</sup> For example, see Bailliot, *Magie et sortilèges dans l'Antiquité romaine*.

<sup>59</sup> Vikan, 'Art, Medicine, and Magic', *DOP*, 65-86. Molly Fulghum Heintz, 'Health: Magic, Medicine, and Prayer', in *Byzantine Women and their World*, ed. by Ioli Kalavrezou (New Haven and London: Yale, 2003) 275-305.

<sup>60</sup> Dauterman Maguire et al., *Art and Holy Powers*. Henry Maguire, 'Garments Pleasing to God: the Significance of Domestic Textile Designs in the Early Byzantine Period', *DOP*, Vol. 44 (1990), 215-224. Henry Maguire, 'Magic and Geometry in Early Christian Floor Mosaics and Textiles', *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, Vol. 44 (1994), 265-274. Henry Maguire, 'Magic and the Christian Image', in *Byzantine Magic*, ed. by Henry Maguire (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1995), 51-71. Henry Maguire, *The Icons of their Bodies: Saints and their Images in Byzantium* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 100-145. Henry Maguire, 'Magic and Money in the Early Middle Ages', *Speculum*, Vol. 72, No. 4 (1997), 1037-1054. Henry Maguire, 'The Nile and the Rivers of Paradise', in *The Madaba Map Centenary, 1897-1997*, ed. by Michele Piccirillo and Eugenio Alliata (Jerusalem: Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, 1999), 179-184. Henry Maguire, 'Profane Icons: the Significance of Animal Violence in Byzantine Art', *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 38 (2000), 18-33. It was repeated in Eunice Dauterman Maguire and Henry Maguire, *Other Icons: Art and Power in Byzantine Secular Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 58-67. Henry Maguire, 'Personal Adornment: Glory, Vainglory, and Insecurity', in *Transition to Christianity: Art of Late Antiquity, 3<sup>rd</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> Century AD*, ed. by Anastasia Lazaridou (New York: Alexander A. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation, 2011), 43-47.

than the images or words engraved on them.<sup>61</sup> A case that might then be made is that the Byzantines perceived both the material and the iconography as what defined an object's power.

Some scholars have begun to recognise that the term 'magic' has become an umbrella term for a wide variety of beliefs. Some have identified superstition as something that should be studied in its own right. However, in terms of historical studies, this literature is in its infancy. For example, though his essay included the word 'superstition', David Frankfurter's interest was not to compare superstition to magic, but to show how the Byzantines inherited Roman concepts and words that would have an effect on Reformation Christianity.<sup>62</sup> In contrast, James Russell implicitly highlighted how a belief in the Evil Eye straddled the lines between superstition and magic, by showing how a number of objects were designed to repel the Evil Eye.<sup>63</sup> A discipline that has been keen to distinguish superstition from magic is psychology. Since the 1950s, but most significantly since the 1990s, psychologists have looked to the behaviour of an individual superstitious person rather than a group, seeking the cognitive processes of why such believers act in the way they do. A psychological perspective argues that superstitions provide believers with a sense of control in their lives when things seem uncontrollable: it gives them confidence and provides comfort.<sup>64</sup> They also argue such beliefs are not unique to a gender or a class of society. Yet psychologists have also shown that at its worst, superstition can increase anxiety, encourage fatalism and has its roots in schizophrenia.<sup>65</sup>

There are a number of differences in the academic literature on supernatural theories and the power of images. Establishing what these beliefs were, whether magical, superstitious, or supernatural, are all questions that are open to debate. How

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<sup>61</sup> Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets*, pp. 2-3, 9, 14. Michel, *Die magischen Gemmen im Britischen Museum*. Spier argues that gems hold more functions than just supernatural ones. Spier, *Late Antique and Early Christian Gems*, pp. 81-86.

<sup>62</sup> David Frankfurter, 'Beyond Magic and Superstition', in *Late Ancient Christianity*, ed. by Virginia Burrus (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 255-312.

<sup>63</sup> James Russell, 'The Evil Eye in Early Byzantine Society: Archaeological Evidence from Anemurium in Isauria', *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (1982), pp. 539-548.

<sup>64</sup> Stuart A. Vyse, *Believing in Magic: The Psychology of Superstition* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 20-22. For a more 'populist' psychology book on the subject, but nonetheless informative, see Matthew Hutson, *The 7 Laws of Magical Thinking: How Irrationality Makes Us Happy, Healthy, and Sane* (London: Oneworld, 2012), p. 6, 51-60, 61-70, 186-191, 239-249.

<sup>65</sup> Vyse, *Believing in Magic*, p. 203.

these questions might be applied to a period in history, such as the Early Byzantine Empire, is just as difficult to reach a consensus on.

### *Supernatural mosaics*

Having discussed literature on the power of imagery and on the nature of supernatural power, in this section I will discuss what has been established in mosaic scholarship about these surfaces having supernatural functions. It is a topic that has been studied more in Roman scholarship than Early Byzantine studies. The literature that does exist is restricted to essays and, as of yet, there has not been a complete study of it. This thesis goes some way to rectify this.

The authors of this literature naturally had their own agendas and brought forward different conclusions. Writing in the 1940s, Doro Levi's agenda was to seek the meaning of three panels from the outskirts of Antioch, which had unusual iconography.<sup>66</sup> One depicted an eye being attacked by creatures and weapons (fig. 54). The other two panels depict a chubby man holding two snakes by their necks, in addition to a hunch-backed man holding two 'rods' in his hands. Levi argued each of the panels had an apotropaic, protective function, and he regarded the power in the mosaic as superstition. His interest was not necessarily in the supernatural aspect; his interest was in interpreting the meaning of the panels and why the iconography had been combined in that way. Writing nearly thirty years later, Ernst Kitzinger highlighted a different aspect.<sup>67</sup> He showed the significance of where images were placed in a building. He demonstrated how imagery was depicted in significant parts of two separate Christian buildings to provide protection. His study is a reminder for scholars to look at imagery in an architectural context. When imagery is placed in certain parts of a building, it tends to evoke specific meanings.

Katherine Dunbabin has suggested more than once that some mosaics were designed to have supernatural functions.<sup>68</sup> Like Kitzinger, she emphasised that images

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<sup>66</sup> Doro Levi, 'The Evil Eye and the Lucky Hunchback', in *Antioch on-the-Orontes, the Excavations 1937-39*, Vol. 3, ed. by Richard Stillwell (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1941), pp. 220-232.

<sup>67</sup> Kitzinger, 'The Threshold of the Holy Shrine', pp. 639-647.

<sup>68</sup> Dunbabin, *MRNA*, pp. 161-172. Katherine M. D. Dunbabin and Matthew W. Dickie, 'Invidia Rumpantur Pectora: the Iconography of Phthonos/Invidia in Greco Roman Art', *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, Vol. 26 (1983), pp. 7-37. Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, 'Baiaurum Grata Voluptas: Pleasures and Dangers of the Baths', *Papers of the British School at Rome*, Vol. 57 (1989), pp. 6-46. Katherine M.

tend to change meanings according to where they are placed in an architectural context. In one study looking at mosaics from the Roman North African provinces, she detailed how some mosaics were depicted with imagery to attract powers from pagan gods, while the origins of the power of other mosaics are less evident.<sup>69</sup> In a later essay, Dunbabin asserted a more cultural emphasis, where she explained that mosaics with supernatural functions in the baths reflected the cultural fears about demons in society and the need to protect bathers against them.<sup>70</sup> John Mitchell also emphasised that floor mosaics could be decorated with images out of fear of demons, as he argued those creatures could enter buildings and harm those within.<sup>71</sup> Using iconography, he examined two separate mosaics in Albania that he perceived as having protective functions against demons.

Maguire had a different agenda, to discuss the nature of ornament in Early Byzantine art.<sup>72</sup> He showed how both floor mosaics and textiles were depicted with symbols to attract powers. His essay was written in the 1990s during a surge of interest in scholarship on magic and on the nature of ornament. He showed how many motifs on magical objects were depicted on a particular floor mosaic in Syria, thereby suggesting the mosaic probably shared a similar supernatural function. He is one of the few scholars who have attempted to place their findings in a Byzantine cultural context, as he asked how Christians might have felt about magical motifs being used in a Christian place of worship.

The archaeologist John Manley took a noticeably different approach when he focused solely on the borders that encircle the shape of a room.<sup>73</sup> Looking to anthropology and psychology, he argued that in Roman mosaics these areas were decorated to protect the room against malevolent beings. The imagery in the borders, he argued, kept demons away from people who were standing within the central areas. His

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D. Dunbabin, 'Inbide Calco Te...: Trampling Upon the Envious', in *Tesserae: Festschrift für Josef Engemann* (Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1991), pp. 26-35.

<sup>69</sup> Dunbabin, *MRNA*, pp. 137-172.

<sup>70</sup> Dunbabin, 'Baiaurum Grata Voluptas', pp. 6-46.

<sup>71</sup> John Mitchell, 'Keeping the Demons out of the House: the Archaeology of Apotropaic Strategy and Practice in Late Antique Butrint and Antigoneia', in *Objects in Context, Objects in Use: Material Spatiality in Late Antiquity*, ed. by Luke Lavan et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 273-310.

<sup>72</sup> Maguire, 'Magic and Geometry', pp. 265-274.

<sup>73</sup> John Manley, 'Decoration and Demon Traps: The Meanings of Geometric Borders in Roman Mosaics', in *Communities and Connections: Essays in Honour of Barry Cunliffe*, ed. by Chris Gosden et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 426-448.

agenda considered the use of space in relation to decoration. Both Mitchell and Manley's approaches emphasised the importance of how mosaics could be decorated to fulfil specific supernatural functions.

Other scholarship that has discussed supernatural mosaics has dealt with the topic as just one part of a larger argument. For example, when explaining how Christian objects were designed to repel the Evil Eye, Josef Engemann presented floor mosaics as just one form of media among many that were believed to affect the supernatural realm. Silke Trzcionka argued that fourth-century citizens in Palestine wanted as many protective devices as possible, floor mosaics being just one.<sup>74</sup> Ellen Swift's study on decoration and ornament in Roman culture briefly alluded to how the thresholds and borders of mosaics were decorated to attract power and prevent misfortune.<sup>75</sup>

In the current literature there are a number of discrepancies. There is a great deal of confusion as to what the power in the mosaics might be called. Is this magic, religion, superstition or just a belief in the potency of images? Such a question has not been posed. It leads to enquiries as to what this power was and how it operated within Christian society. Yet, there is some agreement in the literature on other topics, such as the use of iconography to understand the imagery on floors and establish how they can be seen in supernatural terms. There is also an implicit acknowledgement that images were interpreted in multiple ways. The literature suggests analysing a motif when it is placed in a certain part of a room or a building changes the way we might interpret that motif.

## THE POWER OF OBJECTS AND IMAGES IN BYZANTIUM

Having discussed previous literature relating to the themes of this thesis, an examination will now be undertaken to illustrate Byzantine beliefs in the supernatural. This is an essential concept to my thesis and central to an understanding of how floor mosaics were perceived to have a supernatural function. It therefore needs to be understood. I will show in this section that the Early Byzantines believed there were

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<sup>74</sup> Silke Trzcionka, *Magic and the Supernatural in Fourth-Century Syria* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 111-112.

<sup>75</sup> Ellen Swift, *Style and Function in Roman Decoration: Living with Objects and Interiors* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p. 34, 41-42.

multiple supernatural sources that could be appealed to and from which power could be acquired. By the use of the term ‘supernatural powers’ I refer to the Byzantines’ beliefs that invisible powers or essences could be attracted from or manipulated in a supernatural realm to intervene and affect the lives of those in the terrestrial realm. My term ‘supernatural power’ encompasses a broad category of beliefs, whether Christian, pagan, magical, or superstitious. In this thesis I will show that many of these different kinds of powers were present in the decoration of floor mosaics.

The Byzantines viewed the world in two ways: the physical and the spiritual. For example, when writing to the Emperor Constantine I (r. 312-337), the bishop Eusebios of Caesarea (c. 260/265-348-349) wrote, “For in fact two kinds of nature have been entangled in us, I mean the spiritual and the physical, the one composed of that which is visible to all and the other of that which is invisible”.<sup>76</sup> Eusebios perceived the physical, terrestrial realm as one of cause and effect: if a marble statue were to fall from a great height, it would smash to pieces. Yet Eusebios also attested to a spiritual realm that was composed of invisible powers, some of which, as he later goes on to say, he regarded as beneficent, such as the miracles of saints, angels or God. He also considered other powers in the world to be malevolent, in the form of demons or the Devil. The unseen forces could affect the earthly realm in visible ways, causing illnesses or earthquakes. Yet just as it was possible for these powers to affect the earthly realm, he perceived it as possible for humans to affect the spiritual realm: those powers could be invoked and controlled.<sup>77</sup> That powers could be acquired, bestowed and manipulated through objects and images was evident in many Byzantine texts. In this part, I will first show that objects and images were viewed as tools to attract powers. I will then discuss the nature of these powers to show that the Byzantines sought power from Christian, magical, demonic, pagan and from sources where the power is unclear. This will present a rather different and less pious Christian society than the one put forward by Robin

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<sup>76</sup> Δυσὸν γάρτοι φύσεων ἐν ἡμῖν συμπεπλεγμένων, ψυχῆς λέγω καὶ σώματος, καὶ τοῦ μὲν ὁρώμενου τοῖς πᾶσι, τοῦ δ’ ἀφανοῦς καθεστῶτος, ἐπὶ τοῦτοις ἐναντία βάρβαρα καὶ πολέμια γένη, τὸ μὲν ἀφανῶς, τὸ δ’ ἐκ τοῦ προφανοῦς, παρετάττετο · καὶ τὸ μὲν σώματα σώματι προβεβλημένον, τὸ δ’ ἄσωμάτοις παμμαχίαις γυμνὴν αὐτὴν ἐπολιόπκει τὴν ἀνθρώπου ψυχὴν. Eusebios of Caesarea, *Εἰς Κωνσταντίνον τὸν βασιλεῖα τριακονταετηρικός*, Z’ (*De laudibus Constantini oratio in ejus tricennalibus habita*, 7); PG 20, 1352B. Trans. by H. A. Drake, *In Praise of Constantine: A Historical Study and New Translation of Eusebius’ Tricennial Orations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 95.

<sup>77</sup> Dauterman Maguire et al., *Art and Holy Powers*, p. 2.

Cormack and Antony Eastmond, who have argued the Early Byzantine period was one that was 'Christian' and which produced 'religious art'.<sup>78</sup>

The Early Byzantines believed that objects and images were potent devices that could 'do' things. Objects and images were not just something to look at or to handle; they were perceived as having the capacity to intervene in a person's daily life, whether for beneficial or for malevolent purposes. As will be argued later, floor mosaics can be included as having these functions. The supernatural function of images and objects is evident in many Byzantine written sources. Having become sick with a colic disease, a woman was described as scraping the plaster from a fresco depicting the medical saints Cosmas and Damian; she mixed it with water, drank it and later became cured.<sup>79</sup> In this story, the woman perceived the fresco depicting the saints, even the miniscule shavings of it, as possessing something of the saints in the image. She believed that if she consumed the plaster from the fresco, the saints represented on it could intervene in her life. John Moschos (550-619) described how a woman in Apamea (a city in modern Syria) had a water-well built, only to find there was no water. She later had a vision instructing her to obtain an image of a monk, which would provide water to the well. Having completed the task, she lowered the image into the well and immediately it was full of water.<sup>80</sup> The monk's image was so potent that it had the power to miraculously turn an empty well into a full one. Lastly, another Byzantine text suggested that figurines could be seen as embodying the persons they represent. Theophilus of Alexandria suddenly had pains in his arms and legs. He was taken to the Church of Cyrus and John where he had a vision of those saints, who instructed him to cast a net into the shore of the sea and whatever was caught would heal him. The next morning he did as instructed and he captured a box. When it was opened, it contained a small bronze statuette of Theophilus which had nails pierced through it in the arms and feet. The nails were removed and Theophilus instantly felt better.<sup>81</sup> In the tale, the statuette had control over the real human body and it is reminiscent of Frazer's first form of

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<sup>78</sup> Robin Cormack, *Byzantine Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 2-3. Antony Eastmond, *The Glory of Byzantium and Early Christendom* (London: Phaidon, 2013), p. 7.

<sup>79</sup> Έκ ἡδὲ αὐτῶν θαυμάτων, περὶ τῆς γυναιχὸς τῆς ἐχέσης τὸς σπόφος (*Ex eisdem miraculis, de muliere tortionembabente*); Giovanni Domenici Mansi (ed.), *Sacrorum conciliorum nova, et amplissima collectio*, Vol. 13 (Florence: Espensis Antonii Zatta Veneti, 1767), p. 68.

<sup>80</sup> John Moschos, *Λειμῶν (Pratum Spirituale)*, 61; PG 87.3, 2940A-B.

<sup>81</sup> Sophronios, *Διηγήσις θαυμάτων των ἁγιων Κυρου και Ιωαννου των σοφων αναργυρων (Narratio miraculorum SS. Cyri et Joannis)*, 35; PG 87.3, 3541-3548.



sympathetic magic, homeopathy, where an action is believed to have an effect on something or someone else: damage to the statuette caused damage to the person. Thus, the statuette was an object that could be filled with power.

From the above examples, it can be said that objects and images were perceived as possessing powers. Far from being objects and images to contemplate, spiritual beings were deemed to be in them. Supernatural beings could be contacted or could be manipulated through the image or object. This is evident in the numerous tales and beliefs that the objects and images generated. The logic or any explanation of how these powers were believed to work is rarely made explicit in Byzantine texts. They seem to imply that a supernatural essence would know and grant a person's wish if that person possessed, used or wore an object in a certain way. From that, the image or words on an object would work in favour of that person. Ernst Kitzinger described the logic in the mind of these viewers as an inability to distinguish between the image and what is represented: the object and what was portrayed on the object were one and the same.<sup>82</sup> It suggests that the Byzantines did not necessarily just look to the decoration or the aesthetics of an object, but paid equal attention to the material it was made from, as well as the type of object it was: it suggests art was viewed more broadly than we might do today.

## BELIEFS AND MULTIVALENCE OF POWERS

As we shall see, the powers in floor mosaics came from different supernatural sources, so it is necessary to discuss in this part of the introduction how those beliefs worked and how they overlapped. These powers could come from Christian, pagan, magical, demonic or from an unclear source. The Byzantines' understanding between these different kinds of beliefs was not as clear to them as it might seem to modern readers. For them, these beliefs 'overlapped' with each other.

### *Christian power*

Some powers could be recognised as distinctively Christian. Theodoret of Cyrrhus described how the porches of Rome were decorated with images of Symeon the Elder, specifically to attract protective powers and give a sense of security.

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<sup>82</sup> Ernst Kitzinger, 'The Cult of Images in the Age Before Iconoclasm, *DOP*, Vol. 8 (1954), 83-150 (p. 101).

It is said that the man [Symeon the Elder] became so celebrated in the great city of Rome that at the entrance of all the workshops men have set up small representations of him, to provide thereby some protection and safety for themselves.<sup>83</sup>

What underlines the account is the belief that Symeon was not depicted for decorative purposes, he was considered as being present in the image. Being a Christian saint, the power in the image was perceived as coming from a Christian source. The integrity of the image was as important as the beliefs that it generated: so long as the depiction of Symeon was kept intact, the depiction would ensure continued protection to the workshop. An image of a saint was believed to provide the power of the saint. A similar logic is present in other accounts where a Christian character is depicted or linked to an object, therefore rendering its power as Christian. Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335-395) described the relics of the martyr Theodore as so holy that a person would be compelled to pray before it.<sup>84</sup> If a person were to direct their prayers at his bones, the martyr himself would be an intercessor as if he were actually present. The bones could be appealed to and beneficiaries (power) could be acquired from them.<sup>85</sup>

Thus Christians used objects and images to acquire powers: just some of these objects include icons, armbands, gems, amulets, *ampullae* (flasks that carried holy water or holy oil), votive objects, *eulogia* (clay blessing tokens) and relics in the form of martyrs' bones and objects touched by holy persons.<sup>86</sup> The imagery itself might consist of crosses, saints, scenes from the Old Testament, the Nativity, the Baptism of Christ, the Ascension or images of Christ's mother, the Virgin Mary. The belief in Christian objects and images as possessing powers caused great concern to some Christians, who perceived this as either heresy or idolatry. Authors such as Asterios of Amaseia

<sup>83</sup> Φασί γάρ οὕτως ἐν ἄνδρα, ὡς ἐν Ῥώμῃ μεγίστη πολυθρύλλητον γενέσθαι τὸν ἄνδρα, ὡς ἐν ἅπασιν τοῖς τῶν ἐργαστηρίων προπυλαίοις εἰκόνας αὐτῷ βραχείας ἀναστῆσαι, φθλακὴν τινα σφίσιν αὐτοῖς καὶ ἀσφάλειαν ἐντεῦθεν πορίζοντας. Theodoret of Cyrhus, *Historia Religiosa*, 26, 12; PG 82, 1472D-1473A. Trans. by R. M. Price, *A History of the Monks of Syria* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian, 1984), p. 165.

<sup>84</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Εἰς τὸν μέγαν μαρτυρὰ Θεοδοῖον* (*Sancti ac magni martyris Theodori*); PG 46, 740B.

<sup>85</sup> For relics as powerful, see Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981), pp. 88-94.

<sup>86</sup> Gary Vikan, 'Icons and Icon Piety in Early Byzantium', in *Byzantine East, Latin West: Art-Historical Studies in Honor of Kurt Weitzmann*, ed. by Christopher Moss and Katherine Kiefer (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 569-576. Gary Vikan, 'Byzantine Pilgrims' Art', in *Heaven on Earth: Art and Church in Byzantium*, ed. by Linda Safran (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 229-266. Gary Vikan, 'Two Byzantine Amuletic Armbands and the Group to which they Belong', *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery*, Vol. 49-50 (1991-1992), 35-51.

complained of those in society who had the story of the Gospels depicted on textiles, thinking they were pleasing God and perhaps deriving power from the images, when in his view all they were doing was showing their vanity.<sup>87</sup>

### *Demonic power*

In addition to Christian power, the Byzantines also believed in demonic power. To both pagans and Christians, demons were perceived to be supernatural beings more powerful than humans, but less powerful than deities.<sup>88</sup> It was understood they could be summoned in order to intervene and affect matters in the terrestrial realm. To Christians they were regarded as mischievous tricksters, hell-bent on causing misery and misfortune to people.<sup>89</sup> For example, one Byzantine account stated how a mosaicist was left with a swollen hand after he attempted to remove a wall mosaic depicting the goddess Aphrodite. In the story, the mosaicist became injured because a demon was said to have inhabited the representation of Aphrodite: as the mosaicist was unaware of the demon, when he tried to remove or destroy the image, the demon reacted by injuring him.<sup>90</sup> What is apparent in the story is that the demon was believed to reside in the image or that the creature may have even protecting the image. Just as Symeon was regarded as being within the images of himself on porches, a demon was believed to reside in the representation of Aphrodite. That demons were perceived to inhabit other objects can be seen in a story that documented the life of Bishop Porphyry where it is stated that the bishop approached a statue of Aphrodite in Gaza with a crowd bearing crosses. When the demon within the statue saw the crosses, it was forced to flee from the statue out of fear.<sup>91</sup> People went to great measures to protect themselves against demons with the use of art, objects and prayer.<sup>92</sup> At the same time, if someone were experienced in sorcery, a demon's power could be gained and manipulated for that individual's advantage. As demons were perceived to reside in statues depicting the

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<sup>87</sup> Asterios of Amaseia, *Homilia*, 1; PG 40, 165-168.

<sup>88</sup> Ramsay MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (New Haven and London: Yale, 1981), p. 82.

<sup>89</sup> Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 38-42.

<sup>90</sup> Eustratios Presbyter, *Vita S. Eutychii*, 53; PG86b, 2333-2336.

<sup>91</sup> Mark the Deacon, *Βίος του αγίου Πορφυρίου, Επισκόπου Γάζης* (*Vita de S. Porphyrii*), 59-61; Mark the Deacon, *Vie de Porphyre: Évêque de Gaza*, trans. by Henri Grégoire and M. A. Kugener (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1930), pp. 47-49.

<sup>92</sup> Peter Brown, 'Sorcery, Demons and the Rise of Christianity from Late Antiquity into the Middle Ages', in *Witchcraft: Confessions and Accusations*, ed. by Mary Douglas (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970), 17-45 (pp. 18-20). David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 5.

pagan gods, the statues could be turned on their side, inverted or carved with Christian insignia to neutralise the power in the statue and turn it to a person's advantage.<sup>93</sup> With this in mind, it is possible to interpret the inverted bases of classical statues on the city walls of Ankara as bringing protective powers to the city. This demonstrates a belief that the demons' powers in the statues could work positively if they were manipulated properly.

### *Pagan sources*

Another source of supernatural power that could be appealed to were pagan deities. The word 'pagan', however, is misleading and it needs to be discussed and defined. *Paganii* was a Latin term that was only created in the second century AD by Christians, who were keen to distinguish an 'us' and 'them' relationship between Christians and non-Christians.<sup>94</sup> This was a term that labelled anyone not Christian as 'the other' in society and not part of their community. The term *paganii* actually translates as "country dweller".<sup>95</sup> Pagans did not consider themselves as 'pagans' and might object to being grouped together with other non-Christian believers. For example, a devotee to the goddess Athena would practice their beliefs very differently to a follower of Mithras. Thus, there was no such thing as 'paganism'; instead there were cults to specific deities, traditional beliefs and a shared culture comprising of festivals, feast days and rituals.<sup>96</sup> Pagans participated in cults and believed in multiple gods who could be appealed to. The emphasis in these cults was not on instruction and their beliefs cannot really be considered religions in the modern sense of the word. Believers did not necessarily praise or submit to deities; they contacted the gods when they wanted something. As Mary Beard has argued, pagans believed the gods had an attitude of 'if you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours': if pagans wanted something from their gods (love, money, cures, health), they knew they would have to offer something to

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<sup>93</sup> Liz James, "Pray Not to Fall into Temptation and be on your Guard": Pagan Statues in Christian Constantinople', *Gesta*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (1996), 12-20 (p. 16).

<sup>94</sup> Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians in the Mediterranean World from the Second Century AD to the Conversion of Constantine* (Harmondsworth: Viking, 1986), pp. 30-31.

<sup>95</sup> Robert Shorrock, *The Myth of Paganism: Nonnus, Dionysus and the World of Late Antiquity* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2011), pp. 4-6. Alan Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 7, 14-24.

<sup>96</sup> Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries* (New Haven and London: Yale, 1997), pp. 32-34. Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, pp. 30-46. Garth Fowden, 'Religious Communities', in *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World*, ed. by G. W. Bowersock et al. (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 82-106 (p. 84).

them in return, whether a sacrifice, a donation to a temple or a votive object.<sup>97</sup> When I use the term 'pagan' in this thesis I refer to non-Christians or to a non-Christian culture, adhering to traditional Roman religious customs.

Byzantine scholarship had traditionally stated that from the reign of the emperor Theodosius I (379-395), legislation made it more difficult for pagans to practice their beliefs. It was once thought this was a deliberate, aggressive tactic whereby pagan temples were destroyed and legislation was then enacted against them so that they could not practice their beliefs. This supposedly served part of a wider plan to encourage pagans to convert to Christianity. However, scholarship in the last twenty years has begun to show that society was not quite as aggressively anti-pagan as previously assumed. Temples were not always torn down; some were restored while others were just abandoned.<sup>98</sup> Pagans were not necessarily prevented from practicing their beliefs; they were discouraged from practicing them in public spaces. Though Christian religions became socially and politically more powerful, pagans and pagan culture were still a significant social force with many adherents across the Empire; it would have caused social and empire-wide turmoil if Christians had tried to abolish pagan beliefs in such an aggressive manner.<sup>99</sup> Pagans still held many positions of power in public life. Cities, such as Rome, which had a strong pagan history, were governed by pagan senators and pagan practices were still a staple feature of the city in the fifth and sixth centuries.<sup>100</sup> It was only during the reign of Justinian I in the mid-sixth century that pagan beliefs were outlawed with some force and in stronger terms.<sup>101</sup> As Pierre Chuvin had noted, even with all these legislations and prohibitions in place, this does not mean that the laws were obeyed. In the later years of Early Byzantium, many pagans kept their beliefs quiet so as not to attract the attention of the authorities.<sup>102</sup> Some pagans went to the countryside where it was thought they would not be persecuted as heavily: Frank Trombley has shown that there were still pagans in these areas as late as the

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<sup>97</sup> Mary Beard et al. (eds), *Religions of Rome: A History*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 34. R. M. Ogilvie, *The Romans and their Gods: In the Age of Augustus* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969), pp. 12-14.

<sup>98</sup> Helen Saradi-Mendelovici, 'Christian Attitudes Towards Pagan Monuments in Late Antiquity and their Legacy in the Later Byzantine Centuries', *DOP*, Vol. 44 (1990), 47-61 (p.49). Beard et al. (eds), *Religions of Rome*, Vol. 1, p. 382.

<sup>99</sup> Beard et al. (eds), *Religions of Rome*, Vol. 1, p. 388.

<sup>100</sup> MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism*, pp. 32-34.

<sup>101</sup> Pierre Chuvin, *A Chronicle of the Last Pagans*, trans. by B. A. Archer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 71.

<sup>102</sup> Chuvin, *A Chronicle of the Last Pagans*, p. 118.

eighth century.<sup>103</sup> Understood in this way, a Christianisation of the Empire was a slow, gradual changeover of power.

That the power of pagan deities might still be sought in Early Byzantium is not too surprising. Pagan deities continued to be depicted on gemstones, and gemstones from earlier centuries with images of pagan deities were kept, cherished and reused, whether the objects' owners were pagan or Christian.<sup>104</sup> That pagan deities' powers might still be sought can be seen in an example when the Christian sixth-century physician Alexander of Tralles prescribed limonite gemstones with images of the demi-god Herakles on them.<sup>105</sup> As well as herbal medicines, Alexander regarded gemstones as potent sources to combat illnesses. In the case just mentioned, he believed the Herakles gem, an object depicting a pagan deity, would provide the cure a patient needed, though he did not state whether it was the image of Herakles or the gem's material that provided the power. Other objects that were used to invoke the pagan gods' powers include icons, which have survived from the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries on which figures such as Zeus and Isis were depicted, attesting to the continued existence of non-Christians in society.<sup>106</sup> The depiction of these figures on objects such as icons suggests those deities could be appealed to as a source of power. A large number of the consumers of these objects were probably pagans, but just as pagans might possess Christian-themed images, so too might Christians seek the old gods' powers.<sup>107</sup> Thus, Cormack and Eastmond's perception of Early Byzantium as a Christian one is slightly misleading. This was a diverse period with people combining many beliefs. When it came to the nature of beliefs, this was a culture that was still 'hedging its bets' and it is one where Christians were not as singular in their beliefs as is often thought.

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<sup>103</sup> Frank R. Trombley, 'Paganism in the Greek World at the End of Late Antiquity: the Case of Rural Anatolia and Greece', *Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 78. No. 3-4 (1985), pp. 327-52 (p. 328). For pagans inhabiting countryside areas see Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, pp. 276-293.

<sup>104</sup> Spier, *Late Antique and Early Christian Gems*, p. 13, 34-39.

<sup>105</sup> Alexander of Tralles, *Βιβλίον Δεύτερον*, 9, 2. 579; Theodor Puschmann (ed), *Alexander von Tralles*, Vol. 2 (Vienna: W. Braumüller, 1879), p. 377.

<sup>106</sup> Thomas F. Mathews, *The Clash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art*, rev. edn (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), pp. 179-182, who calls them 'icons'.

<sup>107</sup> Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets*, pp. 210-221.

### *Magical and superstitious powers*

In Early Byzantium, power might be sought through magical means. As I highlighted earlier, the word ‘magic’, like ‘superstition’, has developed many connotations over time that it did not always have in ancient and Byzantine culture. With this in mind, we need to understand what the Byzantines perceived magic to be. To them, magic was known as *μαγεία* or *γοητεία* in Greek and *magia* in Latin.<sup>108</sup> References to these terms can be found in a section of the *Codex Theodosianus*, a collection of legislations that date from the reign of Constantine I in the fourth century up to the fifth century. The text is a collection of imperial laws that was enforced on the Empire from 439. The *Codex Iustinianus*, written under the reign of Justinian I in the mid-sixth century, reiterated the same legislation on magic, and left the previous laws unchanged using the same wording in the legislations.<sup>109</sup> It is not stated in the legislation why laws were created to prohibit the use of magic, yet a reading of these texts provides evidence of what magic was perceived to be in Early Byzantine terms. These texts saw the involvement of demons as constituting as magic. In both codices it is stated explicitly that sacrificing to demons, worshipping them or invoking them was a magical act and a crime punishable by death.<sup>110</sup> Astrologers and haruspices (religious officials that inspected the entrails of sacrificed animals in order to interpret omens) were just some of the professions that became outlawed at varying periods because their craft was perceived to involve demons and taking control over them.<sup>111</sup> The Byzantines also considered the desire to bring harm to another person through a supernatural means as magic. The *Codex Theodosianus* stated that those who worked magic against the safety of men would be punished.<sup>112</sup> An example of this was curses, which sought to bring harm to someone emotionally or physically by causing misfortune, illness or even death. Attempts to make another person do something against his or her will also constituted magic; in other words the power to take control over them. An example of

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<sup>108</sup> Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 7<sup>th</sup> edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1883), p. 1071 and p. 356. Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary: Founded on Andrews' Edition of Freund's Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879), pp. 1096-1097. For a discussion of these terms and the connotations of them, see Fitz Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, trans. by Franklin Philip (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 20-60. Jan N. Bremmer, ‘The Birth of the Term ‘Magic’’, in *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, ed. by Jan N. Bremmer and Jan R. Veenstra (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 1-11.

<sup>109</sup> *Codex Iustinianus*, 9, 18; *Corpus iuris civilis*, trans. by Paulus Kreuger, Vol. 2 (Berlin: Apud Weidmannos, 1963), p. 379-380.

<sup>110</sup> *Codex Theodosianus*, 9.16.7; Mommsen *CT*, p. 462 and Pharr *CT*, p. 238.

<sup>111</sup> *Codex Theodosianus*, 9.16.4; Mommsen *CT*, p. 461 and Pharr *CT*, pp. 237-238.

<sup>112</sup> *Codex Theodosianus*, 9.16.3, 9.16.5; Mommsen *CT*, pp. 460-461 and Pharr *CT*, pp. 237-238.

this was love spells, which were believed capable of taking over a person's reason and making them fall in love with someone who they might not have done otherwise. This fear of being controlled by someone through a supernatural means can be seen in the *Codex Theodosianus* when it is stated that causing virtuous minds to develop lust for another person is magic.<sup>113</sup> Lastly, the Byzantines perceived predicting the future as a form of magic. Many professions that claimed to foresee the future (astrology, soothsaying, divination, augury and seers) were perceived as employing magic and the legislation tried to prevent it.<sup>114</sup> It can be said that, for the Byzantines, magic was used to contact a non-earthly realm: it had a supernatural aspect. It can also be noted it was outlawed not because it was nonsense, but because its potency was considered real and could actually work. Magic only had negative connotations when it might have had an impact on another person's life. It was the magical user's desire that was offensive. In addition, it was the magical user's actions and intent that activated the malevolent powers. If it were not for the involvement of the magic user, these powers would not have been activated in the first place.<sup>115</sup>

As was the case with Christian power and demonic power, magical power was sought through objects and images. A large majority of gemstones that have survived from the Early Byzantine period seem to have had magical functions, and they were inscribed with motifs of the Holy Rider, the demon *Chnoubis*, the Evil Eye being destroyed, lions, deities, *characteres* (pseudo-graphics that look like an alphabet), as well as texts in the form of acclamations which ask for things such as health, luck and protection.<sup>116</sup> Early Byzantine magical gemstones often combined magical imagery on one side and religious imagery on the other. Another type of object that was considered to have magical powers was a curse tablet. The tablets were inscribed on thin metal sheets (*defixiones*) and included text as well as imagery; some portray the demon or a deity that might provide the power, others have *characteres*, while others depict what

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<sup>113</sup> *Codex Theodosianus*, 9.16.3; Mommsen *CT*, p. 460 and Pharr *CT*, p. 237. For a tale in which demons take control over someone through a love spell see Jerome, *Vita S. Hilarionis ermitae*; *PL* 23, 38A-39A.

<sup>114</sup> *Codex Theodosianus*, 9.16.4; Mommsen *CT*, p. 461 and Pharr *CT*, pp. 237-238.

<sup>115</sup> For an argument in which malevolent powers in the form of demons were considered best left alone, see James, "“Pray Not to Fall into Temptation”", p. 17.

<sup>116</sup> For an introduction see Gary Vikan, 'Magic and Visual Culture in Late Antiquity', in *Greek Magic: Ancient, Medieval and Modern*, ed. by J. C. B. Petropoulos (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 53-57 (p. 56). Spier, *Late Antique and Early Christian Gems*, pp. 81-86.



was hoped to happen to the curse's recipients.<sup>117</sup> Clay figurines were also made to harm individuals; they were pierced with needles and nails in the belief it would inflict pain on the person the figurine resembled.<sup>118</sup> Then there were amulets and phylacteries; these were charms that were hung from the neck or kept on a person, believing this would provide protective or beneficial power.<sup>119</sup> They could be made from many materials, for example, metals, furs, stones or vegetation. They had texts and images inscribed on them and they were usually rolled up into a cylinder shape. In Byzantine Middle Eastern provinces, bowls were inscribed with magical art and text and then placed under the threshold of a building. This was either to trap a demon in the bowl, or, alternatively, they were placed under an individual's threshold, who was thus cursed or had a love spell cast on them.<sup>120</sup> Lastly, magical power was sought through spells written on papyri, many of which had symbols and creatures depicted on them.<sup>121</sup>

Beliefs that did not seek to invoke demons, attempt to harm someone, take control over another person, or predict the future were not perceived as magic in Early Byzantine culture. There were some other beliefs that were considered as marginal magic: many superstitions fit into this category. What was called superstition (Greek: *θειασμός, δεισιδαιμονία*; Latin: *superstitio*) was perfectly permissible and at a legislative level, considered tolerable in the Early Byzantine period.<sup>122</sup> For example, the *Codex Theodosianus* claimed it was acceptable to perform rituals to protect crops against hail and rain, which was called neither magic nor superstition but instead 'divine gifts' (*divina munera*).<sup>123</sup> The Christian Abbot Shenoute complained of people who

<sup>117</sup> See John G. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 7-12.

<sup>118</sup> Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, pp. 15-18. Magali Bailliot, *Magie et sortilèges dans l'Antiquité romaine: archéologie des rituels et des images* (Paris: Hermann Éditeurs, 2010), pp. 104-111.

<sup>119</sup> Gustave Schlumberger, 'Amulettes byzantins anciens destinés à combattre les maléfices et maladies', *Revue des études grecques*, Vol. 5 (1892), 73-93. Gary Vikan, 'Art, Medicine, and Magic in Early Byzantium', *DOP*, Vol. 38 (1984), 65-86. Jacquelyn Tuerk, 'An Early Byzantine Inscribed Amulet and its Narratives', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* Vol. 23 (1999), 25-42. Also see, Jeffrey Spier, 'Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and their Tradition', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 56 (1993), 25-62. Michel, *Die magischen Gemmen im Britischen Museum*.

<sup>120</sup> Michael D. Swartz, 'Jewish Magic in Late Antiquity', in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, Vol. 4: *The Late Roman-Rabbanic Period*, ed. by Steven T. Katz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 699-720 (pp. 711-712). Charles D. Isbell, 'The Story of the Aramaic Magical Incantation Bowls', *The Biblical Archaeologist*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (1978), 5-16.

<sup>121</sup> Karl Preisendanz (ed.), *Papyri graecae magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri*, 2 vols (Stuttgart: Verlag B. G. Teubner, 1974). Hans Dieter Betz (ed.), *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation: Including the Demotic Spells*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>122</sup> Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 664 and p. 330. Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, p. 1809.

<sup>123</sup> *Codex Theodosianus*, 9.16.3; Mommsen *CT*, p. 460 and Pharr *CT*, p. 237.

thought it would help them if they wore snakes' heads on their wrists and fox claws around their ankles.<sup>124</sup> It was considered acceptable to believe that rituals had to be performed to prevent the Evil Eye from hurting someone, whether that meant washing children in polluted water or wearing appropriate paraphernalia in the form of amulets.<sup>125</sup> In these examples, none of the rituals or beliefs were considered to be magic; they were regarded as superstition. The Church Fathers had strong opinions about superstitions and they wanted to eradicate them. John Chrysostom (c. 347-407) complained of suspicious acts and beliefs when citizens wore amulets and bells for protection, describing it as foolish (ἄνοια) and as the work of demons.<sup>126</sup> The Church Fathers' perception was inherited from Roman culture, where *superstitio* was a pejorative term that designated a person was easily influenced by charlatans.<sup>127</sup> Despite religious opposition to superstition, it was not suppressed in Early Byzantium. It was not encouraged either, but alternative, non-organised beliefs such as superstition were practiced alongside religions. Thus the Byzantines had perceptions that beneficial and malevolent powers could be gained from an external world, and that legislation was put in place in order to harness these powers so that people could not gain acquire advantages at the expense of other citizens.

A theme that will recur in this thesis is the concept of luck and good fortune. This is a belief that beneficial advantages can be acquired and will affect a person's life in a way that they considered to be for the better. Luck crosses the boundaries between magic and superstition but the hope of attaining good luck did not seem to ever gain any negative connotations, as it could be believed in whatever a person's religious affiliation.

Whatever the relationship between magic and superstition, and however the Byzantines could distinguish religion and magic, it can be said that the Byzantines resorted to the magical and superstitious realms to acquire powers. Yet it also needs to

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<sup>124</sup> Shenoute, *Acephalous Work* A14; Tito Orlandi (ed.), *Shenute: Contra Origenistas* (Rome: C.I.M., 1985), 18-21.

<sup>125</sup> Matthew W. Dickie, 'The Fathers of the Church and the Evil Eye', in *Byzantine Magic*, ed. by Henry Maguire (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1995), 9-34 (pp. 9-12).

<sup>126</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilia XII*, 13; John Chrysostom, *The Homilies of S. John Chrysostom on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, trans. by Hubert Kestell Corinst et al., Vol. 1 (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1839), p. 164.

<sup>127</sup> Samuel Dill, *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius* (London: Macmillan, 1904), 443-483.

be pointed out that many Christian beliefs in the potency of objects and images have links to magic and superstition. Christian faith in the potency of martyrs' relics can be compared to the activity of magicians who for centuries before the birth of Jesus collected the bones of those that had died violent deaths for use in spells. The Christian belief that saints could be contacted through icons is not much different to the pagan perception that the gods could be contacted through sculptures. Possessing a cross for protective purposes was not too different to possessing a gemstone with the words 'Protect me' on them. Engaging in a ritual to protect crops was not unlike Christian ceremonies that blessed crops. What the above suggests is, as has been suggested already, that Christian society was still developing rules about additional beliefs, and it perhaps reflects a society that was not quite ready to let go of traditional and alternative beliefs.

#### *Unclear power*

The Byzantines also believed that powers could be acquired from sources where the power is unclear. We, as modern readers, might understand this as being pagan or magical, but a closer examination shows this was a belief in a broader, unidentifiable source. It was not known exactly where those powers came from or what this source was, but I will define them as powers coming from a supernatural realm. It is possible to interpret the statue of Justinian I on horseback in Constantinople as having this power. Writing in the sixth century, Prokopios (*d. c.* 600) described how that statue was placed in the Augustaion, a public square, as a protective force over the city.<sup>128</sup> The statue faced east, in the direction of the opposing Sasanian Empire. Though Prokopios stated that the statue honoured God, its protective powers were not described as coming from God. The power in the image seems to lie within the emperor himself. Because portrayals of emperors on horseback reinforced positive messages relating to dynasty, military prowess and authority, it could be argued the Byzantines considered it as possessing the same attributes as the physical emperor.<sup>129</sup> The statue became a substitute for the actual emperor: it maintained his presence over the city. In this sense, the statue might be seen as the second form of Frazer's sympathetic magic, as working

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<sup>128</sup> Prokopios of Caesarea, *Περὶ κτισμάτων* (*De aedificiis*), 1, 2, 1; Prokopios, *Buildings*, Vol. 7, ed. by H. B. Dewing, Loeb (London: William Heinemann, 1961), pp. 32-36.

<sup>129</sup> For military leaders on horseback see Dale Kinney, 'The Horse, the King and the Cuckoo: Medieval Narrations of the Statue of Marcus Aurelius', *Word & Image*, Vol. 18 (2004), 372-398.

through ‘contagion’, whereby objects carry the essence of their owners. It is possible to see the statue as providing protection against the East. This power was neither demonic nor Christian: this was a belief in another, alternative power that might be called supernatural. Such a tale could have been part of Prokopios’ classical writing style and it may have been intended as a rhetorical device. Yet it does nevertheless suggest a common perception that images and objects could bring about protection or good fortune. What is more significant is that this power was unclear; whatever it was, it was believed that by some supernatural means, the statue brought protective powers.

The *Chronicon Paschale* provided another instance of powers coming from an unclear source. The *Chronicon* is a Christian text which gave a Christian interpretation of the world. But it suggested that one sculpture’s power came from a vague supernatural realm. It provides a tale of the construction of Constantinople, where a wooden statue of the goddess Athena, known as the Palladion, was brought from Rome to Constantinople and erected beneath the Column of Constantine.<sup>130</sup> The statue was historically regarded as a divine, guardian statue that protected whatever city happened to be in possession of it. A myth grew surrounding the statue’s origins and it was believed to have come from ancient Troy, where it fell from the heavens to safeguard the city, before it was brought to Rome and installed in the Temple of Vesta.<sup>131</sup> Based on the object’s history, it can be argued that it was removed to Constantinople to fulfil the same function as it had done in Rome: safeguarding and benefitting the city through the statue’s supernatural power. Despite the text’s pro-Christian agenda, at no point is there a suggestion that the Palladion’s power was Christian or even belonged to Athena; it was understood that because it worked in Rome’s favour, it would work for Constantinople too. Whatever this power was, it was a belief that the power of the statue could be transferred to the city through a supernatural dimension.

A further example, though dating from a later part of the empire, attests to Byzantine beliefs in a source of power that is unclear. Michael Italikos (*d. c.* 1157) stated that the masses cherished coins that had images of past Byzantine emperors on

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<sup>130</sup> *Chronicon Paschale* 328, 11-13; *PG* 92, 709.

<sup>131</sup> Sarah Bassett, *The Urban Image of Late Antique Constantinople* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 205-206. Jerome Jordan Pollitt, *The Art of Rome c. 753 B.C.-337 A.D.: Sources and Documents* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 197, ft. 113.

them, believing they could provide protective powers. Italikos was careful not to call the power magic or religious:

“You will not only have this piece [the coin] as a phylactery against the ill effects of nature, in that it bears the imprint of the victory-bringing cross, but there is an ineffable power peculiar to this object, which is not contrived from some magical art, such as the Chaldeans and the Assyrian theurgists often perform, but [it comes] from some divine power that has perhaps been injected into it by the instruments of the metalworkers.”<sup>132</sup>

Italikos perceived the power in the coins as not just coming from the images on them, but the material itself could provide power. He described how the metalworkers injected a supernatural power into the coins through other methods.

A belief in unclear supernatural sources was not unique to the Byzantines, as it can be found in many cultures, including modern ones. Crossing the middle and index finger to attain good luck, touching something wooden to prevent misfortune, avoiding anything associated with the number thirteen or believing in fate all reflect a belief in supernatural power.<sup>133</sup> The unclear powers and the concept of superstition share a lot in common and might be seen as similar, as in both cases it is not known from where these powers come. They are not a belief in religion or a cult; they are a belief that invisible forces and essences can affect the terrestrial realm and those that inhabit it. Though these powers can be gained from a supernatural realm, believers usually cannot be more specific than that. They cannot tell whether the force behind it is a deity, a spirit or the universe itself. The unclear and non-definable aspect is important because it marks this power source as distinct from Christian, pagan and demonic powers.

However the terms discussed above are labelled, it can be said that the Byzantines believed in different forms of the supernatural. What is especially significant for this thesis is that objects had a vital role in aiding many of these beliefs. Instead of getting too caught up in defining labels, it needs to be recognised that the

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<sup>132</sup> “Ἐξεις δὲ τοῦτο οὐ μόνον φυλακτήριον τῆς ἀποτραπείου φύσεως, ὡς καὶ τὸ τροπαιοφόρον ὄπλον τὸν σταυρὸν ἐντετυπωμένον ἔχον, ἀλλὰ γὰρ ἔστι τις ἀπόρρητος δύναμις ἰδιάζουσα τῷ χρήματι τούτῳ, οὐκ ἀπὸ τινος τέχνης μαγικῆς περιειργασμένη, οἷα πολλὰ Χαλδαῖοι τελοῦσι καὶ τῶν Ἀσσυρίων οἱ θεουργοί, ἀλλ’ ἐκ τινος δυνάμεως θείας ἐξ αὐτῶν τῶν χαλκοτύπων ὄργανον ἴσως ἐμβεβλημένης, τοὺς φοροῦντας ἐξάντεις ποιοῦσα τοῖς νοσήμασι. Michael Italikos, 33 (To the Aktouarios); Michael Italikos, *Michel Italikos, lettres et discours*, trans. by Paul Gautier (Paris: Institut français d’études byzantines, 1972), pp. 208-210.

<sup>133</sup> Hutson, *The 7 Laws of Magical Thinking*, pp. 1-2.

Byzantines' perception of the supernatural realm was multifaceted, where many labels might overlap with each other. For one person the bones of a deceased martyr were holy and an aid for veneration, for another it was idolatry, for another it was magical. This was a society where the boundaries between magic, superstition and religion were very blurred. It was a diverse period with many forms of belief, whether Christian, magical, pagan, superstition or an unclear one. Many of these labels overlapped with each other: a person might adhere to a religion, but might participate in alternative beliefs at the same time. The distinction between each of the above labels was not clear to the Byzantines, and this factor may have caused some of the tensions that led to periods of iconoclasm in the eighth and ninth centuries. Early Byzantine culture was one that perceived there to be many sources of power that could be appealed to and which could be acquired. This challenges Cormack and Eastmond's view of Early Byzantium as a Christian empire and one which produced religious art: Early Byzantium was more diverse than that.

## AN OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

Having discussed the nature of imagery and the sources of powers in Early Byzantium, an understanding of which is fundamental to my argument, I will now outline what my thesis entails. If Early Byzantium had a culture that believed powers could be attained from supernatural realms through the use of objects and images, in this thesis I will demonstrate that another form of media, floor mosaics, depicted images and words in the same way.

The thesis has four chapters. Each chapter will discuss a different type of decoration that was depicted on floor mosaics. I will argue it is possible to interpret certain symbols, creatures, personifications and inscriptions as having had supernatural functions. I have presented the material in this way because by dividing the decoration into categories, we can better understand what it was about each category that was perceived to be significant to the Byzantines. This, in turn, will help tell us more about Byzantine culture.

My first chapter will discuss the use of symbols in floor mosaics. It will provide four case studies, with each one detailing how symbols could be depicted to attract supernatural powers. I begin with a mosaic at Adeitha, which had a wealth of symbols

depicted on it. I provide an analysis of a selection of the symbols on show, such as Solomon's knot, the cross and vegetation, and discuss how each one can be seen as an attempt to attract what was deemed to be in the symbol or what it stood for. I then provide an examination of a mosaic from Antioch to argue the significance of symbols, and other imagery, when they are depicted in a mosaic on a threshold, just in front of a door. My next case study comes from Beit Mery, where I examine how the mosaic in a church was probably designed to attract the powers of the symbols. I will explain how and why the swastika, the eight-rayed sign and concentric circles can be seen in supernatural terms. In the last part of the chapter, with an example at Zahrani, I will discuss how symbols could be repeated more than once in the same mosaic to increase the potency of a mosaic.

Chapter Two will show how images of creatures were depicted in floor mosaics for supernatural purposes. I will show through an examination of other supernatural objects how the Byzantines perceived creatures to have many associations, and how it was considered possible to attract something that was associated with a creature through an image. I begin with an example of how a mythological bird was depicted at Antioch to attract associations of renewal and immortality. I then argue that, when shown in a certain way, a terrestrial bird was depicted in floor mosaics to attract the same associations. An example from Antigoneia is then discussed where I show that a creature that is normally depicted in other supernatural media, such as magical gemstones and papyri spells, was portrayed on a floor mosaic for the same supernatural function. In the last part of the chapter I explain the significance of horses and chariot scenes, and how they can be seen in supernatural terms.

From the depiction of creatures, I then turn to the images of personifications. I will explain why this form of imagery was used over other forms of human iconography in floor mosaics, and how personifications can be seen in terms of sympathetic magic. An example from Kourion is discussed and it shows the supernatural significance of why personifications were depicted by themselves within a framed space. I then present a series of case studies from Antioch, Sepphoris, Narlidja and Kos that explain why the representation of personifications on floor mosaics can be seen as an attempt to attract what was represented.

My last chapter, Chapter Four, discusses how inscriptions were another means that could be depicted to attract powers. I give examples from Kourion, Skala, Tell Basul and Memphis, among others, to show that the written word could be used to attract protective and beneficial powers. I explain how inscriptions sought to attract powers throughout the Early Byzantine Empire, and how and why the content and the tone of fourth century inscriptions differ from those in the seventh. I compare the inscriptions on floor mosaics with those on gemstones, papyri spells and lintels to demonstrate that mosaic inscriptions were incorporated into an overall design for similar supernatural functions.

Throughout my thesis I define what these powers were and show the relationships between Christian power, supernatural power and magical powers. I ask what this can tell us about Early Byzantine culture. In addition, a recurrent theme to my study is that powers were perceived to be in images and texts: art, objects and monuments could have been designed to have, or to have gained over time, supernatural associations. Some aspects of each chapter provide a means by which scholars might go about identifying whether a mosaic had supernatural power.

What this thesis does therefore is to place the topic in a more cultural context. Having already distinguished between the different kinds of powers that were prevalent in society earlier in the introduction, I will examine the different types of imagery that could be depicted in floor mosaics to attract powers. By doing this we can understand what kinds of powers were sought, for what purposes words and images were depicted and ask why supernatural power was needed in the buildings the mosaics were placed in. I ask and answer the questions I put forward earlier in the introduction, establishing the significance of what floor mosaics were for, what a supernatural function tells us about Early Byzantine culture, the types of depictions that were used for this matter, and explaining what the beliefs were.



## CHAPTER ONE

### THE POWER OF SYMBOLS

In this thesis I will discuss four different types of images that were depicted on floor mosaics to attract supernatural powers: symbols; creatures; personifications; and inscriptions. These categories are staple features of Byzantine floor mosaics in all provinces and regions.<sup>134</sup> Though I present each of these four categories individually, they might be utilised at the same time within the same mosaic design. It is rare that a mosaic only featured one category in its entire design. However, though I acknowledge that these categories can be understood as being used alongside each other, I have decided to present them separately in order to discuss what it was about these four elements that were perceived to provide supernatural powers and what these different elements can tell us about Byzantine culture. Even though I discuss these categories individually, it will be seen throughout this study that mosaics incorporated the other categories at the same time, and they will be discussed alongside the topic of the chapter. I have divided the thesis into these categories because it was the best way to provide a readable narrative and it was the strongest theme that occurred: the narrative I have chosen is to divide this by the types of things that were depicted in the floor mosaics.

This chapter will discuss how symbols were depicted on floor mosaics in order to harness the perceived supernatural powers in certain symbols. The word ‘symbol’ can mean many things in modern culture. My definition of a ‘symbol’ comes from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, in which a ‘symbol’ refers to a shape or a sign, and is considered a simplified way of representing something. Some literature, especially in studies of semiotics, differentiates between a ‘sign’ and a ‘symbol’ and see them as separate things.<sup>135</sup> Other literature regards symbols in more a textual context, where a symbol was not necessarily a visual device, but a textual, metaphorical one.<sup>136</sup> This literature often overlooks a simple fact: symbols are visual devices that can sometimes

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<sup>134</sup> See the individual chapters of the Roman Empire’s regions in Dunbabin, *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World*.

<sup>135</sup> Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, trans. by Janet Lloyd (Brighton: Harvester, 1980), p. 217.

<sup>136</sup> See George Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 7-8. For semiotics, see Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967).

stand for certain meanings. With that in mind, when I refer to symbol I mean a visual device that may or may not stand for something else. My approach to the study of symbols in floor mosaics is essentially an iconographic one. I will demonstrate that certain symbols had supernatural associations and the use of them in floor mosaics was seen as a way of acquiring those associations. Within my database, I regarded twenty-six out of the seventy-six entries as having images of symbols for supernatural purposes. In this chapter I will examine mosaics from Adeitha, Beit Mery, Antioch and Zahrani, all of which are in the Levant in the Middle East, which was an area of the Byzantine Empire until the rise of Islam in the seventh century (map 2). These mosaics have been chosen as they are good examples of mosaics with a wealth of symbols on their surfaces.

#### A SET OF SYMBOLS AT ADEITHA

My first case study comes from a church in a village the Byzantines called Adeitha, now Khirbat al-Samra in Jordan (fig. 1, cat. 75). The church takes the form of a three-aisled basilica and it was dedicated to St George.<sup>137</sup> Mosaics decorate the nave, the aisles and the apse of the church (fig. 2). An inscription in the centre of the mosaic's nave informs us that the mosaic was laid in 637, while an additional inscription before the chancery area near the apse states that an individual called Kasiseos was a patron for either the mosaic or the building.<sup>138</sup> The mosaics in the aisles are decorated with a simple grid consisting of a trellis with squares set at an angle; in the centre of each square is a crosslet. The same pattern is repeated in the eastern part of the apse; the remaining area contains two Solomon's knots and more crosslets. My focus will be on the nave as it is possible to show that the symbols in the nave can be seen in supernatural terms.

The nave of the church is enclosed by a reverse-turned swastika-meander border and alternating squares. The central part of the nave consists of a grid that is filled with quadrilobes, shapes that look like a square with semi-circles on each edge. Within each shape is a motif. The subdivision of space in the mosaic's grid creates spaces for symbols, which are separated from one another which emphasises the noticeability of each symbol. The original design had four larger quadrilobes that Michele Piccirillo

<sup>137</sup> Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan*, p. 306.

<sup>138</sup> Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan*, p. 306.

argued contained portraits of the church or mosaic's donors.<sup>139</sup> In the centre of the nave is a medallion, within which is a Greek inscription naming an individual called Kasiseos, a deacon, as the donor of the mosaic.<sup>140</sup> The rest of the quadrilobes in the nave are filled with symbols (Solomon's knots, interlace patterns, crosses, vegetation, fruit and vases), and I will argue they were used in order to gain supernatural power.

The cross is shown twice in the lower half of the nave. These are both in the form of Greek crosses, the four arms being of equal length. However, the ends of Adeitha's crosses have elongated, curved ends which makes them appear more like a *cross pattée*. The cross was not just a potent symbol to the Byzantines; it was considered one of the most powerful images in their repertoire. This symbol represented the object that Jesus of Nazareth died upon. It became a symbol of Jesus' suffering, a symbol of Christianity and of Christians in a broader sense.<sup>141</sup> The cross came to be viewed as having powers through its association with what it represented. It was believed that an image of two lines that crossed over each other was potent and provided powers to someone who possessed it or if a building were inscribed with that symbol.<sup>142</sup>

The inclusion of this cross at Adeitha can be regarded as an attempt to attract the powers that was believed to be manifest in that symbol. There are many Early Byzantine authors who stated the cross was capable of 'doing' certain things. Paul the Silentiary (*d. c. 575/580*) described the cross in the dome of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople as protecting both the church and the entire city.<sup>143</sup> In addition, Theodore of Sykeon (*d. 613*) wrote that crosses could protect against demons if they were carved in areas where demons lurk.<sup>144</sup> John Chrysostom (*c. 347-407*)

<sup>139</sup> Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan*, p. 306.

<sup>140</sup> + ΕΚ ΠΡΟΣ ΦΟΡΑΣ / ΤΟΥ ΔΙΔΟΥ ΤΑΩ ΘΥ ΔΕΝ / ΤΙC ΗCΤΙΝ ΕΛΕΙC ΟΝ / ΑΥ ΤΟΥ ΗΠΙ ΘΕΩΔΩΡΟΥ / ΑΡΧΗ ΗΠΙC ΚΟΠΟΥ ΕΨΗ / ΨΟΘ ΤΟΥ ΑΓΙΟΥ ΓΕΩΡΓΙΟΥC ΠΟΥ / ΔΙC ΚΑCΙCΕΟΥ Δ / ΠΑΡΑΜΟΝΑ-/ ΠΙΟΥ.

<sup>141</sup> Robin M. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 137.

<sup>142</sup> Dauterman Maguire et al., *Art and Holy Powers*, pp. 19-20. Christopher Walter, 'IC XC NI KA. The Apotropaic Function of the Victorious Cross', *Revue des études byzantines*, Vol. 55 (1997), 193-220.

<sup>143</sup> Paul the Silentiary, *Εκφρασεις ναου της Αγίας Σοφίας* (*Descriptio ecclesiae Sanctae Sophiae*), 489; *PG 86b*, 2138B.

<sup>144</sup> Βίος του οσίου Πατρος ημών Θεοδώρου αρχιμανδριτου Συκεων, συγγραφεις παρα Γεωργιου μαθητου αυτου πρεσβυτερου και ηγουμενου της αυτης μονης (*Life of Theodore of Sykeon*), 43.35, 45.21-22, 53.5, 114.41, 144.4, 155.15-16; André-Jean Festugière (ed.), *Vie de Théodore de Sykeon* (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1970), pp. 38-39, 41, 46, 90-91, 113, 126.

recommended using crosses at entrances, describing them as the sign of safety in the battle against demons.<sup>145</sup> Other texts from Christian writers shared the same view.<sup>146</sup> Therefore, one interpretation of crosses in Early Byzantium was that they were believed to provide protective powers. These associations may derive from a tale when Eusebios of Ceasarea stated that before Constantine's battle with his rival Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge in 312, Constantine looked up to the sun where he saw a cross of light and the words "In this sign you shall conquer".<sup>147</sup> Constantine subsequently ordered his army to adorn their shields with the sign for protection and victory. A belief in the power of a visual cross went hand in hand with other beliefs in the cross, as a person making the sign of the cross over their body was regarded as providing protective powers too.<sup>148</sup>

Beliefs in the cross were so strong that some Christians considered them excessive. St Jerome (347-420) felt some beliefs in the cross were suspicious. He complained of 'superstitious little women' who believed they could acquire advantages in life by wearing relics of the true cross in addition to various other depictions of crosses.<sup>149</sup> Christians' beliefs in the power of the cross were amusing to non-Christians. The fourth-century pagan emperor Julian (r. 361-363) said Christians can be characterised as either whistling to keep demons away or as constantly crossing themselves.<sup>150</sup> Even though today we consider the cross to be a Christian symbol, non-Christian citizens also regarded the symbol as efficacious and so might desire an object with that symbol on it too.<sup>151</sup> Understood in this way, to these people it did not matter where the power came from and whether owning such an object made them a 'Christian'; the cross was seen as powerful and they used it like an amulet to attract powers, whatever their spiritual allegiance. It is these aspects that have led some

<sup>145</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homiliarum in Matthaeum*, Homilia 54, 4; PG 58, 536-537.

<sup>146</sup> For example, Tertullian, *De corona militis*, 3, 3; PL 2, 78-80. Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem libri quinque*, 3, 22; PL 2, 352-353. John Chrysostom suggests the cross is sought in all places, *Contra Iudaeos et Gentiles quod Christus sit Deus, liber unus*, 9; PG 48, 826. In addition, lintels were inscribed with messages that attest to the cross having powers such as "Where the cross is set in front, Envy has no power". See Josef Engemann, 'Zur Verbreitung Magischer Übelabwehr in der Nichtchristlichen und Christlichen Spätantike', *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, Vol. 18 (1975), 22-48.

<sup>147</sup> Ἐν τούτῳ Νικᾷ. Eusebios of Caesarea, *Εἰς τὸν βίον τοῦ μακαρίου Κωνσταντίνου τοῦ Βασιλέως* (*De vita beatissimi imperatoris Constantini*), 1, 28-29; PG 20, 932-933.

<sup>148</sup> Dauterman Maguire et al., *Art and Holy Powers*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>149</sup> Jerome, *Commentarius in Evangelium secundum Matthaeum*, XXIII, 6; PL 26, 174-175.

<sup>150</sup> Julian, *Epistula* 19; Julian, *The Works of the Emperor Julian*, trans. by Wilmer Cave Wright, Vol. 3, Loeb (London: William Heinemann, 1923), p. 52.

<sup>151</sup> Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets*, p. 225.

scholars such as Ernst Kitzinger to refer to the power in crosses as having magical efficacy.<sup>152</sup> However, this would be a misuse of the word magic. What Kitzinger, and others, mean is that Byzantine contemporaries believed the cross could attract beneficial and protective powers.

It is possible to see further evidence of the power of the cross through an examination of other objects. Figure 3 shows the head of a second-century sculpture that probably portrays the pagan goddess Aphrodite. At some point in Byzantine history, a cross was inscribed on the forehead of the sculpture. The cross on Aphrodite's forehead is not the only example of a classical pagan sculpture that has added carving. A sculpture of the goddess Hera had crosses added to it on the forehead, the eyelids and mouth, which Eunice Dauterman Maguire and Henry Maguire described as a Byzantine attempt to control the demon that resided within.<sup>153</sup> The reasons for the inclusion of the crosses are likely because classical pagan sculptures were regarded as being objects inhabited by demons.<sup>154</sup> As was stated earlier in the introduction, there is a Byzantine tale in which a group accompanied Bishop Porphyry in approaching a statue of Aphrodite in Gaza bearing crosses, whereupon the demon within the sculpture vanished at the sight and might of the Christian symbol.<sup>155</sup> Other texts allude to demons being inside statues. In the seventh or eighth-century text the *Parastaseis syntomoi chronikai*, the narrator of one story described how he and a friend went to an ancient theatre where they came upon a pagan statue, and whilst looking at it, it fell and killed the narrator's friend.<sup>156</sup> Returning to the crosses on classical sculptures, the Byzantines regarded the cross as such a potent symbol that it was considered capable of exorcising or 'neutralising' the demons inside statues. This did not go unnoticed by non-Christians, as the emperor Julian remarked that when Christians pass a pagan statue, they cross their heads to protect themselves.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Kitzinger, 'The Threshold of the Holy Shrine', p. 640.

<sup>153</sup> Dauterman Maguire and Maguire, *Other Icons*, p. 131.

<sup>154</sup> James, "Pray Not to Fall into Temptation", pp. 15-18.

<sup>155</sup> Mark the Deacon, *Βίος του αγίου Πορφυρίου, Επισκόπου Γαζης (Vita de S. Porphyrii)*, 59-61; Mark the Deacon, *Vie de Porphyre: Évêque de Gaza*, trans. by Henri Grégoire and M. A. Kugener (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1930), pp. 47-49.

<sup>156</sup> *Παραστάσεις σύντομοι χρονικά (Parastaseis syntomoi chronikai)*, 28; Averil Cameron and Judith Herrin (eds), *Constantinople in the Early Eighth Century: The Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1984), pp. 88-90.

<sup>157</sup> Julian, *Epistula* 19; Julian, *The Works of the Emperor Julian*, trans. by Wilmer Cave Wright, Vol. 3, Loeb (London: William Heinemann, 1923), p. 52.

Crosses were also put to use on larger monuments. At Kurşunlugerme in northwest Turkey, part of the Aqueduct of Thrace has multiple crosses and inscriptions. Some of these are on the lower half of the structure and are visible to the eye. There are also crosses on the upper part of the structure, which are not in eye range. Viewers at ground level cannot see the crosses on the upper half of the monument. James Crow argued that both sets of crosses were depicted in order to attract power for the monument.<sup>158</sup> He stated that the crosses on the lower half are positioned in architecturally vulnerable areas of the structure that need supporting, such as the buttresses and keystones. The crosses might be seen as providing extra support to the aqueduct and as protecting it against dangers. The inscriptions that accompany the crosses are protective in theme too, as can be seen in one example that reads “The cross has conquered. It always conquers”.<sup>159</sup> These inscriptions are visible and legible to literate viewers and this is important because the Byzantines had an oral-reading culture: when confronted with an inscription, the Byzantines would read it aloud rather than in their heads.<sup>160</sup> For the Byzantines, inscriptions were to be engaged and interacted with. In the process of reading the inscriptions aloud, the Byzantines were reinforcing the nature of the inscriptions, giving *more* power and blessings to the monument and allowed the inscription to physically resonate.

The crosses on the upper half of the Thracian aqueduct held a different power function. Because they were not visible to the human eye, they could not be interacted with. The higher-placed crosses were not depicted there for human eyes; they were positioned there for the supernatural world. They attract divine fortune and blessing for the monument.<sup>161</sup> They did not need to be interacted with; they were self-sufficient images. Crow’s argument for this was based on comparisons where inscriptions and crosses were combined to attract protective powers on bridges, in public squares, city walls and on fortifications. Through this, Crow shows how the crosses and inscriptions

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<sup>158</sup> James Crow, ‘The Christian Symbols and Iconography of the Aqueducts of Thrace’, in *The Water Supply of Byzantine Constantinople*, ed. by James Crow et al. (London: Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, 2008), 157-171.

<sup>159</sup> O CT[AY]POC EN[I]KHCEN AEI NIKA.

<sup>160</sup> Amy Papalexandrou, ‘Text in Context: Eloquent Monuments and the Byzantine Beholder’, *Word & Image*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (2001), 259-283 (pp. 261-264). Amy Papalexandrou, ‘Echoes of Orality in the Monumental Inscriptions of Byzantium’, in *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture*, ed. by Liz James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 161-187 (pp. 165-166).

<sup>161</sup> Crow, ‘The Christian Symbols’, pp. 163-164.

on the aqueduct can be interpreted as having the same supernatural – not magical – purposes.

If images of crosses were depicted to attract powers in other objects and monuments, it is very likely that they had a similar function in attracting powers when depicted on floor mosaics. The crosses on Adeitha's floor can be seen as an attempt to attract supernatural powers. They were positioned in the lower part of the nave to attract protection. The nave is where the congregation gathered to attend services.<sup>162</sup> The crosses at Adeitha might be seen as protecting those that gathered in that part of the church, and were possibly visible to those who walked over the church's floor. Churches used words and images to attract powers. Churches were considered sanctified spaces, so it was important to maintain their purity and safety against demons, who were feared capable of entering them and defiling those holy spaces. Crosses, and other visual devices, were one way of combatting their presence.

Crosses were also depicted on the floor mosaic at the Martyrium of Babylas outside Antioch.<sup>163</sup> Perhaps deliberately, the building takes the shape of a cross too. Just before the central area, where Babylas' bones were kept, are a series of simple black crosses (fig. 4, cat.16). One argument that has been put forward is that the crosses were positioned there in order to keep demons away from Babylas' remains, since demons were said to be drawn to un-cremated figures that had died violent deaths, such as martyrs like Babylas.<sup>164</sup> Thus, it can be said that crosses were depicted for their protective powers, and by having that symbol on a floor was a means of acquiring the power in the cross for a building and its inhabitants, much in the same way that relics were perceived as providing protection for buildings and cities. The position of the crosses at the martyrion at Antioch was very significant in keeping demons at bay: they were depicted to form a protective 'barrier' or 'fence' preventing demons from approaching Babylas' remains. The crosses at Adeitha could be seen as having just as important a role in providing protective power where the congregation gathered.

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<sup>162</sup> Thomas F. Mathews, *The Early Churches of Constantinople: Architecture and Liturgy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1971), pp. 117-125.

<sup>163</sup> Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*, Vol. 1, pp. 283-285.

<sup>164</sup> Kitzinger, 'The Threshold of the Holy Shrine', pp. 640-641. For demons being attracted to dead figures see Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, pp. 18-20.

Another symbol that is depicted on Adeitha's floor is the Solomon's knot. The naming of it is misleading because it has no links to Solomon: this is the name that nineteenth-century academics ascribed to it. Furthermore, strictly speaking, the design is not really a 'knot': it consists of two links that loop under and over each other (fig. 5). But by looking to the design of the symbol, it can be seen why scholars called it a knot. The two links create the illusion that it is never-ending and is somehow joined and tied. The never-ending aspect was an important factor in depictions of the *ouroboros*, a serpent that is depicted in gemstones as trying to eat its own tail, thereby forming a never-ending circle.<sup>165</sup>

There are six Solomon's knots in the nave of Adeitha's floor mosaic and two in the apse. Three of them are depicted in a sequence, along a row in the lower nave, while the other three are portrayed irregularly in the upper part of the nave. It is a symbol that probably had supernatural associations. As will be shown, in the Greco-Roman world, knots and intricate designs were perceived to provide powers. There are magic spells that specify knots as a central part of a ritual. For example, to place a curse on someone, a knot had to be tied. To be released from a curse, a knot had to be ritually untied.<sup>166</sup>

In some ancient languages there are links between knots and the supernatural world. In Greek, Latin and Hebrew-speaking cultures, the word for 'knot' (Greek: κατάδεσμος; Latin: *ligare*; Hebrew: כּוּם) meant both literally to tie something together and to bind someone by a spell.<sup>167</sup> Love spells also required the use of knots so as to bind two people together.<sup>168</sup> For example, a Roman love spell specifies that 365 knots must be used to tie a lead sheet to a wax or clay figurine of the person desired.<sup>169</sup> Furthermore, the user of a spell that sought to find a thief is instructed that a knot was a means of verifying whether someone was a thief or not: if they spoke whilst tying the knot they were, indeed, the culprit.<sup>170</sup>

<sup>165</sup> For the *ouroboros* see Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets*, p. 20, 250. The *ouroboros* is not only depicted on gemstones, but it is also explicitly referred to in spells. See *PGM*, VII. 579-90; Preisendanz, Vol. 2, p. 26 and Betz, p. 134.

<sup>166</sup> Cyprus Lawrence Day, *Quipus and Witches' Knots: the Role of the Knot in Primitive and Ancient Cultures* (Lawrence: The University of Kansas Press, 1967), pp. 42-43.

<sup>167</sup> Erich Dinkler, 'Der Salomonische Knoten in der Nubischen Kunst und die Geschichte des Motivs', *Études Nubiennes*, Vol. 77 (1978), 73-86 (p. 86).

<sup>168</sup> Day, *Quipus and Witches' Knots*, p. 74.

<sup>169</sup> The Great Magical Papyrus in Paris (*PGM* 1:83-87); Luck, *Arcana Mundi*, pp. 92-93.

<sup>170</sup> *PDM*, lxi. 79-94; Betz, p. 288.



Solomon's knot and knots in general likely gained their supposed powers through associations to the Herakles knot (Ἡρακλεωτικόν ἄμμα or Ἡρακλειος δεσμός in Greek), which is referred to as a reef knot today.<sup>171</sup> The Herakles knot can be said to have supernatural powers with some certainty. It refers to the paws of Herakles' lion skin that was tied around his neck. The logic was if someone were to wear his knot, then Herakles' powers could be acquired by the wearer. There is literary evidence to show that this version of the knot held beneficial properties in Roman culture. The grammarian Sextus Pompeius Festus (second century AD) described his bride's marriage belt as fastened with the knot because it was a good omen to do so and he believed the knot would allow him to be as fortunate in producing as many children as Herakles (who left seventy children).<sup>172</sup> Further beneficial associations of this knot can be seen when doctors tied the bandages of the injured in the Heraklean fashion as it was believed to heal someone's injury quicker.<sup>173</sup> Dauterman Maguire and Maguire argued that in addition to beneficial associations, the design might also have protective powers. They suggested the use of the design on soldiers' armour indicates that it was protecting the soldiers, presumably because of Herakles' powerful and combative associations in battle.<sup>174</sup>

Herakles' knot was regarded as a potent symbol, as can be seen when that symbol was depicted on Christian objects. A fragment of a Christian gravestone in the Coptic Museum in Cairo is depicted with the *alpha* and *omega*, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, which are used either side of a cross (fig. 6). The gravestone also shows a staurogram, which combines the Greek letters *tau* and *rho* on a cross. The Herakles knot is in the centre of the fragment, and to the right-hand side is a Greek inscription reading EIC Θ[EOC] "One God". This was a phrase that Christians began to use and it became a power inscription itself, as it can be found on magical gemstones.<sup>175</sup> It is possible to interpret the gravestone as demonstrating how

<sup>171</sup> Day, *Quipus and Witches' Knots*, pp. 53-54.

<sup>172</sup> Sextus Pompeius Festus, 'Cingillo' in *De significatione verborum*, 63, 13-18; Sextus Pompeius Festus, *De verborum significantu quae supersunt cum Pauli epitome*, trans. by Wallace M. Lindsay (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1965), p. 55.

<sup>173</sup> Ioli Kalavrezou-Maxeiner, 'The Byzantine Knotted Column', in *Byzantine Studies in Honor of Milton V. Anastos*, ed. by Speros Vryonis Jr. (Malibu: Undena, 1985), 95-103 (pp. 95-96).

<sup>174</sup> Dauterman Maguire et al., *Art and Holy Powers*, p. 3.

<sup>175</sup> Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets*, pp. 174-175. Spier, *Late Antique and Early Christian Gems*, p. 85.

Christians might seek the powers of the Herakles knot, despite its pagan connotations and presumably the power deriving from a belief in the potency of Herakles. It is an example either of a society that is not as 'Christian' as is usually thought, or where pagan traditions are still strong, or one that is still 'hedging its bets'.<sup>176</sup>

However, to say the Herakles knot was a motif that was common in Byzantine art would be misleading. It was not used regularly. It can occasionally be found on Early Byzantine floor mosaics, such as the mosaic at Maroneia, just north of Alexandroupolis in Greece (fig. 7, cat. 41).<sup>177</sup> When the Herakles knot is depicted in floor mosaics, it was usually used as a framing device and it was not a feature signalled out in isolation or for special attention.

Because of the decreasing use of the Herakles knot in Byzantium, it has been argued by Ulrike Zischka, for one, that the Solomon's knot was regarded as an updated version of the Herakles one.<sup>178</sup> It contained the same supernatural connotations but in a new design and without overt pagan connotations. I would agree with Zischka. Her conceptual approach suggests that the use of knot designs to attain power continued into the Early Byzantine period and this was expressed through the Solomon's knot design, which was an alternative to the Herakles version. This argument can be illustrated by a mosaic at a church near the city of Livias (Shunah al-Janubiyah) in Jordan (fig. 8, cat. 60). The mosaic in the lower part of the nave of the church is decorated with a repetitive, geometric design of lozenges, squares and parallelograms. Set against this, in the centre, is an octagon shape that is filled with a symbol consisting of four Solomon's knots that are linked together, forming a double Solomon knot. Around the knot is a Greek inscription that when translated reads "God is with us".<sup>179</sup> The symbol is depicted on its own, isolated within an octagon frame and it stands out against a repetitive, abstract design. It is possible to interpret the symbol and inscription as being depicted for a set purpose and presumably was meant to be noticed by church-goers, or by the eyes of the supernatural realm. Whatever the intent of the panel, the knot was clearly

<sup>176</sup> Dauterman Maguire et al., *Art and Holy Powers*, p. 4.

<sup>177</sup> Marie Spiro, *Critical Corpus of the Mosaic Pavements on the Greek Mainland, Fourth/Sixth Centuries, with Architectural Surveys* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1978), no. 227, pp. 643-646.

<sup>178</sup> Ulrike Zischka, *Zur Sakralen und Profanen Anwendung des Knotenmotivs als Magischer Mittel, Symbol oder Dekor* (Munich: Tuduv, 1977), pp. 41-48.

<sup>179</sup> + ΜΕΘ ΗΜΩΝ Ω Θ[Ε]Ο[C]. Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan*, p. 322.

significant enough to associate it with God. Reading the symbol and the inscription together, the panel could signify God was inseparable from the people in the village: He was inextricably linked to them in an unbreakable bond, and the village was linked to Him.

As well as attracting powers through associations with knots, a single Solomon's knot may have been perceived as having associations with a Greek cross because of the design's four arms and equilateral nature. If the design was placed in a church, as it is at Adeitha, it is plausible that the resemblance to the cross would not be lost on churchgoers. James Trilling and John Mitchell both noted this similarity and argued that the Solomon's knot combined both the power of the cross and the knot at the same time. Understood in this way, they see the design as a disguised cross: Solomon's knot was a way of representing a cross without actually having to depict a cross.<sup>180</sup> It might be wondered why the Byzantines would want to disguise the use of a cross when, as has been shown, they were used in floor mosaics in any case. But a law passed in 427 during the reign of Theodosios II (r. 408-450), stated crosses could not be depicted on the floor.

Since it is our diligent concern to observe by all means the religion of the highest God, we decree specifically that no one shall be permitted to carve or to paint the sign of Christ the Saviour upon the floor or pavement or on marble slabs placed on the ground; nay, any such that are found shall be removed, and whoever attempts to contravene our statute shall be punished by the gravest penalty.<sup>181</sup>

The edict does not say why crosses were not permitted, although a later edict from 692 suggests it was disrespectful to walk over such a potent image.<sup>182</sup> As can be seen in some of the examples provided earlier, this edict was not always followed. Yet the significance of this edict for the discussion of the Solomon's knot is that the knot could

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<sup>180</sup> James Trilling, 'Medieval Interlace Ornament: the Making of a Cross-Cultural Idiom', *Arte Medievale*, Vol. 9 (1995), 59-86 (p. 70-76). Mitchell, 'Keeping the Demons out of the House', p. 283.

<sup>181</sup> Although enforced under the reign of Theodosios II, the legislation was not written in the *Codex Theodosianus*; instead it appears in the *Codex Iustinianus*. Cum sit nobis cura diligens per omnia superni numinis religionem tueri, signum salvatoris Christi nemini licere vel in solo vel in silice vel in marmoribus humi positum insculpere vel pingere, sed quodcumque reperitur tolli: gravissima poena multando eo, si quis contrarium statutis nostris temptaverit, specialiter imperamus, 1, 8; *Codex Iustinianus*, ed. by Paulus Krueger (Berlin: Apud Weidmannos, 1963), p. 61. Trans. by Cyril Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453: Sources and Documents* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), p. 36.

<sup>182</sup> *Concilium Trullanum 692*, canon 73; Giuseppe Alberigo et al. (eds), *Conciliorum oecumenicorum generaliumque decreta*, Vol. 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), p. 276-277.

be one among many other symbols that were depicted to attract supernatural powers because the cross had been outlawed. Since the Solomon's knot loosely resembles a cross, it could have been regarded as a substitute for it, and in the process still provide supernatural powers. At Adeitha, both the Solomon's knot and the cross are portrayed in their own right, which could be taken as providing the power in both symbols to the church.

Further evidence that the Solomon's knot was a symbol to attract powers can be illustrated through an examination of the contexts of other mosaics. Solomon's knots might have had a supernatural function in the original structure of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. The church was built to commemorate the spot where Jesus was believed to be born. Stairs in the sanctuary led down to a grotto. There were two mosaic panels that formed the lowest steps that led from the nave to the sanctuary. One of the panels (fig. 9, cat. 29) has at least two Solomon's knots in the corner along with a Greek inscription reading IXΘYC ("fish"), which was a common acronym for the letters that stood for "Jesus Christ, God's son, Saviour". Five more Solomon's knots were used in the northern panel (fig. 10, cat. 29). One way in which both of the panels have been regarded is that the knots guard the sanctuary area. Kitzinger argued that they are strategically placed to keep evil away from the most sacred area of the church.<sup>183</sup>

Returning to the Adeitha mosaic, aside from the Solomon's knot, there are a variety of designs that are intricate and knot-like in character. A guilloche frames the medallion inscription in the centre of the nave. In addition to the guilloche, there are 'knots of three figures of eights,' crosses of loops' and 'squares filled with loops' at various points in the upper part of the nave. These designs are intricate, their patterns loop under and over each other, and they give the illusion that they are tied (fig. 11). These designs might be seen as providing protective power.<sup>184</sup> Trilling argued the intricate nature of the patterns was intended to catch the attention of demons, who could be manipulated or trapped by the designs.<sup>185</sup> It was believed that demons would trace

<sup>183</sup> Kitzinger, 'The Threshold of the Holy Shrine', pp. 641-647.

<sup>184</sup> Ernst H. Gombrich, *The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art* (London: Phaidon, 1979), pp. 262-63. Walter Leo Hildburgh, 'Indeterminability and Confusion as Apotropaic Elements in Italy and Spain', *Folklore*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (1944), 133-49 (p. 144).

<sup>185</sup> Trilling, 'Medieval Interlace Ornament', pp. 63-76.

and follow the design, not realising the patterns could not be undone. Not being able to escape the design, the demons became trapped and neutralised.

There is some basis for the argument that intricate patterns were used to repel and distract demons. As Mitchell has illustrated, a good visual example of this can be seen from the four steps that lead down to the funeral oratory of Mellebaudis at Poitiers in France (fig. 12).<sup>186</sup> The seventh-century steps were designed to keep demons away from the deceased who were laid to rest in an area beyond the steps. The bottom step uses magical words and phrases to keep demons away from the dead bodies. The three steps above are decorated with intricate patterns that Mitchell argued were designed to avert the presence of demons too. The top step depicts a three-stranded guilloche which was a common pattern in floor mosaics, and is similar to the two-stranded guilloche patterns around the medallion at Adeitha. Not only does the Poitiers example allude to images as being potent tools or weapons to ward off evil, it also suggests that, in the right circumstances, guilloche and intricate designs were attempts to ward off demonic threats.

The intricate designs at Adeitha were depicted in other Early Byzantine floor mosaics and they may have been used in those locations for protective reasons too. For example, intricate designs are depicted around the cross-shaped baptistery pool at Mount Nebo in Jordan (fig. 13, cat. 49).<sup>187</sup> A ‘cross of loops with eyelets inscribed in a circle with loops’, a ‘knot of two curvilinear triangles’, a ‘triple square with squared loops’ and a ‘knot of four figures of eight’ are shown in the corners, and they could be seen as protecting the baptistery pool. Since the pool takes the form of a cross, it could be argued further protection was sought in the structure of the pool. Christians regarded baptisteries as sacred because until someone was baptised, they were considered vulnerable to attack from demons. Tertullian (160-225), writing from an earlier period, described how demons lurked in watery locations such as streams, springs, baths and wells, and stressed the importance of baptism-like rituals to avert demons.<sup>188</sup> The

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<sup>186</sup> Mitchell, ‘Keeping the Demons out of the House’, p. 287.

<sup>187</sup> Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan*, pp. 146-147.

<sup>188</sup> Tertullian, *De baptismo*, 5-6; *PL* 1, 1204-1206.

baptistery pool itself, filled with holy water, needed to be kept clear from demons who were considered as capable of contaminating it.<sup>189</sup>

Aside from the knots, there are other elements in Adeitha's floor mosaic that could be interpreted as attempts to attract power. There are many vegetation symbols in the nave that could be seen as increasing the prosperity of the land. To be more specific, there are motifs of plants, shrubs and isolated leaves that are shown individually within the quadrilobe shapes. Even the half-shaped quadrilobes next to the borders are filled with plants, though these latter ones are unidentifiable. The use of vegetation at Adeitha is hardly unique in floor mosaics: vegetation is perhaps the most common theme in floor mosaic imagery. In most circumstances, the depiction of vegetation does not seem to have much significance or meaning, and it seems to have been depicted for its aesthetic appearance. But the manner in which the vegetation is depicted at Adeitha, as single images and in framed-off spaces, highlights their presence and suggests that a special significance is given to the image. It emphasises that the vegetation is a deliberate part of the mosaic design. When they are the sole focus of attention, the vegetal motifs might be seen as an attempt to attract the beneficial qualities of the natural world. Vegetation was beneficial because plants were one form of medicine.<sup>190</sup> Since medical matters and healing are important themes in gemstones and spells, not to mention that most of the Christian saints' 'miracles' are medically related, it can be seen why healing was important to represent to the Byzantines. Vegetation was also considered a symbol of prosperity, representing the fertility of the land and the power of nature itself. It is possible to interpret the vegetation in terms of sympathetic magic: by depicting symbols of prosperity and fertility, it might be believed that those associations can be attracted. The vegetation is an appropriate form of imagery for floor mosaics because the images of the vegetation imitate the area where the real plants grows, from the earth (in other words, the mosaic takes the position of the soil, both being surfaces that are stood on).

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<sup>189</sup> Robin M. Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity: Ritual, Visual, and Theological Dimensions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), pp. 30-35.

<sup>190</sup> Early Byzantine medicine was influenced by Galen and Dioskorides, authors that placed an emphasis on plants as providing remedies. For Early Byzantine medicine see Vivian Nutton, 'From Galen to Alexander, Aspects of Medicine and Medical Practice in Late Antiquity', *DOP*, Vol. 38 (1984), 1-14. Vikan, 'Art, Medicine, and Magic', 65-86. Owen Temkin, 'Byzantine Medicine: Tradition and Empiricism', *DOP*, Vol. 38 (1984), 95-115.

When discussing supernatural iconography, there comes a point at which it is realised any depiction could be seen in supernatural terms. Some symbols, such as the ones that I have provided here, and elsewhere in this chapter, can be seen in supernatural terms with evidence to support it. Yet not all symbols can be seen in the same way. For example, at Adeitha there are also symbols including drinking vessels, bread, a birdcage, a bottle and a glass and individual fruit. Aside from the fruit, these other depictions cannot be seen so strongly in supernatural terms, at least by us.

This selection of symbols on the floor at Adeitha shows the mosaic as incorporating many motifs that had links to supernatural power. The use of the cross might be seen as Christian power, but the use of the Solomon's knot, intricate patterns and the vegetation might be seen as non-Christian. Some of the powers were protective in theme, while others were more beneficial. These symbols were portrayed at varying points across the rectangular nave. Their placement ensured that all parts of the nave, the central part of a church, were attracting power. The symbols used at Adeitha are representative of supernatural power being sought in a church. Churches were buildings that were potentially open to many members of society, though not all: in terms of a basilica church, only the clergy were permitted around the apse and the altar, initiated male Christians were permitted to gather in the nave, initiated women might be allowed to gather in the aisles, while the uninitiated were only allowed to gather outside of the building, in the atrium.<sup>191</sup> This means that a mosaic design could provide supernatural assistance to the building or those that were gathered in the church. Symbols were depicted to provide powers to those that could gather in the church: they were not necessarily just for one person. This is a more communal use of power when compared to objects such as magical gemstones, which due to the nature of the object, were believed to provide power to an individual rather than a group.

#### ANTIOCH: SYMBOLS ON THE THRESHOLD

Symbols alone were a source of power but their location within a building could also be important. At Adeitha we saw how some symbols have links to supernatural power, I will now demonstrate that the depiction of some symbols on threshold areas was a specific way of acquiring supernatural powers for a building. I will show the

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<sup>191</sup> Richard Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), pp. 24-26, 40-41

significance of threshold areas in Early Byzantium and examine why those areas of buildings were considered in need of protection. By the use of the word ‘threshold’, I refer to the area beneath or just in front of a door. It is an area that has to be walked over when entering or leaving a room. As floor mosaics were surfaces that covered most of the surfaces of a room, the patron or designer of the mosaic had to make a choice as to how to decorate this area.

I begin with a sixth-century mosaic from the upper level of the House of the Phoenix in Antioch (fig. 14, cat. 62).<sup>192</sup> The central area of the floor is decorated with a grid of circles interloped tangentially, each of which is filled with rosettes and stylised flowers. Encircling the perimeter of this is a border consisting of a pattern of repeating octagons. These octagons are filled with squares, apart from the three octagons on the threshold of the room, which depict two Solomon’s knots either side of a symbol called a knot of eight loops. I will argue that the threshold of this room is an example of a mosaic with a supernatural function, and that at a wider level, threshold areas might determine whether a mosaic might have had a supernatural function.

The anthropologist Arnold van Gennep argued that thresholds were considered areas that needed protecting. Gennep described how humans mark phases of their lives with rituals, and these rituals happen in three forms; a preliminary stage, a liminal (transitional) one, and a postliminal stage. Gennep was interested in the liminal stage and he regarded thresholds as an example.<sup>193</sup> He stated that most past cultures regarded thresholds as having supernatural associations and that when those areas were trodden over, it was done with great caution and ritual in order to ease the process. For Gennep, the inner part of the building symbolise the sacred and the knowable; the outside was the unpredictable and dangerous. The threshold, symbolising the point at which the exterior meets the interior, was vital in keeping the outer world at bay. Other aspects of Gennep’s theory have been critiqued and updated, but his work on thresholds has not been refuted. His work on the threshold’s significance has been taken up by later scholars.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*, Vol. 1, pp. 351-352.

<sup>193</sup> Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. by Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 15-25.

<sup>194</sup> Gennep’s work inspired Joseph Campbell’s view that mythologies of heroes can be divided into three stages. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1949). Victor



Katherine Dunbabin is an example of just one scholar who sees the threshold as an important area when trying to interpret whether a floor mosaic was decorated to attract supernatural powers.<sup>195</sup> For her, the beliefs in Roman culture concerning thresholds mean that this area of a building needs to be examined carefully. I will argue that Early Byzantine mosaics can be seen in the same terms. I will show how the Early Byzantines inherited these same beliefs, using Byzantine sources that suggest thresholds were regarded as areas that needed protection. In addition, it will be shown that the symbols on the mosaic at Antioch were employed for this reason.

Early Christian writers indicated that thresholds and doorways were areas that were in need of protection and supernatural assistance. For example, writing in the western part of the empire, Augustine of Hippo (354-430) attested to a pagan ritual that was believed to protect newly-born children. Augustine explained the belief in which three spirits by the names of Intercidona, Pilmus and Diverra guarded a new mother from the forest-god Silvanus.<sup>196</sup> He went on to write that pagans impersonate the three spirits and, as part of a ritual, attack the threshold of the home with an axe, then a pestle and then sweep it with a broom. Ardle Mac Mahon argued the point of the ritual was to create a barrier on the threshold that Silvanus could not cross.<sup>197</sup> Silvanus would be repelled by the axe and pestle because these were objects that civilised the land, the very opposite of Silvanus' free-growing nature. Augustine also referred to the significance of thresholds in another text. Having said that superstitious beliefs belonged to the Devil, in *On the Christian Doctrine* he provided a list of numerous activities that he considers to be superstitious; among them are beliefs around the threshold. In a disapproving tone of voice, Augustine spoke of people believing that ill fortune could strike them unless they trod on the threshold when leaving the home.<sup>198</sup>

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W. Turner expanded and built upon Gennep's work in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969), 95-97. Yet Turner's work has been questioned by Caroline Bynum, who says it is not useful in understanding the role of women in medieval societies. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 27-39.

<sup>195</sup> Dunbabin, 'Baiaurum Grata Voluptas', p. 46.

<sup>196</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *De civitate dei contra paganos*, 6, 9; Saint Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. by William M. Green, Vol. 2 (London: Heinemann, 1963), pp. 340-342.

<sup>197</sup> Ardle Mac Mahon, 'The Realm of Janus: Doorways in the Roman World', in *TRAC 2002: Proceedings of the Twelfth Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference*, ed. by Gillian Carr et al. (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2003), 58-73 (p. 69).

<sup>198</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *De doctrina christiana*, 2, 20, 31; *PL* 34, 50-51.

He also detailed how people would immediately return home if they were to stumble on another's threshold, believing it was a sign of ill fortune. It might be said then that for Augustine, the threshold was a significant area, but it was nevertheless a 'superstition'. As such, he would not have deemed beliefs around the threshold a positive influence for Christians in their daily lives.

The Christian Tyrannius Rufinus (340/345-410) also suggested that people believed that thresholds and entrances held supernatural associations. He wrote of pagan deities who were connected to those areas. When Rufinus wrote of the destruction of the large temple of the god Serapis at Alexandria, he described the entrances, windows and doorposts of homes as having busts of Serapis for protection.<sup>199</sup> He went on to say that citizens of the city went through a period of Christianisation, where busts of Serapis were replaced with crosses instead. Rufinus' account suggests that images of deities were depicted at entrances and windows in order to attract the power of the deity for the protection of a building. It then indicates that crosses were used instead to fulfil exactly the same purpose.

The concept that deities provided protection at doorways was part of the Byzantine's Greco-Roman culture. The 'appropriate' gods include Apollo, Serapis, Forculus (god of doors), Limentinus (the god of the threshold), Janus (god of the gate), Terminus (god of boundary markers), Priapus (god of fertility); two goddesses in the form of Vesta (goddess of the hearth) and Cardea (also known as Carna); as well as other supernatural beings in the form of the *Anthelli* (demons), or even the deceased family's ancestors, Lares.<sup>200</sup> Frescoes, figurines and prayer all might be used to invoke the gods' powers in protecting the doorway.

Roman sources provide further information about thresholds. What can be summarised from these sources is that it was deemed beneficial to tread on a threshold with the right foot first because it was considered a bad omen to tread on it with the

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<sup>199</sup> Tyrannius Rufinus, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 2, 29; *PL* 21, 537.

<sup>200</sup> Franz Joseph Dölger, 'Beitrage zur Geschichte des Kreuzzeichens, VII', *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, Vol. 7 (1964), 5-38 (pp. 30-31). John R. Clarke, *The Houses of Roman Italy 100 B.C.-A.D. 250: Ritual, Space, and Decoration* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; Oxford: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 211-212. Florence Dupont, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*, trans. by Christopher Woodall (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 83. Mac Mahon, 'The Realm of Janus', p. 70. The *Anthelli* demons are referred to by Tertullian, *De idolatria*, 15; *PL* 1, 683A-684B.

left.<sup>201</sup> When entering another person's home, if someone were to sense something bad whilst stepping over a threshold it was considered best to return home and stay there for the rest of the day.<sup>202</sup> Another belief was that after a couple had been married, entrances had to be decorated to prevent evil spirits from entering; then the bride could be greeted at her new door where she was lifted over the threshold to bring good luck, because it would have been a bad omen if she were to tread on it.<sup>203</sup> It is possible to interpret that thresholds and entrances in Roman culture were perceived as areas that needed protecting, or at the least, were associated with gods and spirits.<sup>204</sup>

As might be expected of the inheritors of Greco-Roman culture, the Early Byzantines continued to hold beliefs that thresholds were areas that might require protection. In this context, Franz Joseph Dölger examined the inscriptions of lintels to show that crosses were depicted or invoked in name to provide a more permanent method of protection for a building.<sup>205</sup> Like thresholds, lintels are objects that are associated with doorways because they too mark a transitional area from the exterior to the interior. Dölger argued that although societies became more Christian, beliefs around the threshold continued to persist in people's thoughts and these beliefs became Christianised. Pagan gods and spirits, once seen as governing the doorway, became the

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<sup>201</sup> See for example Petronius, *Satyricon*, verse 30-31; Petronius, *The Satyricon*, trans. by Patrick Gerard Walsh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 164. Vitruvius, *De architectura*, 3, 4, 4; Vitruvius, *On Architecture*, trans. by Frank Granger, Vol. 1, Loeb (London: William Heinemann, 1962), p. 182. Florence Dupont, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*, trans. by Christopher Woodall (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 85.

<sup>202</sup> See for example Valerius Maximus, *Facta et dicta memorabilia*, 1, 5, 2; Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings*, trans. by D. R. Shackleton Bailey (London: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 178. Dölger, 'Beiträge zur Geschichte des Kreuzzeichens', p. 32. Mac Mahon, 'The Realm of Janus', p. 70.

<sup>203</sup> See for example Juvenal, *Satirae*, 6, 51-52; J. D. Duff (ed.), *D. Iunii Iuuenalis Saturae XIV: Fourteen Satires of Juvenal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 27. Lucius Apuleius, *Apulei Madaurensis Metamorphoseon*, 4, 26; Apuleius, *The Golden Ass. Being the Metamorphoses of Lucius Apuleius*, trans. and rev. by William Adlington and Stephen Gaselee, Loeb (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1971), pp. 182-184. Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historiae*, 28, 37, 135; 28, 37, 142; and 29, 9, 30; Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, trans. by H. Rackham, Vol. 8, Loeb (London: William Heinemann, 1963), p. 94, pp. 98-100, and p. 202. Titus Maccius Plautus, *Casina*, 4, 4; Plautus, *Casina, The Casket Comedy, Curculio, Epidicus, The Two Menaechmuses*, trans. and ed. by Paul Nixon, Vol. 2, Loeb (London: William Heinemann, 1959), pp. 88-92. Maurus Servius Honoratus, *Commentarii in Vergilii Bucolicon librum*, 8, 29; Maurus Servius Honoratus, *Servii Grammatici qui fervuntur in Vergilii Bucolica et Georgica commentarii*, trans. by Georgius Thilo, Vol. 3 (Leipzig: in aedibus B. G. Teubneri, 1887), pp. 96-97. The ritual was also referred to by Plutarch, but he does not attribute any magical associations to it, he just asks why this was a ritual. Plutarch, *Aetia Romana*, no. 29, 271 D; Plutarch, *Moralia*, trans. and ed. by Frank Cole Babbitt, Vol. 6, Loeb (London: William Heinemann, 1936), pp. 51-53.

<sup>204</sup> Mac Mahon, 'The Realm of Janus', p. 70. Dunbabin, *MRNA*, pp. 162-164. Manley, 'Decoration and Demon Traps', pp. 440-445.

<sup>205</sup> Dölger, 'Beitrag zur Geschichte des Kreuzzeichens', pp. 30-31.

subjects of what Christians were seeking protection from. The deities had turned into villains. Christianisation also meant a new decorative repertory was required to deal with the supernatural threats. Images of gods were replaced with crosses, quotes from the Psalms, Jesus' name or the acronym IXΘYC; all of which were depicted on door lintels.<sup>206</sup> What is significant is the decoration depicted around thresholds, whether on mosaic or on lintels, sought protective powers for all that might enter: whether that was for a building's inhabitants or guests. The communal aspect of the power is again markedly different to other supernatural objects such as gemstones, which are generally perceived as seeking power just for the wearer.

The two Solomon's knots at Antioch and the knot of eight loops motif were depicted immediately on the threshold to the room. As has been shown in this chapter, the Solomon's knot has connotations of protective power. The knot of eight loops seems also to have had protective powers. It was a symbol that was depicted on lintels above doors and windows in the Levant in the fifth and sixth centuries, which may suggest the symbol had supernatural significance.<sup>207</sup> In Roman and Byzantine cultures, lintels were deliberately designed to have a function in averting evil. Words and images were inscribed on them, explicitly telling unwanted threats such as Satan and the Evil Eye not to enter the building.<sup>208</sup> Once we accept the Solomon's knots and the knot of eight loops on the threshold at Antioch having links to supernatural powers, they can be seen as an attempt to attract the power in those symbols for the building. It may be that the placement of those symbols on the threshold was an attempt to repel supernatural beings before they could enter a room. That the symbols were placed there to prevent unwanted beings from entering could seem likely in the Antioch example, as the threshold mosaic is laid in front of a door to a courtyard. In other words, the symbols were positioned in a significant area to prevent spirits and demons from entering the courtyard or the rest of the building.

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<sup>206</sup> Dölger, 'Beitrage zur Geschichte des Kreuzzeichens', pp.26-33.

<sup>207</sup> William K. Prentice, *Greek and Latin Inscriptions* (New York: Century, 1908), p. 18.

<sup>208</sup> William K. Prentice, 'Magical Formulae on Lintels of the Christian Period in Syria', *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (1906), 137-150. Ignacio Peña, *The Christian Art of Byzantine Syria*, trans. by Eileen Brophy and Francisco Reina (Reading: Garnet, 1997), pp. 169-181.

## PROTECTIVE AND BENEFICIAL SYMBOLS AT BEIT MERY

The use of symbols to attract supernatural power is also apparent in other Early Byzantine floor mosaics. One example, I will show, comes from the mid sixth-century floor mosaic that was excavated at Beit Mery in central Lebanon (fig. 15, cat. 58).<sup>209</sup> It is a basilica church with an apse, a significantly long nave and two aisles. Mosaic in the upper nave and north aisle are the only parts to have survived, and these areas use a grid composition filled with symbols. Just before the nave is a composition of a vessel with vine leaves spreading forth, flanked by a pair of peacocks. A fragmentary inscription from the lower part of the nave survives and suggests that one of the donors of the mosaic or the church was called Aeiannos.<sup>210</sup> Between the south aisle and the nave, and between columns, are mosaic panels depicting additional symbols and geometric patterns.

I will begin with a discussion of a symbol that is repeated twice in the south aisle. It consists of a concentric circle and it has eight lines that radiate from it, the ends of which have little circles. Henry Maguire refers to it as an eight-rayed sign.<sup>211</sup> This symbol is worthy of discussion because it was usually depicted on magical objects rather than the floors of churches.

The eight-rayed sign was used with some frequency in magic spells. Figure 16 shows a fourth- or fifth-century papyrus spell that is currently held at the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence.<sup>212</sup> Most of the papyrus consists of Greek text and it instructs the reader how to win friends and influence people.<sup>213</sup> Three quarters of the way down the papyrus, just above some figural images of demons are various symbols, among them the eight-rayed sign. The group of symbols on the papyrus can be grouped together in one category. Symbols that are slightly erratic, looking vaguely like letters and which have little circles are referred to in the sources as ‘ring signs’ or *characteres* and in scholarship as ‘characters’.<sup>214</sup> *Characteres* were depicted on many magical

<sup>209</sup> Donceel-Voûte, *Les pavements des églises byzantines*, pp. 337-344.

<sup>210</sup> YIIEP CQ[TH]PIAC AEIANNON OIK(ONOMOY) / K[AI TON TEKNON] AYTO[Y]. Donceel-Voûte, *Les pavements des églises byzantines*, p. 339.

<sup>211</sup> Henry Maguire, ‘Magic and Geometry’, pp. 265-266.

<sup>212</sup> Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana. Papiri della Società Italiana (PSI I 29).

<sup>213</sup> *PGM* XXXV. 1-42; Preisendanz, Vol. 2, pp. 160-162 and Betz, pp. 268-269.

<sup>214</sup> Spells that refer to them as *χαρακτήρες* can be seen in *PGM* VII. 193-196, 390-393, 411-416, 579-590. Scholars such as Campbell Bonner, Gary Vikan and Marvin Meyer use differing and inconsistent terms.

items; papyri spells, amulets, curse tablets and phylacteries. Scholarship is not sure what function they had and if they were meant to convey anything, whether they were symbols or even if they were letters of a lost language.<sup>215</sup> In some spells, the magic user is explicitly asked to copy the *characteres* as a part of the spell.<sup>216</sup> Whatever those symbols were, they were a significant part of powerful rituals and may have had powers in themselves.

The eight-rayed sign was depicted on other spells too. A papyrus spell in Cologne seeks health for a person named Tirom (fig. 17).<sup>217</sup> One third of the way down, the eight-rayed sign is depicted alongside other symbols that are referred to as ‘holy signs’: ‘Holy signs, heal Tirom, whom Palladia bore, from all shivering’.<sup>218</sup> There is another instance of an eight-rayed sign being invoked in medical magic. A fifth-century spell intended to cure a sickness also depicted two eight-rayed signs either side of a key-hole shape. They are depicted next to a part of the spell that refers to them as ‘mighty signs’: ‘Holy inscription and mighty signs, chase away the fever with shivering from Kale, who wears this protective charm’.<sup>219</sup> The eight-rayed sign can also be found on magical gemstones. On one example, the symbol is repeated three times on the obverse of a gem, along with other *characteres* (fig. 18).<sup>220</sup> Depicted on the other side of the gemstone is the demon Chnoubis, who, despite her threatening appearance, was a beneficial demon, in that she was believed to cure stomach illnesses.<sup>221</sup>

Maguire points out that the papyrus in Florence also contains a concentric circle with triangles on the border. This looks like another symbol that is used in Beit Mery’s south aisle, and it is not a symbol that is particularly common on floor mosaics.<sup>222</sup> This symbol, and the eight-rayed sign, are usually associated with magical objects, but in this instance are depicted in a Christian place of worship. The symbols might be taken as

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Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets*, pp. 12-13, 194-195. Vikan, ‘Magic and Visual Culture in Late Antiquity’, p. 55. Meyer and Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic*, p. 390 and 392.

<sup>215</sup> Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets*, pp. 12-13, 194-195.

<sup>216</sup> For example, see *PGM* VII. 385-89; Preisendanz, Vol. 2, p. 17 and Betz, p. 128.

<sup>217</sup> Köln VI, 257. 10266v. University of Cologne.

<sup>218</sup> Ἅγιε χαρακτῆρες θεραπεύσατε Τείρονα, ὃν ἔτεκεν Παλλαδία, ἀπὸ παντὸς ῥίγους. [...] Maguire, ‘Magic and Geometry’, p. 266.

<sup>219</sup> Henry Maguire, *The Icons of their Bodies*, pp. 119-120.

<sup>220</sup> Jacques Matter, *Histoire critique du gnosticisme et de son influence sur les sectes religieuses philosophiques des six premiers siècles de l’ère chrétienne* (Paris: F. G. Levrault, 1828), plate 2A, fig. 10.

<sup>221</sup> Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets*, pp. 54-60. Vikan, ‘Art, Medicine, and Magic’, pp. 75-77.

<sup>222</sup> Maguire, ‘Magic and Geometry’, p. 266.

being perceived as beneficial in other contexts, since they were depicted on spells that ask for beneficial things. These symbols might be called ‘magical’, rather than Christian or pagan, because they were mostly depicted on magical objects. The use of magical symbols on a church’s floor conveys just one example of the crossover between what was and what was not acceptable to portray in mosaic. Despite the symbol’s ‘magical’ or non-Christian associations, it was probably depicted in order to acquire the power in the symbol within a church building.

Alongside the eight-rayed sign, Beit Mery contains many variations of concentric circles throughout the south aisle and the nave. The concentric circle (also called ‘target’) is a design of a circle (or a series of circles) that encases a dot. In ancient art it symbolised a mirror. For example, on the front of Projecta’s casket, the lower scene depicts a bride who turns to her attendant in the next niche who holds up a mirror to her (fig. 19). The mirror is depicted with the concentric circle in the middle. The casket’s craftsmen used this symbol to let viewers know that we are looking at the reflective side of the mirror.<sup>223</sup> Mirrors were considered mysterious objects with a potential for having protective functions in the ancient world. Those objects were believed to turn evil back on itself, and a tenth-century Byzantine text says that farmers used mirrors to turn hail clouds back on themselves and protect their crops and livestock.<sup>224</sup> To add to the tales surrounding mirrors, mythological accounts such as Perseus using his reflective shield to protect himself and defeat the gorgon Medusa also indicate a key role in society concerning the use of mirrors.<sup>225</sup>

Since concentric circles were a way of referring to mirrors and that they held links to the supernatural, it should not be surprising that the design was depicted on door lintels where they could avert evil threats. One example from Umm al-Jimal dates to the sixth century and the concentric circle is depicted over the door of a building (fig. 20). As was discussed earlier, entrances and doorways were considered areas that needed protecting. Lintels and thresholds were decorated with both art and text to attract protective powers in warding off demons who might enter. This is the probable purpose

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<sup>223</sup> Dauterman Maguire et al., *Art and Holy Powers*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>224</sup> *Περὶ γεωργίας ἐκλογαί* (*Geoponika*), 1, 14, 1-4; Henricus Beekh (ed.), *Geoponica sive Cassiani Bassi scholastici de re rustica eclogue* (Leipzig: in aedibus B. G. Teubneri, 1895), pp. 28-29.

<sup>225</sup> Dauterman Maguire et al., *Art and Holy Powers*, p. 7.

of the concentric circles at Umm al-Jimal. It is in the context of this use of circles that I would argue the circles in the south aisle at Beit Mery were depicted to prevent demons from exerting any power or influence on those in the church.<sup>226</sup>

The last symbol that I will discuss at Beit Mery are the swastikas, two of which are in the south aisle and one is in the nave. The swastika looks like an equilateral cross, with four arms bent at ninety degrees. This symbol was considered a good luck symbol in the ancient world (which is obviously quite far removed the associations it has gained since the twentieth century).<sup>227</sup> For example, the Cologne spell discussed above (fig. 17) depicts three swastikas at the top of the spell. That the swastikas might have a beneficent role can be seen from the tone of the spell, which sought to improve the health of a person called Tirom. The swastikas even accompany a part of the spell that suggests the signs have a Christian dimension since they accompany a Christian acclamation, reading “One Father, One Son, One Ghost, amen”.<sup>228</sup>

The reason why the swastika had beneficial associations is not entirely clear. Just like the Solomon’s knot, a case might be made that the swastika was considered powerful through its resemblance to the cross. It has the basis of the Greek cross; the only difference is the four bent lines at the end. As Maguire has noted, it might be argued that the resemblance between the swastika and the cross was not lost on Christians, who might have seen it as a way of overcoming the prohibition of depicting a cross on the floor. However, as I noted with the Solomon’s knot, the prohibition was not always adhered to. But understood in this way, the power of the cross could be acquired through the swastika.<sup>229</sup> Other attempts to explain the swastika’s beneficial associations may point to the design itself. The ‘bent’ lines at the end give the design something of a rotary movement, which itself might be interpreted as alluding to the regeneration and cyclical nature of the seasons.<sup>230</sup> Understood in this way, the swastika had power because it evoked nature, and the continued prosperity throughout the year. Whatever the reason, the Byzantines regarded the swastika as a beneficial symbol, and

<sup>226</sup> Dauterman Maguire et al., *Art and Holy Powers*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>227</sup> Maguire, ‘Magic and Geometry’, pp. 266-67. Dunbabin, *MRNA*, p. 164. Dunbabin reiterated this again in ‘Baiaurum Grata Voluptas’, p. 39. Swift, *Style and Function in Roman Decoration*, p. 78.

<sup>228</sup> Ἦς πατήρ, Ἦς υἱός, ἐν πνεῦμα ἁγίον. ἀμήν. Maguire, ‘Magic and Geometry’ p. 266.

<sup>229</sup> Maguire, ‘Magic and Geometry’, p. 268.

<sup>230</sup> Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols*, trans. by John Buchanan-Brown (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 956.



whether they deemed it pagan or Christian, there seems to be evidence that the swastika was seen as a symbol to attract beneficial powers. This is perhaps why Beit Mery's mosaic incorporated this symbol.

This same beneficial function of the swastika might be why Hagia Sophia in Constantinople was decorated with these symbols too. Swastikas are used across the vault mosaics of the church, especially in the south gallery, where they are depicted in alternating squares that line the shape of the vault. That the builders of Hagia Sophia might seek beneficial powers would not seem out of place, as a semi-legendary account dating to the eight or ninth-century says the bricks of that building were stamped with the name of God to give more power to the building, while relics were inserted into holes in order to give more power to the dome.<sup>231</sup> Because it was known that Hagia Sophia was prone to collapse and damage, the building therefore needed this kind of additional protection to keep it, the citizens and the empire safe.<sup>232</sup>

I have demonstrated that it is possible to see some of the symbols on Beit Mery's floor as referring to supernatural power. They may have been depicted in order to provide powers to the building and interpreted by contemporaries accordingly. What is significant about much of Beit Mery's symbols, though, is that the power in these symbols comes from an ambiguous source. Though these symbols could have been 'Christianised', the symbols functioned as something broader; this was a belief in the power of imagery. The power in these symbols lay somewhere between paganism, idolatry, and magic. Having these symbols on the floor was a means of ensuring the prosperity of the building, and perhaps of those that used it. This is important because the use of this imagery hints at Byzantines' fears. At times, the imagery may have been depicted to ward off demons and other malevolent threats, who were perceived as capable of entering properties and harming those within. Beneficial and protective powers were so strongly desired that floors might be used as a tool to ensure that

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<sup>231</sup> Διήγησις περὶ τῆς οἰκοδομῆς τοῦ ναοῦ τῆς μεγάλης τοῦ θεοῦ ἐκκλησίας τῆς ἐπονομαζομένης ἁγίας Σοφίας (*Narratio de Sanctae Sophiae*), 14; Theodorus Preger (ed.), *Scriptores originum Constantinopolitanarum* (Leipzig: in aedibus B. G. Teubneri, 1901), pp. 91-92. Trans. by Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire*, p. 98. For the date of the *Narratio* see Hanno-Walter Kruft, *A History of Architectural Theory: From Vitruvius to the Present*, trans. by Ronald Taylor et al. (London: Zwemmer, 1994), p. 33.

<sup>232</sup> Rowland J. Mainstone, *Hagia Sophia: Architecture, Structure and Liturgy of Justinian's Great Church* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1988), p. 129, 131-134.

advantages might be acquired in life. In this light, it is possible to see floor mosaics in the same way as other supernatural objects: they could be designed or interpreted as a means to invoke powers from a supernatural realm.

#### ZAHRANI: THE REPETITION OF MOTIFS

If symbols could be used to attract power, a method to ensure they did their job properly was to repeat the same symbol more than once. The repetition was an attempt to increase the supernatural power in the mosaic. To demonstrate this I will examine the mosaic from the north aisle of a church at Zahrani in modern Lebanon (fig. 21 and 22, cat. 61). The aisle takes the form of a trellis grid, with symbols being depicted in the centre of each square.<sup>233</sup> Elsewhere in the church, the south aisle contains another trellis design which features further symbols and an inscription in the centre states that Kesarios may have laid the mosaic in the sixth century under the patronage of the priest Abylas. The upper part of the nave consists of a repeating octagon design surrounding two panels, one forming an abstract pattern, the other with a vine leaf border enclosing further octagons, which are filled with further symbols, including a cross. In the lower part of the nave there are vases with vine leaves pouring forth and a fragmentary inscription that names individuals who showed devotion to God. The church has a narthex containing a mosaic of two doves drinking from a fountain, with two inscriptions stating the work was made in the sixth century and asking for salvation for individuals called Baracheos, Neestaros and Baracheos' son. Four additional chapels that are decorated with floor mosaics that are located south of the south aisle. One contains a grid design with land birds depicted within shapes and an inscription in memory of Gottheias, Sabarios and his son, Sousias and Leonitos. Another contains an abstract design of geometric shapes. One depicts a *kantharos* (a two-handled drinking vessel) with vine leaves spreading forth which form medallions, where a lion, land animals, a deer and fruit are depicted. The last chapel, opposite the narthex, has four *kantharoi* in the corners that sprout vine leaf medallions with an assortment of creatures in them.

I will focus on the north aisle, where running down the centre vertically are Solomon's knots repeated at least four times, and there are also five crosses. I will focus

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<sup>233</sup> Donceel-Voûte, *Les pavements des églises byzantines*, pp. 424-439 (esp. 426-427).

on this aisle because these symbols' supernatural associations have already been discussed in this chapter. At the top of the aisle is a fragmentary inscription that states that the patrons made the mosaic out of a vow made to God.<sup>234</sup> Within the aisle there are additional symbols including a flower motif, as well as abstract patterns. The mosaic might be taken as example in which the symbols were depicted to attract what they represented. But the repetition of the same symbol invites a question. Did this repetition increase the power of the mosaic, or did it reduce these motifs to 'decoration'?

Maguire has argued the repetition of a motif in the same mosaic does not make that motif become 'ornament'; rather, he says, it is an attempt to multiply the power of the motif. He argued this made the supernatural function of the mosaic *more* effective rather than less.<sup>235</sup> Maguire came to this conclusion through an examination of the mosaic at Beit Mery, where some motifs were depicted more than once. He went on to argue that Early Byzantine mosaics consciously incorporated grid layouts specifically to repeat the same motif, thereby enhancing the power of a mosaic.<sup>236</sup> Grid designs were a feature of Roman mosaics too, and were certainly not invented by the Byzantines. But the use of grid devices in mosaics is more characteristic and became more elaborate in Early Byzantium.<sup>237</sup>

There is some basis for saying that in Early Byzantium, repetition was believed to impart more power. In many supernatural objects the use of repetition might be seen as having a charm-like quality. The more that a supernatural symbol is shown, the more chance the power in the image could be attained. Many spells repeat certain phrases at the end of the text, such as "Quickly, quickly", "Immediately, immediately", or "Now, now".<sup>238</sup> Repetition is also used in another way in the spells. Letters of the Greek alphabet are repeated in successive lines and are presented in trapezoid and triangular shapes, presumably because the letters were less effective on their own, but more effective when repeated again and again.<sup>239</sup> In addition, gemstones also have images

<sup>234</sup> + KY[PIE... OI] / NAYKΛHPOI EYΞAMENOI / THN ΣTAYAN EΨHΦΩΨAN +. Donceel-Voûte, *Les pavements des églises byzantines*, p. 426.

<sup>235</sup> Maguire, 'Magic and Geometry', pp. 269-272.

<sup>236</sup> Maguire, 'Magic and Geometry', pp. 269-272.

<sup>237</sup> James Trilling, *The Medallion Style: A Study in the Origins of Byzantine Taste* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1985), pp. 29-41.

<sup>238</sup> ἡδὺν, ἡδὺν, ταχύ, ταχύ. *PGM* I. 261-62; Preisendanz, Vol. 1, p. 14 and Betz, pp. 9-10.

<sup>239</sup> For example, *PGM* I. 13-19 and *PGM* V. 84-90; Preisendanz, Vol. 1, p. 4 and p. 184. Betz, p. 3. and p. 102.

that might be repeated more than once too.<sup>240</sup> Maguire has noted that the Early Byzantines probably inherited the idea that repetition can affect the supernatural world, as he provides an example of how Roman mosaic inscriptions might ask the visitor to pray repeatedly for the removal of the Evil Eye.<sup>241</sup> It can be said that from the above examples that though the material might be an important factor, the power in repetition lies in the visual aspect of words and images.

With this in mind, the repeated use of the Solomon's knots and the crosses in the aisle at Zaharani might be seen as providing more power to the mosaic. The other elements in the aisle, the flower motif and the abstract patterns, are harder to justify in supernatural terms. But the use of a swastika, more crosses and interlaced patterns in the nave might be seen as further attempts to acquire power for the building.

A discussion on how repeated imagery may impart power would not be complete without asking whether a motif that is repeated more than once actually dilutes an image of its power, making it have a more ornamental, aesthetic role rather than a purposeful function. Dunbabin has argued a motif that appears more than once probably had no ulterior motive behind it; when this was the case, the motifs had an aesthetic role.<sup>242</sup> For example, she argued that the use of repeated gorgon heads on mosaics was not intended to provide the protective powers that the motif had in ancient Greece. Rather, by the time of the Roman Empire, she argued, the protective meaning had been diffused. The idea of motifs 'losing' their original meanings and becoming 'decoration' is an interesting one. When it comes to the topic of decoration in art history, there is a great dichotomy. Some scholars such as Dunbabin implicitly acknowledge that in most cultures, the meaning of images changes: images constantly gain and lose meanings over time. At the same time, other scholarship regards decoration an unworthy topic for discussion and one that has no meaning other than being something for the eye to rest on. Some scholars have challenged these assumptions by demonstrating that for many cultures, decoration did have specific

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<sup>240</sup> For example, see Matter, *Histoire critique du gnosticisme*, plate 2A, fig. 10.

<sup>241</sup> Maguire, 'Magic and Geometry', pp. 269-270. See also James Russell, *The Mosaic Inscriptions of Anemurium* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1987), p. 46. Etienne Bernard, *Inscriptions métriques de l'Égypte gréco-romaine: recherches sur la poésie épigrammatique des Grecs en Égypte* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1969), no. 122, pp. 483-488.

<sup>242</sup> Dunbabin, *MRNA*, p. 163.

functions and formed a vital part in many societies' visual culture.<sup>243</sup> For Dunbabin, when the gorgon was depicted more than once, it had no meaning at all in Roman art. It was a motif that did not 'do' anything and reduced the gorgon's original significance.

However, in her analyses, Dunbabin did not take into consideration other supernatural media. As was demonstrated earlier with how words and images might be repeated more than once in spells and gemstones, it might also be suggested that at a wider cultural level, repetitive devices were considered a method or tool to acquire more power. Dunbabin's comments could also be taken as grounded in a modern bias. Her argument that repeated motifs became decoration may say more about twentieth and twenty-first century ways of looking at visual culture rather than ancient ones. In addition, Dunbabin's views are nearly always exclusive to mosaics; when discussing them she rarely compares them to other media. While this undoubtedly makes her a leading expert in mosaic, it means she is less aware of the connections between mosaics and other media. Examining the wider media in which supernatural imagery appears points to a different cultural perception about repetition. With this in mind, I would argue there were Byzantine beliefs that in many cases, the more a motif was depicted, the more power was deemed to be in the host object.

One last example that could also have utilised repeated symbols to enhance its power is from a fifth-century mosaic at Shavei Zion in modern Israel (fig. 23, cat. 31).<sup>244</sup> This mosaic was laid in a church. The south aisle of the church consists of one motif, the swastika, which is repeated throughout that area. Since the swastika was perceived to hold beneficial powers, it is possible to interpret the aisle as an attempt to attract more beneficial powers for the church. The concentric circle in the centre of the aisle has triangles from the edges (in the centre of it is a four-leafed motif that could be mistaken for a cross), and it might be pointed out it bears a similarity to the symbol next to the eight-rayed sign on the spell discussed earlier that is kept in Florence (fig. 16). Other elements in the floor at Shavei Zion can also be seen in supernatural terms

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<sup>243</sup> The topic of decoration needs consciousness-raising in Byzantine studies as there is no defining work on the subject. For scholarship in other historic eras see Swift, *Style and Function in Roman Decoration*, James Trilling, *The Language of Ornament* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001), Michael Snodin and Maurice Howard, *Ornament: A Social History since 1450* (New Haven, Conn. and London: Yale, 1996), Oleg Grabar, *The Mediation of Ornament* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

<sup>244</sup> Ovadiah and Ovadiah, *Hellenistic, Roman and Early Byzantine Mosaic Pavements*, no. 215, p. 127.

through the use of crosses that were perhaps depicted to attract its protective powers. The north aisle has a medallion in the centre with a Greek cross, set against a trellis grid with rosettes. The nave has no imagery except for two further Greek crosses that were close the altar area, one filled with a guilloche pattern, the other outlining the shape of the cross.

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Symbols were one form of imagery in the Byzantine repertoire that could be used on floor mosaics. They were additionally depicted on overtly supernatural objects, such as magical gemstones and papyri spells, and their use on these objects suggests this form of imagery was perceived to be potent and had supernatural associations. They were probably depicted in order to attract what the symbol represented. It is as if the associations that the symbol represented could be acquired. The symbol is a representation of what the user wants: possessing a depiction of the symbol provides comfort to the user. It is a form of sympathetic magic. By depicting the symbol, it is believed that the associations of the image are manifested within the image. The placement of that symbol on a floor was probably regarded as providing the power in the symbol to the floor. From that, the symbols on the floor were perceived to benefit the building or those that entered the building. This belief in the potency of symbols is ultimately a reflection of a wider belief in the power of imagery. It is a perception that symbols contain essences and that possessing them on an object is a way of gaining those essences for someone's advantage. This represents a belief in the potency in the visual sphere and not necessarily in the materiality of the tesserae of mosaics.

This chapter has shown that symbols could be depicted in floor mosaics to attract what they stood for. This is a belief in supernatural power: it is a belief that what the symbol is associated with can be attracted, and it can then intervene and affect people's lives for better or worse. The symbols have a mystical, supernatural dimension and what this power is straddles the lines between religion, idolatry, magic and superstition. The way in which this power was perceived to 'work' was through a sympathetic magic. I have demonstrated that symbols commonly found on magic spells and gemstones were also depicted in mosaics, where they might have had the same association. The symbols were often depicted in particularly vulnerable areas, such as

thresholds. I began with an examination of the floor at the church of St George in Adeitha. At that church, I argue, crosses, Solomon's knots, intricate patterns and the vegetation were depicted precisely to attract what those symbols stood for. In this case, both protective and beneficial powers were sought. My study of the floor mosaic at Beit Mery argued that the eight-rayed sign, concentric circles and swastikas were also symbols that were perceived to have supernatural powers. Their depiction on the floor was a way of acquiring those powers for the church.

I have also examined how symbols might be depicted on important areas, notably thresholds, to attract powers. Using primary sources I showed that threshold areas in buildings were perceived to be places that needed protecting. With an example from the House of the Phoenix in Antioch, I argued that the two Solomon's knots and a knot of eight loops were used on the threshold area of the room to keep perceived evil forces out from the building. The symbols had a vital role in keeping demons at bay. When this is the case, the symbols were like weapons: unlike mortals, they were perceived capable of having powers that could stop demons from entering. Because demons could take an invisible form, they could go unnoticed by mortals. Yet the Byzantines believed that the powers in imagery could overcome the invisible nature of demons, and the imagery was a permanent form of protection that was in effect on guard for twenty-four hours a day. In this light, the depiction of symbols on thresholds played a vital role in keeping a building safe. Using symbols to repel unwanted beings is ultimately a reflection of a wider Byzantine belief in the power of imagery: power was perceived to be in the symbols and they could repel evil forces. Understood in this way, imagery was not just something to look at in the terrestrial world, imagery also had an additional purpose in being seen as affecting the supernatural realm. Depicting symbols on a threshold was in a sense to invoke the power of the symbol; this would ensure the imagery could 'work' to the Byzantines' advantage.

Lastly, I have revisited Maguire's work and I suggested that the more that one symbol is repeated in the same mosaic, the more power was granted to the building. Using examples from the mosaics at Zaharani and Shavei Zion, I have argued that the repetition of the same symbol does not reduce it to having an ornamental, aesthetic role. In Byzantine terms, this was perceived to enhance powers. I came to this conclusion through an examination of other supernatural objects, where both art and text used

repetition to enhance the power in the objects. I argue, it is possible to interpret the repeated motifs on mosaics in the same way.



## CHAPTER TWO

### THE POWER OF CREATURES

This chapter will show how in certain circumstances, images of creatures could be depicted on floor mosaics in order to attract supernatural powers. By the use of the word ‘creature’, I refer to a broad category consisting of non-human life, whether animal, mythological creature, insect or marine life; creatures are a common category in Early Byzantine floor mosaics. Yet more than any other form of imagery, scholars find this category difficult to interpret, whether in floor mosaic, on silver vessels or textiles. To demonstrate the ambiguity in how the representation of animals might be interpreted in Early Byzantium, consider the multiple meanings the dove evoked. For example, a dove might be interpreted as having Christological associations in representing the Holy Spirit.<sup>245</sup> Didymos the Blind (c. 313-398) said doves represented saints such as Paul and Timothy, other Byzantine interpretations saw doves as representing the soul, pagans regarded it as belonging to Aphrodite, while other contemporaries regarded the dove literally, as just an image of a dove.<sup>246</sup> The multivalence in how to interpret Byzantine images of creatures is reflected in my database, where just eleven out of seventy-six entries derived their power through images of creatures. The imagery of creatures scored the lowest number of entries compared to other types that were depicted in floor mosaics. Nevertheless, in this chapter, I will show how images of creatures were one visual tool used in Early Byzantine floor mosaics to attract supernatural powers. I will demonstrate this through case studies from Antioch, Carthage, Antigoneia and Thugga, each of which were recorded in my database.

Maguire has illustrated the difficulties in interpreting what animal imagery was meant to convey in Early Byzantine art. He proposed three ways in which a Byzantinist could try to determine what was conveyed by an image of a creature.<sup>247</sup> He argued, that

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<sup>245</sup> Tertullian, *Adversus Valentinianos*, 3; PL 2, 545-546.

<sup>246</sup> Didymos the Blind, *Commentarii in Genesim*, 46; Pierre Nautin and Louis Doutreleau (eds), *Didyme l'Aveugle: Sur la Genèse; texte inédit d'après un papyrus de Toura* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1976), p. 122. For the dove representing the soul, see Gregory of Nyssa, *De virginite* 11, 4-5; Gregory of Nyssa, *Gregorii Nysseni Opera Ascetica*, trans. by. Werner Jaeger et al., Vol. 8.1 (Leiden: Brill, 1952), pp. 294-296. For the dove representing Aphrodite see Lisa R. Brody, ‘The Cult of Aphrodite at Aphrodisias in Caria’, *Varia*, Vol. 14 (2001), 93-109 (pp. 99-100). For a literal, non-symbolic interpretation of the dove, see John Diakrinomenos, *Θεοδώρε ἀναγνώς ἐκ τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς ἰστορίας* (*Theodori lectoris de ecclesiastica historia*); Giovanni Domenici Mansi (ed.), *Sacrorum conciliorum nova, et amplissima collectio*, Vol. 13 (Florence: Espensis Antonii Zatta Veneti, 1767), pp. 180-181.

<sup>247</sup> Henry Maguire, ‘Profane Icons’, pp. 24-25.

imagery was either interpreted literally: where a sheep was interpreted as a sheep. It could also be interpreted allegorically: where a lamb might have been seen as signifying something else, such as Christ or a member of his flock. Maguire lastly suggested that images of creatures were interpreted as talismanic; where the Byzantines perceived them to embody special features in their blood, feathers, claws that could be attracted via a supernatural means.

In this chapter I focus on Maguire's last point and I will show how creatures could be depicted as a way to attract supernatural powers. Creatures were perceived to have connotations and associations in Early Byzantium. Some of these were supernatural; others were based on the creature's traits. It was perceived that the connotations of a creature were present within depictions of them. Possessing that image was a way of acquiring those associations for a person's benefit. Once again, this was a belief in sympathetic magic and the potency of images. It was a belief that through supernatural means, humans could better their lives by attaining the connotations (power) of a creature.

An examination of other Early Byzantine objects can illustrate a Byzantine belief that creatures were viewed as talismans and a means of attracting powers. Images of snakes, birds, scorpions, lions, beetles and figures that are half-human and half-creature were frequently depicted on magical gemstones. Creatures were also frequently referred to and invoked in magic spells. In the latter case, it was believed the creatures' properties and qualities could be attracted, whether that was drowning a falcon to invoke a demon; killing a bull, donkey or goat to be granted any wish; or making a dog out of clay and waiting for it to bark.<sup>248</sup> In these examples, the creatures' properties and qualities played a crucial part of the spells: the death, the blood and the reconstruction of the physique of creatures were believed to have an effect on the supernatural realm. Whilst animals were referred to and depicted on many supernatural kinds of objects, Byzantine texts also indicate that creatures were perceived to have supernatural associations and were capable of influencing daily life. The *Parastaseis syntomoi chronikai* recounts tales of sculptures affecting the lives of those that lived in Constantinople. In one example, a bronze statue of an ox was said to have occasionally

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<sup>248</sup> *PGM* I. 1-42; *PGM* IV. 1331-1389; *PGM* IV. 1872-1927; Preisendanz, Vol. 1, pp. 2-4; pp. 116-118; p. 130. Betz, p. 3; pp. 63-64; pp. 71-72.

made the sounds of a real, living ox. When the sculpture made that sound, it was thought there was a forthcoming disaster or misfortune.<sup>249</sup> What lay behind this tale was a belief that there was an essence in the sculpture of the ox that had supernatural powers to foresee the future.

Having given a glimpse of how creatures were perceived to have supernatural associations in other aspects of Byzantine culture, in this chapter I will demonstrate how creatures depicted in floor mosaics could bestow supernatural powers on a building.

#### ‘LIKE WHEN THE PHOENIX RENEWS ITS BURDEN LIMBS’: THE PHOENIX AT ANTIOCH

The fifth or sixth-century floor mosaic excavated from the building referred to as the House of the Phoenix in Antioch provides an interesting case for discussion.<sup>250</sup> This building was mentioned in the previous chapter, where two Solomon’s knots and a knot of eight loops were depicted on the threshold of a door that led from a room to a courtyard, where I argued those symbols had a protective role in keeping out demonic threats. The mosaic that is now under discussion comes from the courtyard of that building. It has been removed from its original location in Antioch and can now be found in the Musée du Louvre in Paris (fig. 24 and fig. 25, cat. 57). In the centre of the mosaic is an image of a phoenix. It has a beak, a long-arched neck, short wings, a short tail, long legs and it stands on a sloping rock. It also has lines surrounding the head (a *nimbus*), and based on comparisons with other objects, it is this iconographic element that suggests this is a phoenix. For example, a series of coins struck during the reign of Emperor Constantius II (r. 337-361) were imprinted with a phoenix with a *nimbus* radiating from its head (fig. 26). The *nimbus* is an important piece of iconography in Early Byzantine art that usually signified important figures, creatures and denoted status.<sup>251</sup> In the case of the phoenix, the *nimbus* gives status to the creature, and it emphasises its associations with the sun.<sup>252</sup> The phoenix is the only piece of figural imagery in the mosaic, except for a repeating motif in an enclosing border showing a

<sup>249</sup> Παράστασεις σύντομοι χρονικάί (*Parastaseis syntomoi chronikai*), 5a; Cameron and Herrin, *Constantinople in the Early Eighth Century*, p. 61.

<sup>250</sup> Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*, Vol. 1, pp. 351-355.

<sup>251</sup> Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*, pp. 117-118.

<sup>252</sup> Roelof van den Broek, *The Myth of the Phoenix: According to Classical and Early Christian Traditions*, trans. by I. Seeger (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), pp. 246-251.

pair of goats facing each other with beribboned wings beneath them (ribbons are tied to the goats' wings).

It is plausible that the mosaic at Antioch was designed to attract supernatural powers through the image of the phoenix, or at least, that contemporaries could interpret the mosaic in that way. The phoenix was a mythological bird that was present in Byzantine culture through their Greco-Roman heritage. Despite its mythical associations and its origins in pagan culture, the phoenix continued to be portrayed in both visual and literary sources in Early Byzantium and it became Christianised. In Early Byzantine Christian sources, the bird is synonymous with resurrection and immortality, as can be seen in the fifth or sixth-century text, the *Physiologos*, a collection of Christian texts that discuss various animals.<sup>253</sup> Further associations of the phoenix with resurrection were present when George of Pisidia (*d.* seventh century) used the rebirth of the phoenix as a metaphor when trying to persuade the non-Christians in his community to abandon their practices and follow the resurrection of Jesus and the Christian faith instead.<sup>254</sup> In the West, Ambrose of Milan (340-397) stated more explicitly that the phoenix was a symbol of the resurrection of saints and martyrs.<sup>255</sup> It might be understood then that the resurrection of the phoenix conveyed a sense of being reborn in a new, more magnificent form.

It is important not to underestimate the links between resurrection and supernatural power. In Western culture, resurrection has become synonymous with religion rather than something magical or supernatural. Yet when this concept is thought about in more detail, there is no reason why resurrection 'belongs' solely to Christianity and not to alternative beliefs such as magic or superstition. Resurrection means something that has been revitalised, whilst in terms of Christianity, it is a belief in a life after death.<sup>256</sup> It is a belief that a person's soul, cremated remains or their un-buried corpse will be reassembled from the terrestrial realm into an alternative sphere. It is a

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<sup>253</sup> *Secunda Physiologi redactio*, 10; Francesco Sbordone (ed.), *Physiologus* (Milan: in aedibus societatis "Dante Alighieri-Albrighi, Segati et c.", 1936), pp. 203-204.

<sup>254</sup> George of Pisidia, *Eῡαγγελισμὸς (Hexaemeron)*, 1117-1122; *PG* 92, 1520.

<sup>255</sup> Ambrose, *Exameron*, 5, 23. 79A-80E; Ambrose of Milan, *Sancti Ambrosii Opera*, trans. by Carolus Schenkl, Vol. 1 (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1897), pp. 197-198.

<sup>256</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 4-6. For Biblical passages on the Resurrection of Christ, see 1 Corinthians: 15; Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20; Acts 1; Romans 6-8.

wish for a form of never-ending life, something unattainable in the earthly, mortal realm. It is a belief in being reborn on a higher level and that resurrection can be acquired or achieved by actions during a person's lifetime. In this context, a person's wish or attempt to gain this was an attempt to attain supernatural power.

In addition to its associations with resurrection, the Early Byzantines also regarded the phoenix as being associated with ideas of renewal. For example, in a poem dedicated to Justin II (r. 565-574), the author Corripus described how the imperial crown was reborn in Justin:

Like when the phoenix renews its burden limbs, alive again from its own pyre, and the whole throng of birds together stands watching for the sun and the bird of the sun to appear, and greets the new king with a shout: so the glory of the empire, so the holy letter I rises up again from its own end, and Justinian, the great emperor, laying aside old age, lives again in Justin, an emperor with an upright name.<sup>257</sup>

In the text, Corripus portrayed a renewal and seamless link between Justinian I and his nephew Justin II. Just as Justinian I was perceived as achieving much through his reign, the poet suggests that his successor would do the same via a phoenix metaphor.

The resurrection and renewal associations of the phoenix were inherited from the Greco-Roman past. Yet many ancient and Roman sources have differing accounts and associations around the bird. Roelof van der Broek carefully detailed how ancient authors such as Hesiod, Hecataeos, Aenesidemos, Laevius and Marcus Manilius perceived the phoenix as having attributes that were abnormal and supernatural. Some of their accounts talk about physical features while others imply the phoenix had extraordinary qualities. These authors stated how the bird lived for long periods of time, travelled from Arabia to Egypt every 500 years to bury its father, it had red and gold feathers, it looked like an eagle, it sang a beautiful song, it reproduced asexually, it was the escort of the sun and when it died, a worm emerged and developed into a new phoenix.<sup>258</sup> Whether or not the Byzantines knew of these specific associations, the

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<sup>257</sup> ... dant agmina plausus... vox omnibus una, mens eadem: nomen populis placet omnibus unum. Ales ut exustos cum phoenix innovat artus a busto recidiva suo, seniumque reponens nominis erecti Iustino in principe vivit Iustinianus apex. Corripus, *In laudem Iustini*, 1, 349-56; Averil Cameron (ed.), *Flavius Cresconius Corripus: In laudem Iustini Augusti minoris* (London: Athlone Press, 1976), p. 47, 94.

<sup>258</sup> Broek, *The Myth of the Phoenix*, pp. 393-398.

concepts of renewal and resurrection appear to have continued into Early Byzantine culture.

Corripius' text suggests how the phoenix might be interpreted in an allegorical way. But the depiction of that creature on magical gemstones would suggest the phoenix's image may have been perceived as a means to attract the renewal or resurrection connotations of that bird. This perception probably came from the Byzantines' Roman past. One example from the British Museum collection shows a phoenix that is near identical in pose to the phoenix on the Antioch mosaic (fig. 27).<sup>259</sup> The gemstone portrays the phoenix with the same *nimbus* with light bursting forth around its head and the bird is depicted with a staff leaning against its body. There are accompanying engravings on the gem, including *characteres* and a magic word to enhance the power. The mosaic at Antioch can also be compared to figure 28, which shows a phoenix in the centre of a gem, complete with a rayed *nimbus*, standing on a globe, while other animals are depicted on the edges of the gem.<sup>260</sup> On the obverse is a Greek inscription that translates as "Digest!", which may suggest the phoenix was additionally regarded as a good means of diminishing stomach pains.<sup>261</sup> As well as the inclusion of phoenixes on gemstones, the birds were alluded to in spells. As van der Broek has pointed out, magical spells make mention of a potion called "sinews of the phoenix", which the Roman author Dioskorides said was popularly promoted by magicians.<sup>262</sup> From these tales it can be seen why the phoenix was considered an apt creature to be depicted on magical objects: it was believed that through a process of sympathetic magic that creature's associations could be attracted through an image of it. Therefore a case could be made that this same function lay behind the image of the phoenix on the mosaic at Antioch.

Whether a supernatural function lay behind other images of phoenixes on objects is open to debate. For example, the phoenix was depicted on coins up until the fifth century where they are shown standing on globes, in a similar fashion to how they

<sup>259</sup> Michel, *Die magischen Gemmen im Britischen Museum*, no. 347, p. 219.

<sup>260</sup> Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets*, no. 392, p. 321.

<sup>261</sup> ΠΕΙΤΕ. Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>262</sup> Νεῦρα φοίνικος. For the magic spell see Samson Eitrem (ed.), *Papyri Osloenses*, Vol. 1 (Oslo: On Commission by Jacob Dybwad, 1925), pap. 1, 156-157, p. 9 and p. 156. Dioskorides, *De materia medica*, 3, 24; Dioskorides, *Pedanii Dioscuridis Anazarbei De materia medica libri quinque*, trans. by Max Wellmann, Vol. 2 (Berlin: Apud Weidmannos, 1958), p. 34. Broek, *The Myth of the Phoenix*, p. 56.

were depicted on magical gemstones. It is possible to see this motif when looking at the coins from the collective late-fourth century emperors Valentinian, Theodosios I and Arkadios. For both Christian and non-Christian emperors, the phoenix was a convenient image in evoking the concept of renewability of authority, especially when families sought to establish dynasties.<sup>263</sup> In this view, the bird was depicted to invoke its powers: by depicting the bird with the emperors, the coin's designers sought to attract the power of the bird to the emperors. It has to be acknowledged the phoenixes may have been interpreted allegorically too, as these birds were depicted to convey a message to the wider population that the emperors were associated with renewal and stability.

The inclusion of the phoenix in the mosaic was a deliberate attempt to attract the immortal or renewability associations for the building and its inhabitants in a part of the building that both inhabitants and guests would have used. The power of the phoenix was thus potentially attainable for the multiple people who entered the building: it is this aspect, that power was available to many, that reflects a mosaic's communal function as they were surfaces that have to be used by all. The phoenix is shown by itself, with only rosebuds in the background. The isolation of the image, as will be shown in the next chapter, suggests it has a special significance and it can be seen more strongly in sympathetic magic terms. The additional, conceptual evidence of phoenixes on magical objects might also be taken into account as this points to a wider cultural belief that images of phoenixes could bring rewards in daily life. The associations were thought to be manifest in the depiction. Once the mosaic had been made, the image was deemed capable of attracting or bestowing powers. This concept is similar to how icons were perceived to work in Early Byzantium.<sup>264</sup>

Painted icons of saints were perceived to have the saint present in the image.<sup>265</sup> The saint became 'active' when the craftsmen had finished painting it and could then be appealed to. It was not the painting that could do miraculous deeds; the holy figure's representation was just a conduit for the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is what was really harnessing the power. Power was in the image; and the image was powerful. In terms of

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<sup>263</sup> Maguire, *Earth and Ocean*, pp. 63-64.

<sup>264</sup> Kurt Weitzmann, *The Icon: Holy Images, Sixth to Fourteenth Century* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1978), pp. 7-8.

<sup>265</sup> Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, pp. 30-101.

the representation of the phoenix at Antioch, the mosaic might be seen as possessing all the associations the phoenix is said to have had. Once the bird had been depicted, it worked twenty-four hours a day attracting and bestowing those associations. The power seems to come from the associations that the phoenix possesses: this is a belief in the power of images rather than the power in tesserae.

The goats in the border at Antioch are positioned over a pair of beribboned wings. Both of these motifs do not come from traditional Roman or Byzantine iconography, rather, it was a motif that was depicted on Sasanian carpets and metalware. It is thus an example of artistic exchange and influence between the two empires. Little is known about what the motif signifies, let alone whether it had any magical or supernatural significance. Christine Kondoleon has argued that when ribbons were depicted as tied to animals (or 'beribboned') they held apotropaic and beneficial associations in Sasanian art, though she did not explain further.<sup>266</sup>

Two of the beliefs most closely associated with the phoenix may have been resurrection and renewal, but how might we better understand this power? If resurrection and renewal powers were sought, why could the Byzantines have not used imagery more explicitly and which did not require the use of creatures? In other words, depicting the phoenix to acquire these associations would not seem overtly Christian. Yet, it would not be correct to call this power 'magic' or 'pagan' either. It is not pagan because the Byzantines continued to incorporate this motif in their culture, suggesting the phoenix became Christianised. The use of this motif cannot be considered magical either because magic meant four specific things in Byzantium. Instead it is best to recognise this power as belonging to a broader, ambiguous supernatural realm. The phoenix may have been Christianised, but to evoke resurrection and renewal through the depiction of this creature might have been considered unorthodox and in danger of idolatry by conservative Christians. It might be said then, the line between the Byzantines' pagan heritage, magic and acceptable lines of behaviour within Christianity were very ambiguous.

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<sup>266</sup> Christine Kondoleon (ed.), *Antioch: The Lost Ancient City* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 137.



# 'IMMUNITY FROM DECAY': THE PEACOCK AT CARTHAGE

Just as images of the phoenix could be depicted and interpreted as attracting resurrection or renewal powers, so too might images of a terrestrial bird. A peacock is depicted on a fourth-century floor mosaic from a building known as the *Maison du Paon* in Carthage, Tunisia (fig. 29, cat. 9). In the centre of the room is a U-shaped niche and it creates a space for a peacock to be depicted by itself. The bird is shown confronting the viewer head-on and its tail is fully extended in the background. Either side of the peacock's legs is a rose bush. The image is framed by a larger U-shape that is filled with a trellis pattern and rosette motifs. Beyond this area, there are two *kantharoi* in the corners that have acanthus leaves spreading forth from the rim with rose-like flowers and tendrils at the tips. One of the many ways *kantharoi* are interpreted is as having supernatural associations, especially by Dunbabin who argued that they have magical and felicitous associations.<sup>267</sup> In pagan terms, the drinking vessel held links to the god Dionysos in Roman art, in Christian terms it symbolises one part of the Eucharist and salvation, while in secular contexts it has been argued to be a symbol of victory.<sup>268</sup>

Separating the semi-circle area is a laurel garland filled with fruits that grow in different seasons (olives, grapes, roses, corn). In the lowest register are four horses who are shown in profile (from a side-view) and each one eats plants and fruit from jewelled cylinders. Dunbabin has argued they eat the fruits of particular seasons, thereby they signify each of the four seasons.<sup>269</sup>

Arguably the mosaic at Carthage is an example of a floor mosaic that was designed or interpreted by contemporaries as an attempt to attract supernatural power through the depiction of a peacock. The Byzantines regarded the peacock as a creature with many extra-ordinary associations. Significantly, the bird was believed to be synonymous with immortality and renewal. As with the phoenix, Byzantine beliefs related to the peacock were present in society because of their Greco-Roman heritage, where the bird held a variety of associations. In Roman imperial art, when the empress

<sup>267</sup> Dunababin, *MRNA*, p. 164.

<sup>268</sup> For the *kantharoi*'s links to Dionysos, see Dunbabin, *MRNA*, p. 164. For *kantharoi* evoking the power of the blood in the Eucharist, see Sweetman, *The Mosaics of Roman Crete*, p. 65. As a secular symbol of triumph, see Dunbabin, 'Baiaurum Grata Voluptas', pp. 39-41.

<sup>269</sup> Dunbabin, *MRNA*, p. 104.

was depicted on her journey to the heavens she sat on the back of a peacock, as this was considered the animal of choice for an empress.<sup>270</sup> Peacocks were also depicted in Roman art as a symbol for the goddess Hera (as she put the eyes of her servant Argos into the tail of the peacock), in addition to accompanying the god Dionysos.<sup>271</sup> It was because of the association with these gods, particularly Dionysos, that the peacock came to be associated with immortality, while the apotheosis imagery encouraged connotations of renewal. This development is reflected in funeral sarcophagi, where peacocks became common iconographic elements from the second century AD. As objects where immortal themes were prevalent and encouraged, the sarcophagi illustrate the development of the peacock's links to resurrection and renewability.

From the beginning of the fourth century, images of peacocks were used to attract powers. Tales that peacocks were incorruptible probably enhanced the qualities the bird was believed to have. Writing in the fourth century, Augustine of Hippo took matters into his own hands and tested whether the bird was miraculous and he detailed the nature of the bird's skin.

For who if not God, the creator of all things, has granted to the flesh of the dead peacock immunity from decay? Although when I heard this it seemed incredible, it happened that at Carthage a roast peacock was served to me. I ordered as much meat as seemed good to be taken from its breast and kept. After a period of days in which any other roast meat would go bad, it was brought out and served without having the least offensive odour. It was put back again and after more than thirty days it was found as before, and again after a year it was the same except that its texture was somewhat more dry and shrunken.<sup>272</sup>

Augustine's tale of the incorruptible flesh must have increased the perceived capabilities and status of the peacock. The bird's actual visible characteristics seem to have enhanced its supposed links to immortality too. For example, George of Pisidia (*d.* c. 631-634) wrote that the peacock was not only a beautiful creature; he also noted the

<sup>270</sup> J. M. C. Toynbee, *Animals in Roman Life and Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1973), p. 251.

<sup>271</sup> The myth of Hera implanting the eyes of Argos into the tail of peacocks can be found in Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Βιβλιοθήκη* (*Bibliothēke*), 2, 6; Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Apollodori Bibliotheca: Ex Recognitione*, trans. by Immanuel Bekker (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1854), pp. 63-65.

<sup>272</sup> Quis enim nisi Deus creator omnium dedit carni pavonis mortui ne putresceret? Quod cum auditu incredibile videretur, evenit ut apud Carthaginem nobis cocta apponeretur haec avis, de cuius pectore pulparum quantum visum est decerpit servari iussimus. Quod post dierum tantum spatium quanto alia caro quaecumque cocta putresceret prolatur atque oblatum nihil nostrum offendit olfactum. Itemque repositum post dies amplius quam triginta idem quod erat inventum est, idemque post annum, nisi quod aliquantum corpulentiae siccioris et contractioris fuit. Augustine of Hippo, *De civitate Dei contra paganos*, 21. 4; Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, Vol. 7, pp. 14-16.

patterns on the bird's tail represent heavenly stars.<sup>273</sup> George's comment on the cosmic and divine characteristics of the peacock is in the same vein as his Roman predecessors, as Pliny the Elder (AD 23-79) noted how the peacock sheds its feathers in winter and regrew them in the spring.<sup>274</sup> Pliny thereby associated the bird with renewal and everlasting connotations. Christians might find the peacock acceptable as an allegory for the death and supposed resurrection of Jesus. Citizens still adhering to traditional Roman (pagan) beliefs might point to Hera and Dionysos. Whatever religions might lay claim to the peacock, it can be said that the peacock was perceived to have renewal and immortal associations in a number of different beliefs. Both the Pliny and the George of Pisidia texts allude to prevalent beliefs around the peacock and must have added extra significance to a bird that was already highly regarded. The literary evidence may point to a belief by which images of peacocks can be seen in terms of sympathetic magic. Depicting the peacock was thus considered a way of attracting the powers it possessed.

An additional reason why the peacock on the Carthage mosaic might be seen as imparting powers is because of the way the bird is depicted. In both Roman and Early Byzantine art, peacocks were most commonly depicted in profile and with their tails sweeping the ground; this is the case in the way the peacocks are depicted in the border of a building called the House of the Bird-Rinceau's upper level mosaic (fig. 30).<sup>275</sup> In addition, those birds were also commonly depicted facing another peacock or drinking from a fountain. But at Carthage the peacock is shown in a different, frontal manner. This is not the only instance of the peacock being depicted in this way in Byzantine floor mosaics, but they are far less numerous when compared to those shown from side-views. As Dunbabin has argued, when peacocks are shown by themselves and rendered in a unusual way, such as at Carthage, it is possible to interpret them as imparting beneficial powers to a building through a supernatural means.<sup>276</sup> Dunbabin considered the outspread tail had links to Dionysos because in Roman art, when the peacock was shown frontally, symbols of Dionysos were depicted around it, such as a *thyrsus* (Dionysos's staff), acanthus and ivy. Thus, in Roman terms, the peacock was only shown in this particular manner to evoke its associations with Dionysos. By the Early

<sup>273</sup> George of Pisidia, *Eἰσαγγελία* (*Exaemeron*), 1245-1292; PG 92, 1529-1532.

<sup>274</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, 10. 22; Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, Vol. 3, pp. 318-320.

<sup>275</sup> Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*, Vol. 1, p. 366.

<sup>276</sup> Dunbabin, *MRNA*, pp. 166-169.

Byzantine era, the specific Dionysiac associations may have been lost or replaced with Christian ones, but when shown in this way, the peacock could still evoke supernatural power rather than have a decorative role. Thus, because the Byzantines believed the peacock was associated with immortality, prosperity and fertility, it is possible to say the Byzantines believed that having this image on the floor, and depicted in this way, ensured those powers could be acquired for the building through the means of sympathetic magic.

The Carthage mosaic is not the only example of a peacock that can be seen as being depicted to attract its associations. Further mosaics might include the mosaic at Thysdrus (El Djem, modern Algeria), where a peacock faces the viewer head-on and it is accompanied by Erotes in a semi-circular niche. Similarly, at the House of Dionysos in Nea Paphos (Cyprus), a peacock is depicted in isolation within a square panel, again facing the viewer head-on (frontally). Both examples date to just before the Early Byzantine era, but they too have been taken as examples in which power was sought through the depiction of a peacock's iconography.<sup>277</sup>

It is uncertain whether all images of peacocks that are shown confronting the viewer head-on and in isolation can be seen in supernatural terms. In most cases, it is uncertain exactly what meaning lay behind the imagery of creatures in floor mosaics. For example, a sixth-century floor mosaic at Sabratha in Libya depicts two of the creatures discussed thus far in this chapter, a phoenix and a peacock, but it is not clear whether it is possible to interpret them as imparting supernatural powers. The floor mosaic comes from a basilica church that Prokopios described as being made during the reign of Justinian I, and as being beautiful and of great renown.<sup>278</sup> The nave at Sabratha takes up a large rectangular shape that extends from the entrance to the apse (fig. 31, cat. 70). Depicted at the bottom of the nave is foliage that spreads forth from an acanthus plant and which fills the rest of the mosaic. Birds and land animals are depicted sitting on the foliage. The design creates four medallion-like shapes that extend up the nave to the altar, each one containing the image shown by itself, in isolation. The

<sup>277</sup> Dunbabin, *MRNA*, p. 168. Michaelides, *Cypriot Mosaics*, no. 9, pp. 15-16.

<sup>278</sup> J. B. Ward-Perkins and R. G. Goodchild, 'The Christian Antiquities of Tripolitania', *Archaeologia*, Vol. 95 (1953), 1-82 (p. 12). Prokopios of Caesarea, *Περὶ κτισμάτων* (*De aedificiis*), 6, 4, 13; Prokopios, *Buildings*, Vol. 7, p. 376.

medallion closest to the apse contains an image of a peacock that faces the viewer head-on and its elaborate tail is extended and fills the entire medallion. Of the two medallions below, one shows a small crown amongst foliage, while the other depicts further birds. The medallion closest to the entrance contains an image of a phoenix, which stands on a rock and faces the viewer frontally, reminiscent of the example discussed earlier at Antioch.

Despite the frontal style in which the birds are depicted and despite the fact they are shown by themselves, it is not straight-forward to say that the birds were depicted to attract supernatural powers. That is one potential interpretation for the mosaic, and it is one that viewers may have come to. Some scholars do not see a supernatural function in the mosaic. Dunbabin refers to the mosaic when discussing how Christian culture appropriated the peacock from pagan culture.<sup>279</sup> Maguire is uncertain how the mosaic is to be interpreted and suggested instead that whatever the designer had in mind, the peacock and the phoenix have a significant part in signifying immortality and renewability.<sup>280</sup> Both Dunbabin and Maguire are hesitant to say whether the imagery on the mosaic was depicted in order to attract powers. But their conclusions are interesting and they have two implications. The first is that Dunbabin and Maguire are only concerned with what the designer intended; they do not acknowledge that the other viewers might interpret the imagery in a different way to the designer. The second implication is that Dunbabin and Maguire believe that for a mosaic to have supernatural function, the whole mosaic had to be designed in that way. In their view, the mosaic at Sabratha does not have a supernatural function unless the rest of the mosaic can be seen in the same terms. But why did supernatural imagery have to function as a whole? It is possible that viewers of the Sabratha mosaic might have interpreted the two birds as attempts to attract immortal powers, regardless of the crown and the birdcage in the other medallions.

The use of a peacock to attract powers once again illustrates the power of imagery in Early Byzantium. It implies that animals and creatures were one device in the Byzantine repertory that could be used to gain power. It was the peacock's associations and traits that led to the belief that possessing a depiction of this bird was a

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<sup>279</sup> Dunbabin, *MRNA*, p. 169.

<sup>280</sup> Maguire, *Earth and Ocean*, pp. 60-66.

way of attracting its associations. Two of those associations were immortality and renewal. This ultimately might say more about the Byzantines' fears and desires for eternal life in a beneficent afterlife (heaven) rather than a maleficent one (hell). The depiction of a peacock on a floor mosaic might be seen as an attempt to harness its powers, perhaps ensuring a long life for the building or salvation in an afterlife for those that used the building.

#### UNUSUAL DEPICTIONS: THE *ANGUIPEDE* AT ANTIGONEIA

Just as a mythical creature can be seen in supernatural terms at Antioch, so too might another example at Antigoneia, in modern Albania (fig. 32, cat. 63). This mosaic comes from a building with an unknown function but is thought by John Mitchell to have probably been a church and a space in which to bury the dead.<sup>281</sup> Mosaic covers the north and south apse areas, in addition to a transept area between them. The north apse depicts a *kantharos* with a vine leaf spreading forth. The southern apse depicts fishes and ivy leaves. There are inscriptions in the church naming individuals and donors such as Trygestos, Dorotheos, Nike, Alexandros, Agothekles and Philetos, all of whom sought salvation.<sup>282</sup>

However, it is the central area of the mosaic, the *bema*, that might be seen in supernatural terms. One of the four panels that make up the central area portrays a creature that is not common in floor mosaics (fig. 33). This figure is shown in a schematic style and has both human and animal features. It has a long elongated head reminiscent of a crocodile, whilst patterning is depicted on its long neck to indicate the creature has scaly skin. The creature's body is not easy to distinguish because of damage to the mosaic, but it might be portrayed wearing drapery. It holds up its left arm and its right arm hangs down loosely against the body. Below the drapery are two human-like legs and the figure wears sandals that are tied up to the knee.

Dhorka Dharmo has argued this creature is a dog-headed St Christopher because this was a local convention when portraying the saint in and around the surrounding

<sup>281</sup> Mitchell, 'Keeping the Demons Out of the House', pp. 297-299.

<sup>282</sup> Mitchell, 'Strategies for Salvation', pp. 268-270.

Macedonian area.<sup>283</sup> However, John Mitchell's suggestion that the creature is the *anguipede* is a better identification. The *anguipede* was a common depiction on magical gemstones, where it is shown as having the head of a chicken, the torso of a human and legs in the form of two serpents (fig. 34). It was usually depicted with a sword or whip in one hand and a shield in the other, with a Greek inscription ΙΑΩ to attract power (this inscription originally derived from the four-lettered name of the Hebrew God, YHWH in Latin and ΓΧΒΧ in Greek, but later came to be a generic magical word).<sup>284</sup> The figure was believed to bring good luck, remove obstacles, avert the Evil Eye and other demons.<sup>285</sup> This was a creature that people wanted on their side. I would agree with Mitchell's identification of it as the *anguipede* because comparisons between the creature on the mosaic and on magical objects bear a close resemblance, although there are some slight differences too.

Despite its hybrid and threatening appearance, the *anguipede* was considered by ancient cultures to be favourable and beneficial. Some secondary literature refers to it as a 'good' demon, others refer to it as a personification.<sup>286</sup> The *anguipede* was originally a motif used in ancient Iran, where it was considered a god with solar significance. The motif became appropriated by the Roman Empire, where it began to be used on magical gemstones.<sup>287</sup> Based on the context of the magical objects, it seems the creature was not so much perceived by the Romans as a 'god' with a cult following. Rather, the *anguipede* became a magical character, having more of a 'spirit' status than a god-like one. Much scholarship has mistakenly referred to this creature as 'Abraxas' because that is what is inscribed on many magical gemstones. However, as Campbell Bonner has argued, this was not the name of that creature: 'Abraxas' was considered a magical word to invoke power.<sup>288</sup>

The *anguipede* can also be found in magic spells. For example, in a fourth-century Egyptian spell that was designed to inflict harm on someone, the *anguipede* is

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<sup>283</sup> Dhorka Dhamo, 'Figura antropozoomorfe e mozaikut të Antigonesë', *Monumentet*, Vol. 21 (1981), 149-157 (pp. 155-57).

<sup>284</sup> For gemstones with depictions of the *anguipede*, see Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets*, pp. 123-139.

<sup>285</sup> Mitchell, 'Keeping the Demons Out of the House', p. 302. Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets*, pp. 123-139.

<sup>286</sup> A. A. Barb, 'Abraxas-Studien', *Hommages à W. Deonna* (Brussels: Latomus, 1957), pp. 67-86.

Carsten Colpe, 'Geister (Dämonen)', *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, Vol. 9 (1974), pp. 618-619.

<sup>287</sup> Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets*, pp. 127-128.

<sup>288</sup> Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets*, p. 123.

depicted near the end of the papyrus.<sup>289</sup> The creature is shown in the conventional manner, though in this depiction it holds a decapitated head. The magic user is instructed to use a bronze stylus to copy out the image, as well as magical names, on a thin metal sheet and smear bat's blood over it in order to make the spell work. Copying out the image and possessing the image of the *anguipede* was a vital part of the spell, presumably because this particular creature would be thought capable of carrying out the maleficent deed.

The *anguipede* might be seen as a further example of the ambiguous line between magic, pagan and Christian beliefs in Early Byzantium. The depiction of this creature on magical gemstones and in papyri spells might lead it to be labelled 'magical' or 'supernatural'. Yet the creature might also be thought to belong to a 'pagan' category since it belonged to an ancient Iranian culture where it was considered a god. Both of these attempts to categorise might say more about modern cultures as we often fail to differentiate between magic and pagan rituals, believing that on some level they are one and the same. To say that the *anguipede* was a piece of Christian culture would seem strange to us. Yet, the depiction of the creature alongside Christian acclamations of Christ's name, salvation and praising the one God on gemstones could suggest that creature became Christianised or, the more likely, that some Christians were not as orthodox as the Church Fathers would have liked and incorporated other beliefs alongside Christian ones.

Therefore, the use of the *anguipede* in what may have been a Christian building also raises the question of the status of that creature within Christian culture. It may suggest that some Christians did not mind its connotations and were not offended by having a depiction of it in a Christian building. Perhaps they even believed that the creature, with its non-Christian history, could be utilised for Christian purposes. Christian society did not stop believing in pagan figures and pagan culture overnight: much of the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries reflect a period when people were 'hedging their bets', using both pagan and Christian iconography and where lots of pagan culture could naturally be transformed into Christian themes.<sup>290</sup> The above suggestions

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<sup>289</sup> *PGM* XXXVI. 231-255; Preisendanz, Vol. 2, pp. 170-171 and Betz, pp. 274-275.

<sup>290</sup> Kurt Weitzmann, 'The Survival of Mythological Representations in Early Christian and Byzantine Art and their Impact on Christian Iconography', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 14 (1960), 45-68. Kurt



ultimately demonstrate a much broader, plural society of Early Byzantium than is generally portrayed. Christians did not just believe in Christian beings; they believed that non-Christian beings existed too. Some of the latter could be used and manipulated, while other beings were considered best left alone. The *anguipede* is thus a motif that breached three categories. In the end this may say more about our culture in the need to categorise things as 'magic', 'pagan' or 'Christian'. In terms of Early Byzantine culture, the labelling of this motif might not have seemed especially important. They perhaps regarded it as a supernatural motif, that fitted in somewhere between magic, pagan and Christianity.

So if this creature had links to magic and things that are supernatural in nature, why was it depicted within the design of a floor mosaic? Was it depicted at Antigoneia for a similar purpose in providing protection and beneficent assistance? John Mitchell has argued that the panel did indeed provide powers. Mitchell reached this interpretation through an examination of the panel and the other elements in the mosaic. Depicted below and around the *anguipede's* mouth is a black snake which Mitchell argued symbolises evil. The bird with a flower in its beak and the consecutive triangles in the background were interpreted as a dove carrying an olive branch and a palm tree, signifying bliss and paradise. Mitchell thus saw the panel as depicting the *anguipede* as a force for good and as being victorious over the forces of evil, guiding Christian souls to everlasting life.<sup>291</sup> His argument was that the panel had both protective and beneficial functions. Its protective role was in warding off evil threats. In his view, because the *anguipede* had associations in fighting off other demons, it meant that creature had the same function in the floor mosaic in deflecting evil, here represented by the snake. This meant that the *anguipede* removed obstacles and left the donors named in the inscriptions free to acquire salvation in Heaven.

Mitchell's reading of the mosaic was very precise and it was an attempt to find the significance of what the designer or patron intended by the use of the panel. It might be considered whether the contemporary viewer could reach the same conclusion.

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Weitzmann, 'Introduction', in *Age of Spirituality: Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1979), pp. xix-xxvi. Jaś Elsner, *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph: the Art of the Roman Empire AD 100-450* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 11-14.

<sup>291</sup> Mitchell, 'Keeping the Demons Out of the House', pp. 302-304.

Would others have contemplated on the image? Because the *anguipede* was depicted in other supernatural media, the use of it on the floor at Antigoneia might suggest it had a supernatural function there too. The mosaic had that function through the depiction of a mythological-like creature.

The use of the *anguipede* is unusual in surviving floor mosaics. It might be said that the unusualness of the image catches our, the modern viewer's, attention and from there we might contemplate whether the mosaic had a supernatural function. Dunbabin first put this view forward and she argued it was useful when a mosaic historian tries to determine whether a mosaic had a supernatural function.<sup>292</sup> She stated that if an image is not represented frequently, then when it is depicted it contains an ulterior motive. It could be argued that this is problematic in terms of survival: there could have been plenty more depictions of the *anguipede* in floor mosaics but they have not been uncovered yet or were destroyed at some point. Yet the survival of such images leads us, as modern viewers, to think of the image as unusual, and for that reason, one interpretation that can be considered is whether that image did have a supernatural function. Maguire used the same approach. When looking at unusual and unique symbols, he compared them to the motifs on magical objects to show they could be seen in supernatural terms.<sup>293</sup>

These interpretations support my argument. If an image is uncommon in a floor mosaic, then it does suggest the image was depicted with an ulterior motive, and probably has some significance for the patron or designer. That is not to say that the image had a supernatural function, but it is one interpretation that can be explored. This, I argue, can be seen with the example at Antigoneia. Because the image is unusual in surviving floor mosaics, and because it is possible to interpret the *anguipede* as having supernatural links, it seems the mosaic at Antigoneia probably had a supernatural function. That creature was perceived to impart powers to the floor and the building. Whether that creature attained salvation for those named in the inscriptions, as Mitchell suggested, is not so clear. But it might be said, based on the creature's links to supernatural power, that the motif was deliberately deployed in order to provide powers.

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<sup>292</sup> Dunbabin, *MRNA*, p. 141. Dunbabin, 'Baiaurum Grata Voluptas', p. 46.

<sup>293</sup> Maguire, 'Magic and Geometry', p. 265.

## GOOD FORTUNE THROUGH HORSES AND CHARIOTS AT THUGGA

In this section I will argue that images of horses and chariot scenes were depicted to attract power through the association of horses with good fortune. I will demonstrate this through an examination of floor mosaics from secular buildings in Thugga (also known as Dougga) in modern Tunisia. Horses were associated with victory, prowess and strength because of how they were used in chariot races. I argue, in some circumstances, having images of horses on floor mosaics was not just a way of a patron demonstrating their passion for chariot races; it was also a means of gaining good fortune. I will argue that by depicting the horses by themselves within a framed space, depicting them with victory insignia and accompanying the images with inscriptions of the horses' names, the owners attempted to attract their perceived victorious connotations.

Chariot racing was an activity with many links to magic and the supernatural realm. It was a hugely popular Byzantine form of entertainment until the seventh century, at which point some Christians discouraged others from taking an interest in it and endeavoured to make the games a ceremonial matter, rather than entertainment.<sup>294</sup> Races were formed of four teams who competed against each other. Tertullian described how there used to be just two teams made up of those belonging to the White and Red factions, symbolising Winter and Summer.<sup>295</sup> But during the Roman Empire these factions expanded to four teams belonging to either Blue, Green, White or Red. The charioteers would wear the colour of the faction they were representing. The practice of racing consisted of four horses being driven by a charioteer at the helm of a *quadriga* (a four-wheeled cart). The races took place in hippodromes, which could be found across the Empire. It is important not to underestimate the significance of chariot racing in Early Byzantium. These competitions were taken very seriously by their supporters who chose (or belonged to) a certain faction. They provoked passion and caused deep, violent rivalries amongst factions and supporters, much in the way modern sports do.<sup>296</sup> Races had an added importance to fans because bets were often placed on which faction

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<sup>294</sup> Alan Cameron, *Circus Factions: Blues and Greens at Rome and Byzantium* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 297. Also see Alan Cameron, *Porphyrius: the Charioteer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).

<sup>295</sup> Tertullian, *De spectaculis*, 9; *PL* 1, 641-642.

<sup>296</sup> Antony Eastmond, 'The Hippodrome of Constantinople and the Last Chariot Race', in *After the Games: Stadia in Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, ed. by Jerzy J. Kierkuć and Geraint John (London: Soane Gallery, 2012), 48-56 (p. 51).

might win, thereby increasing tensions.<sup>297</sup> With pressure on the charioteer to win races and with the knowledge that money was being placed on the outcomes, it is not surprising that charioteers and fans alike sought supernatural assistance to win.

Charioteers, fans and even the magistrates who paid for the races consulted magicians in the hope they could use supernatural means to affect the outcome of a race in the user's favour. Sometimes a magician was known to offer a package to clients in which not only would their wish be granted, but it would ensure that the client's rivals would suffer and that they could not interfere with the spell.<sup>298</sup> In Early Byzantium, as well as seeking magicians, the charioteers were known to be practicing magicians themselves.<sup>299</sup>

Luck was sought at the races through many supernatural means. The charioteers were obliged to see magicians, wear certain lucky clothes and perform certain rituals in order to win races. Even if the charioteer did not want to do these acts, they had to at least be seen to do them to put fans' minds at ease. The charioteers might wear magical gemstones and phylacteries that had charms and prayers written upon them.<sup>300</sup> Sleeves were designed especially for them in order to increase their good fortune and the designs also portrayed the faction as victorious. The horses themselves were given names with victory associations, such as "Victory-bearer" or "Prophet".<sup>301</sup> There was also a sinister side in the use of supernatural powers. Rival factions plotted against each other and there are surviving spells and curse tablets that were buried in hippodromes at the gates and turning posts, the most dangerous parts of the track and places considered most effective in making a curse work.<sup>302</sup>

The horses themselves were understood to play a vital part to attract supernatural power. Horses' hooves could be engraved with *characteres* and other symbols, while wolves' teeth, among other charms, could be hung around their necks to

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<sup>297</sup> Florent Heintz, 'Magic Tablets and the Games at Antioch', in *Antioch: The Lost Ancient City*, ed. by Christine Kondoleon (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 167.

<sup>298</sup> Heintz, 'Magic Tablets and the Games at Antioch', p. 166.

<sup>299</sup> Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World*, p. 296.

<sup>300</sup> Heintz, 'Magic Tablets and the Games at Antioch', p. 167.

<sup>301</sup> Heintz, 'Magic Tablets and the Games at Antioch', p. 167.

<sup>302</sup> Heintz, 'Magic Tablets and the Games at Antioch', p. 167.

acquire more luck.<sup>303</sup> In addition, it seems the haunches of horses were painted with lucky symbols to attract further power and the horses were draped in special fabrics for the same purpose. Yet, just as horses might be decorated and fitted for lucky purposes, they could also be on the receiving end of sinister wishes too. If the horse could not race, then the charioteer could not win. The texts on curse tablets illustrate this desire to harm the animals; one curse excavated at a hippodrome at Antioch asked that the horses of the Blue faction be cursed and overturned.<sup>304</sup> In addition, surviving magical gemstones depict decapitated horses, as this was the fate wished on the horse of a rival faction.<sup>305</sup> In a bid to offer protection against curses and other sinister wishes, the horses (and charioteers) had phylacteries hung from them and these animals were sprinkled with liquids and perfumes.<sup>306</sup>

Because of these connections between chariot racing and the supernatural realm, some images of racing horses might be considered in supernatural terms. The first example I will discuss is a mid-fourth century mosaic panel that was excavated within an unidentifiable building at Thugga (fig. 35, cat. 10). It shows a male charioteer with a body that faces the viewer head-on while his head turns slightly to the side. He wears a green tunic that has straps around the arms and a fastening device over his torso. He carries a palm leaf in one hand and rests his arm against his hip. His other hand is extended and he holds both a crown and a whip. To the side of the image is a Latin inscription that translates as ‘Eros, all by yourself’.<sup>307</sup> The charioteer is depicted in the *quadriga* and led by horses, only three of which have survived. The two horses in the centre are probably those referred to by name, labelled Amandus and Frunitus respectively.<sup>308</sup> The word Amandus derives from two Latin words, the first is a gerundive form of *amo*, meaning to love; the second also derives from *amando*, meaning to send away or to relegate.<sup>309</sup> Thus the horse labelled Amandus may translate as something like ‘Love’ or ‘Away’. The term Frunitus derives from *fruniscor*, meaning

<sup>303</sup> One spell to gain victory in the races asks that *characteres* be carved on the horse’s hooves. *PGM* VII. 385-89; Preisendanz, Vol. 2, p. 17 and Betz, p. 128.

<sup>304</sup> Heintz, ‘Magic Tablets and the Games at Antioch’, p. 167.

<sup>305</sup> Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets*, pp. 111-114.

<sup>306</sup> Heintz, ‘Magic Tablets and the Games at Antioch’, p. 167.

<sup>307</sup> EROS / OMNIA PER TE.

<sup>308</sup> AMANDVS and FRVNITVS.

<sup>309</sup> For ‘amandus’ as relating to ‘amo’ see Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, p. 107. For ‘amandus’ as a form of ‘amando’ see Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, p. 100.

to have enjoyment.<sup>310</sup> Each horse is depicted with a different vegetable or plant attached to its ear; ivy is depicted on Amandus, millet is shown on Frunitus and the horse on the far right is depicted with vine leaves. In the top right corner, portrayed at a diagonal perspective, are five arched openings with grilles, indicating the gates of a hippodrome and reinforcing that the scene depicts a charioteer.

The panel could be interpreted in a number of ways. It might be seen as a commemorative image of a victorious charioteer who rode for the Green faction. Alternatively, 'Eros' might not be the name of the charioteer but a personification of love. In a passage in the *Phaedrus*, Plato used a charioteer as an allegory for love.<sup>311</sup> He described the charioteer driving a chariot as the human soul seeking truth and wisdom, while in front the two horses represented the contrasting characters in life; one horse was the positive part of nature, rationality and reason, while the other horse represented irrational passions, appetites and lust. Plato used the allegory to portray love as divine madness. There are other instances where love (*eros*) was taken as an allegory. There are epigrams in the *Greek Anthology* in which it was fairly commonplace to refer to Eros as a helmsman guiding the soul over the sea of desire.<sup>312</sup> With this in mind, the charioteer at Thugga and its inscription ("Eros, all by yourself") might have been interpreted as love guiding the soul to its destination. Alternatively, it is possible the inscription is more literal and refers to a charioteer named Eros.<sup>313</sup>

Another interpretation of the imagery on the panel is that it was a way of acquiring good fortune. The inclusion of ivy, millet and vine leaves on the horses themselves might be taken as an attempt to gain beneficial powers. Dunbabin has argued that the vegetation on the animals represents just some of the good luck totems that were hung on horses. She added that the inclusion of the vegetation indicates that the panel itself was designed to attract luck.<sup>314</sup> Dunbabin argued the ivy held

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<sup>310</sup> Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, p. 785.

<sup>311</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, 246a-254e; Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. by C. J. Rowe, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1988), pp. 60-77.

<sup>312</sup> *Anthologia Graeca*, 5, 140; W. R. Paton (ed.), *The Greek Anthology*, Vol. 1, Loeb (London: William Heinemann, 1916), p. 194. *Anthologia Graeca*, 5, 155; Paton, *The Greek Anthology*, Vol. 1, p. 202. *Anthologia Graeca*, 12, 157; Paton, *The Greek Anthology*, Vol. 4, Loeb (London: William Heinemann, 1963), p. 362. *Anthologia Graeca*, 12, 47; Paton, *The Greek Anthology*, Vol. 4, p. 302.

<sup>313</sup> Dunbabin, *MRNA*, p. 97.

<sup>314</sup> For alternative interpretation of the vegetation see Alfred Merlin and Louis Poinssot, 'Factions du cirque et Saisons sur des mosaïques de Tunisie', *Revue Archéologique*, Vol. 2 (1949), 732-745 (pp. 732-738).

associations of good fortune and prosperity, whilst in North Africa millet was regarded as apotropaic and lucky, as can be seen when it is depicted on thresholds.<sup>315</sup> Dunbabin also regarded the vine leaves as a protective symbol because that type of vegetation is depicted on thresholds, suggesting that vine leaves were regarded as appropriate for this perilous area of a building.<sup>316</sup> For Dunbabin then, the floral attire on the horses shows them as victorious and as being cloaked in beneficial and protective symbols. The combination of the named individual and the floral attributes is not an attempt to honour the charioteer; it is an image of victory that sought to bring good fortune to the house and its inhabitants.<sup>317</sup> In this example, and in others, the images do not just portray a charioteer and his horses; they are depicted as triumphant through iconography, such as the millet or the crown in the charioteer's hand. The inclusion of this suggests that the mosaic might have been an attempt to attract good fortune.

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This chapter has argued that creatures, whether birds, animals or mythological beasts, were one category that could be depicted in Early Byzantine floor mosaics in order to attract powers. Byzantines portrayed creatures in order to attract their physical attributes or the powers associated with them. This might be called supernatural power because the process by which the Byzantines believed they could acquire these powers was not a terrestrial one. Rather, it was a belief in the power of imagery and sympathetic magic. The potency of the mosaics came from the images rather than the cubes of tesserae. The associations and qualities of a creature were seen to be present in the image of that creature. They believed those qualities could be transferred to a person's benefit or to the building through visual means. That transference was a supernatural process, one that exceeded the laws of the terrestrial world. The animal or creature's associations might seem quite terrestrial (their speed, their beauty), but the process by which the Byzantines sought to attract these was through supernatural means.

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<sup>315</sup> Dunbabin, *MRNA*, p. 164, 170-172.

<sup>316</sup> Dunbabin, 'Baiaurum Grata Voluptas', p. 40.

<sup>317</sup> Dunbabin, *MRNA*, pp. 97-98, 103.

I have provided detailed examples in which images of creatures depicted in floor mosaics can be viewed in supernatural terms. In examining the Antioch phoenix I have shown how it had immortal associations and the use of this motif on the mosaic may reflect an attempt to attract those associations to it. I also argued that peacocks held immortal associations when they were depicted by themselves and shown confronting the viewer head-on. I argued that a mosaic at Antigoneia depicting an *anguipede* was an attempt to attract powers. I was uncertain as to whether the power sought was protective or beneficial, but I illustrated that the motif is one usually found on other magical media. Consequently its inclusion in what may have been a Christian building suggests some supernatural role. The rarity of the image suggests that the mosaic had specific purposes; one of those may have been a supernatural function. In addition, I suggested that images of horses in chariot races might be seen as attempts to attain good fortune. The depiction of creatures to attract powers in floor mosaics tells us that it was not the mosaic itself that was deemed powerful; it was the images that were depicted on the mosaic that were potent. Once again, this is reflective of Byzantine beliefs in the power of imagery and the imagery's capabilities of intervening in the terrestrial world.



## CHAPTER THREE

### THE POWER OF PERSONIFICATIONS

This chapter moves to a third type of image used in floor mosaics, that of personifications. It will demonstrate that images of these figures could be depicted in floor mosaics to attract supernatural powers. Within my database, twenty-one out of seventy-six entries were included because their power could have derived through the inclusion of personifications. In this chapter I will discuss six of these twenty-one entries, which come from Kourion, Antioch, Nebo, Narlidja, Sepphoris and Kos. The original intention of this chapter was to explore whether the iconography of humans could be seen in supernatural terms, but, as will be shown, the majority of human representations cannot be understood in those terms. Rather, in this chapter I argue that one particular type of imagery that resembles the human form was used to attract powers: personifications. I will explain why saints and Christian holy figures, characters that were thought capable of attracting powers in other media, were not depicted in floor mosaics. I then present five case studies that demonstrate how personifications could be depicted as an alternative form of imagery in acquiring powers for a building.

#### THE DEPICTION OF HUMANS IN FLOOR MOSAICS

Before showing how personifications might be depicted to attract powers, I will first explain why most images of humans cannot be seen in the same terms. An example from the upper nave of the Church of the Holy Martyrs Lot and Prokopios at Nebo (modern Khirbet al-Mukhayat, Jordan) illustrates the way in which most humans are depicted.<sup>318</sup> The sixth-century mosaic consists of a grid of vine leaves that form medallion shapes (fig. 36). An inscription placed before the altar states that the mosaic of the church was built in the year 557 under the priest Barichas and lists the names of those who paid for the building. An additional inscription just before the area under discussion quotes Psalm 51:21 in offering calves to God and it also asks for mercy for an individual named Epiphania.<sup>319</sup> Within the medallions are a number of images of humans participating in different activities. Each one is quite representative of how humans are portrayed in other Byzantine mosaics.

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<sup>318</sup> Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan*, pp. 164-165.

<sup>319</sup> Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan*, pp. 164-165.

One way in which humans are depicted can be seen in two of the lower right medallions at Nebo. A man is shown hunting; he faces a four-legged animal and thrusts a spear into the creature's chest. Hunting was a common theme in Early Byzantine floor mosaics, where men were portrayed killing animals, whether for pleasure or for food. In rarer instances, the animal might be shown killing the human. If not in the act of slaughter, humans could also be depicted taming animals or using them to their advantage. For example, Nebo's nave has two medallions showing a man leading (or pulling) a donkey that carries a large basket of fruit attached to the saddle.

Other floor mosaic imagery may show humans that made their living from the earth. Nebo's mosaic has one medallion depicting a man cutting grapes from a vine. In the same category, human figures could be shown sowing the earth, carrying baskets of fruit, making wine or fishing. These show what must have been daily activities for many people. In addition, some men and women in mosaics were depicted in recreational activities: at Nebo, one medallion portrays a man playing an instrument, which may be a flute. All of the categories above do not seem to be overt attempts to attract supernatural powers, not on their own at least. If such images were combined with another piece of supernatural iconography, depicted on a threshold, or used in conjunction with a supernatural inscription, then they could be seen as attempts to attract prosperity and beneficial powers. But the way these categories are depicted in this mosaic do not suggest a desire for supernatural power. Instead, they convey activities of the earth and for Christians they could represent God's creation.<sup>320</sup>

Deities were depicted in the form of men and women and this needs to be acknowledged here. Images of gods, goddesses and mythological characters can be found in Early Byzantine floor mosaics, but it is uncertain whether these characters were depicted for supernatural purposes. Images of deities were shown in human form and, as might be expected, they were depicted in secular buildings rather than religious ones, as mosaics laid in newly erected temples were very rare after the fourth century.<sup>321</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> Maguire, *Earth and Ocean*, p. 48.

<sup>321</sup> Emperor Theodosios I tried to prevent citizens from going to temples and for pagans to sacrifice at those locations. *Codex Theodosianus*, 16.10.7-16; Mommsen *CT*, pp. 899-902 and Pharr *CT*, pp. 473-474. Also see Garth Fowden, 'Bishops and Temples in the Eastern Roman Empire A.D. 320-435', *Journal of Theological Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (1978), 53-78. K. W. Harl, 'Sacrifice and Pagan Belief in Fifth- and Sixth-Century Byzantium', *Past & Present*, No. 128 (1990), 7-27 (pp. 7-8).

Images of gods such as Dionysos, Aphrodite and Eros were particularly popular in mosaic imagery. To give just one example, a fourth-century mosaic at Sheikh Zoweid in north-east Egypt portrays Dionysos, Silenos, Eros, Herakles, Pan, among other mythological characters such as maenads and dancers (fig. 37, cat. 13).<sup>322</sup> As can be seen, it might be said that pagan imagery and pagan culture was present in Early Byzantium despite an increasingly powerful Christian movement. Eunice and Henry Maguire have argued that in other media the pagan gods could be depicted to attract powers through a supernatural means.<sup>323</sup> They suggested that deities were depicted on objects to attract their qualities: this was not heretical because the images were not viewed in a religious context. Instead, the pagan gods were viewed allegorically. There is some basis for the Maguires' argument as those deities could be seen as attempts to attract their associations through an allegorical means. We can see this when images of the gods were shown by themselves and within a framed space. For example, it has been argued that images of the titan sea god Okeanos were depicted on Roman threshold mosaics to provide protective powers. Dunbabin has argued that the image was powerful because accompanying inscriptions suggest the eyes of Okeanos could repel Envy; the power came from the associations of the eyes rather than his godly status.<sup>324</sup>

It seems for the most part that these deities were not depicted in floor mosaics to gain their associations. In most Early Byzantine floor mosaics, mythical characters are generally shown in *tableaux* (or scenes) rather than as individuals. The significance of the gods being shown in *tableaux* is important to note because that form of imagery tends to be used to evoke a story and make the image easier to relate to in everyday life. Traditionally, art historians have regarded scenes as images that are to be contemplated.<sup>325</sup> Viewers are invited to think of the significance or outcome of the story

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<sup>322</sup> Ovadiah and Ovadiah, *Hellenistic, Roman and Early Byzantine Pavements*, no. 69, pp. 51-52. Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*, Vol. 1, p. 73. Russell, *The Mosaic Inscriptions of Anemurium*, p. 46. Asher Ovadiah et al., 'The Mosaic Pavements of Sheikh Zouède in Northern Sinai', in *Tesserae: Festschrift für Josef Engemann* (Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1991), 181-191. Marek T. Olszewski, 'Mauvais œil et protection contre l'envie dans la mosaïque de Cheikh Zouède au Sinaï (IV<sup>e</sup> -V<sup>e</sup> siècle)', in *La Mosaïque gréco-romaine VIII: Actes du VIII<sup>ème</sup> Colloque International pour L'étude de la mosaïque antique et médiévale*, ed. by Daniel Paunier and Christophe Schmidt, Vol. 2 (Lausanne: Cahiers d'archéologie Romande, 2001), 276-301. Marek T. Olszewski, 'La mosaïque de «style naïf» de Cheikh Zouède au Sinaï', *Archeologia*, Vol. 53 (2002), 45-61.

<sup>323</sup> Dauterman Maguire et al., *Art and Holy Powers*, p. 16.

<sup>324</sup> Dunbabin, *MRNA*, pp. 149-154.

<sup>325</sup> Such a view is especially prevalent in studies that date from after the 'Renaissance'. For example, R. H. Fuchs, *Dutch Painting* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1978).

in the image and may (or may not) learn a moral message from it, which could have been important in cultures where many citizens were illiterate. The contemplation is important and it suggests something of the way mosaics might have been interacted with. Supernatural inscriptions do not accompany the majority of scenes with pagan figures, nor are they depicted on threshold areas. These factors do not point to the pagan scenes as having supernatural functions. For the most part, mythical and pagan scenes in floor mosaics can be seen as illustrating stories that were known and read by the Byzantines, as this was part of their cultural heritage.<sup>326</sup> Such scenes were a way for a patron to demonstrate their education and how cultured they were, an acquired skill known as *paideia*.<sup>327</sup> Mythical scenes were popularly depicted in secular buildings and this suggests that for the most part, pagan themes were acceptable in society. Some Christians might have disagreed, but the popularity of myths in Byzantine mosaics is a reflection of Byzantine culture still engaging with pagan culture. During this period Byzantine education was still based on Roman precedents, which meant mythology and classical prose were taught. As societies became more Christian, mythology was treated as culture rather than being historically accurate.<sup>328</sup> With this in mind, it should not be surprising that mythological scenes are depicted in floor mosaics and this reflects the Byzantine cultural heritage rather than attempts to attract power.

One last category that features human representations in floor mosaics includes images of donors, who could have themselves portrayed in the design of a mosaic. Such depictions are not common. Whether they were represented to attract power is not clear. An example comes from the church of Kosmas and Damian at Gerasa (modern Jerash) in Jordan, where one individual is labelled Theodore and he swings a censer, and another is labelled Georgia, shown in an *orans* pose with her two arms raised in the air, in prayer.<sup>329</sup> Accompanying the images is an inscription reminding worshippers of who had originally paid for the mosaic and asking for salvation, which might be taken as an attempt to attract supernatural powers. Similar to the purpose of inscriptions, these donor images were a way of ensuring that fellow churchgoers would pray for them, so

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<sup>326</sup> Bowersock, *Mosaics as History*, pp. 31-63.

<sup>327</sup> For example, see Elsner, *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph*, pp. 106-113.

<sup>328</sup> Anthanasios Markopoulos, 'Education', in *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies*, ed. by Elizabeth Jeffreys et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 785-795.

<sup>329</sup> Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan*, pp. 288-289, figs. 507-509.

that the donors could have a good afterlife in heaven. They were a permanent reminder to God of their devotion so that He might grant them salvation.

## THE LACK OF CHRISTIAN FIGURES

The categories I listed in the previous section describe iconography that took the form of humans. What is more intriguing in floor mosaics is the notable absence of Christian figures, by which I mean characters from the New Testament. There were no images of Jesus, the Virgin Mary, angels, saints or holy figures (those who had carried out holy acts, but had not been deified).<sup>330</sup> Some figures from the Old Testament were depicted in both churches and synagogues in the fourth and fifth centuries, most notably Jonah and the Sacrifice of Isaac.<sup>331</sup> But the absence of distinctive Christian characters is significant because in other media those figures were depicted with great frequency, whether on combs, bracelets, icons, gemstones or wall mosaics. When Christian figures were depicted on personal items rather than public ones, modern scholarship has regarded this as signalling attempts to attract power and blessings. For example, Gary Vikan argued that bracelets with various depictions from the New Testament were designed to provide the wearer with protective powers and a sense of comfort.<sup>332</sup> Furthermore, Henry Maguire has argued the popularity of saints in Early Byzantine art is because they were perceived as providing continual protective powers against demonic threats.<sup>333</sup> If Christian figures were depicted in floors a similar argument could be made.

The absence of Christian figures in floors is not explained in Byzantine sources. But an examination of other texts suggests it was probably considered disrespectful to walk over such images. For example, according to canon law, the Byzantines were not supposed to depict crosses on the floor, as the edict from 692 says that would dishonour Christ.<sup>334</sup> The edicts do not mention whether it was the cross on the floor that

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<sup>330</sup> One floor mosaic at Hinton St Mary in Late Antique Britain includes an image of Christ. But since that province lay outside the boundaries of this thesis, I have not included it in my study. For this mosaic see J. M. C. Toynbee, 'A New Roman Mosaic Pavement Found in Dorset', *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 64 (1964), 7-14. Susan Pearce, 'The Hinton St Mary Mosaic: Christ or Emperor?', *Britannia*, Vol. 39 (2008), 193-218. Also, see the journal *Mosaic*, Vol. 40 (2013), which is dedicated to the Hinton St Mary mosaic.

<sup>331</sup> Hachlili, *Ancient Mosaic Pavements*, pp. 57-96.

<sup>332</sup> Vikan, 'Two Byzantine Amuletic Armbands', pp. 35-51.

<sup>333</sup> Maguire, *The Icons of their Bodies*, p. 118.

<sup>334</sup> See footnotes 181 and 182.

dishonoured Christ, or the act of people walking on the image that would disrespect Christ. Other texts also point to a belief that the Byzantines were conscientious and aware of what they walked over: certain things were appropriate for floors. This point was made in the *Life of Porphyrios*, when Mark the Deacon described the fifth-century Gaza cathedral as reusing marble revetment that had previously been used on a temple dedicated to Zeus.<sup>335</sup> Mark described the reused marble as being laid in front of the church so that it would be trodden over by men, women, dogs, cattle and pigs. He implied that the marble was purposely laid there so that it would be trodden upon. This suggestion infers the marble was a sign of a rival belief; being able to walk over it was a way of suppressing or being victorious over it (and what it signified). It can only be speculated as to why the Byzantines found walking over certain images so offensive. It could be the idea of such a potent image getting dirty from footwear or animals' feet. Alternatively, it could be a heretical matter. Having an image of a reputable figure beneath a person as they walk over it or stand over it implies passivity on the image's part. To walk over an image implies some degree of control or power over the person depicted in the image. To trample over something is a sign of victory, and in Christian terms, that could be interpreted as a triumph over evil.<sup>336</sup> There are passages in the Bible that discuss the significance of trampling. To take just one example, Psalm 91 says that when the believer takes refuge in God then He will take care of them: when the believer treads on a lion or snake, then these creatures will be trampled under the feet of the believer into nothingness. Returning to Christian figures, it could be argued it was deemed sacrilegious to walk over the Christian image because it might offend the depicted person, or show a lack of respect for the image and what it stood for.

## PERSONIFICATIONS; THE NEW SAINTS

I argue that personifications were depicted in floor mosaics as an alternative to Christian figures. A personification is defined as an abstract concept that is represented in human form.<sup>337</sup> In Early Byzantium, rivers, winds, seasons, cities or even things such as health or education could be depicted as human figures. Most scholarship regards

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<sup>335</sup> Mark the Deacon, *Βίος του αγίου Πορφυρίου, Επισκόπος Γαζης*, 76; Mark the Deacon, *Vie de Porphyre: Évêque de Gaza*, trans. by Henri Grégoire et M. A. Kugener (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1930), pp. 60-61.

<sup>336</sup> 1 Corinthians 15: 24-28; Ephesians. 2: 4-10; Colossians 2: 11-15.

<sup>337</sup> Emma Stafford and Judith Herrin (eds), *Personification in the Greek World: from Antiquity to Byzantium* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p. xix.

personifications in allegorical terms; as images that represent another meaning. However, in certain circumstances, it was believed that personifications could attract the quality or concept that the figure represents. Having a personification image was an alternative to representing Christian holy figures, and the designers of mosaics were aware of this. As with other categories of images in this thesis, when personifications were viewed in sympathetic magic terms, those images were regarded as a means of acquiring power. The reason why this can be called 'supernatural power' is because this is a belief that the abstract quality of the personification could be transferred to people or to buildings. This process is one that transcends the terrestrial world and it relies on the laws of physics being suspended; this is a belief in a supernatural dimension. The power of personifications was not just a belief in quasi-religious figures; it was a belief in the power of imagery and in sympathetic magic.

That personifications had supernatural functions has been implicitly raised in scholarship. For example, Maguire and others have suggested that when depicted on textiles, personifications bestowed their qualities onto the wearer.<sup>338</sup> *Ge*, a personification of Earth, can be found on many surviving textile fragments where she is portrayed with fruit and flower attributes. She is shown with the kinds of objects that the earth produces. By depicting her in such a positive and productive manner, scholars have argued that she was portrayed in order to attract the bounty she represents, and thus as powerful.

It is plausible that personifications had such a role in some floor mosaics. I am going to demonstrate this through an examination of floor mosaics that come from Kourion, Antioch, Narlidja, Sepphoris and Kos. In addition, a series of examples will be cited that come from both religious and secular settings which will show that supernatural functions were sought at all levels of society and in all religious and secular contexts. I will begin by expanding upon how and why personifications were regarded as a means of acquiring power.

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<sup>338</sup> Dauterman Maguire et al., *Art and Holy Powers*, pp. 13-14. Henry Maguire, 'The Mantle of Earth', *Illinois Classical Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (1987), 221-228 (p. 228). Maguire, 'Garments Pleasing to God', pp. 215-224. Liz James, 'Good Luck and Good Fortune to the Queen of Cities: Empresses and Tyches in Byzantium', in *Personification in the Greek World: From Antiquity to Byzantium*, ed. by Emma Stafford and Judith Herrin (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 293-307 (p. 297).

The Byzantines' belief that images of personifications could attract what they represented was a continuation of Greco-Roman beliefs. In antiquity, personifications had a quasi-religious status. For example, when referring to the numerous Virtues, Cicero (106-43 BC) encouraged belief in personifications, saying they had an uplifting effect upon a person.<sup>339</sup> Yet this view was not shared by all Romans, as Pliny the Elder (23-79 AD) described such beliefs as nonsense in his *Natural History*.<sup>340</sup> There was no obligation to believe in personifications in society; it was an individual's choice as to whether they wanted to include them in a personal pantheon. There are many examples of Romans regarding those figures not just as abstract concepts, but as real entities whose qualities could be harnessed. Sculptures were carved of them and temples were dedicated to them, such as the one in Alexandria that the fourth-century writer Libanios described as the most magnificent in the Greek world.<sup>341</sup> For those who did believe in them, personifications were secondary deities that did not feature in myths. Rather, they were deemed closer to spirits than gods and goddesses.<sup>342</sup>

If that was the Greco-Roman view, how did the Early Byzantines regard them? How did these figures fit into a world that was increasingly becoming Christian? Did they contradict beliefs? Were they regarded as pagan or heretical? Personifications might have had a pagan stigma attached to them but this did not prevent them from continuing to be depicted in Early Byzantium. They were portrayed on coins, textiles, floor mosaics, among numerous other objects. It is likely that personifications continued in society because Early Byzantium was a continuation of the Roman Empire. One argument that has been put forward is that the figures were incorporated into Christian culture because they could be seen in allegorical terms, making them acceptable and as traits given by God.<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>339</sup> Cicero, *De legibus*, 2, 11, 28; Cicero, *De re publica, de legibus*, trans. by Clinton Walker Keyes, Loeb (London: William Heinemann, 1928), p. 404.

<sup>340</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historiae*, 2, 5, 14-15; Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, Vol. 1, p. 178.

<sup>341</sup> Libanios, *Progymnasmata* R IV, 1114; Libanios, *Progymnasmata*, trans. by Richard Foerster, Vol. 8 (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1963), p. 530.

<sup>342</sup> Kathleen J. Shelton, 'Imperial Tyches', *Gesta*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (1979), 27-38 (p. 29). J. M. C. Toynbee, 'Roma and Constantinopolis in Late Antique Art from 312-365', *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 37, (1947), 135-144 (p. 135).

<sup>343</sup> Toynbee, 'Roma and Constantinopolis in Late Antique Art', p. 136. Harold Mattingly, 'The Roman Virtues', *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (1937), 103-117 (p. 114).



There are many texts that suggest the Early Byzantines continued to believe in the potency of personifications. When consecrating the newly developed city of Constantinople in the fourth century, a statue of *Tyche* (Fate/Fortune) was paraded and afforded traditional rites so that she would grant prosperity to the city.<sup>344</sup> Augustine of Hippo also attested to beliefs in the potency of personifications. He stated that personifications must be destroyed and added that getting people to cease believing in them was actually harder than converting pagans away from pagan gods.<sup>345</sup>

Examples of what Augustine may have been referring to were *Nike* and *Tyche*, two personifications who continued to be depicted on objects throughout Early Byzantium. *Nike*'s (Victory's) power was sought in the hippodrome and she was popularly depicted on textiles. A seventh-century example in the British Museum shows her flying through the air holding a medallion with a Christian cross, attesting to how these figures could become Christianised (fig. 38). Just as popular was *Tyche*, who as well as being depicted on coins, was also shown on gemstones to acquire favour. On a fourth-century example, an inscription wishes a happy return and *Tyche* herself is shown holding the sail of a ship (fig. 39). Personifications were figures that were not only present in the Byzantine visual sphere; it seems that some citizens regarded them as supernatural images. The potency of personifications was a belief that we might understand as straddling the lines between sympathetic magic, paganism and Christianity. It was ultimately a belief that an image could attract what it stood for. The modern viewer might see this as un-Christian, but that is not how it was necessarily regarded in Early Byzantium, a society that was adapting to a new, burgeoning belief in Christianity and still trying to establish what was and what was not acceptable.

In certain circumstances, personifications were depicted in floor mosaics as an alternative form of imagery to Christian figures. Possessing images of holy figures was considered one way of attaining power; but because these figures were not permitted on floors, other means had to be sought to attract power. As personifications were treated in a quasi-religious way during the Roman Empire, it was to be expected that the

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<sup>344</sup> *Chronicon Paschale* 284, 14-15; *PG* 92, 710.

<sup>345</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *De civitate Dei contra paganos*, 4, 16-20; Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, Vol. 2, pp. 60-72.

Byzantines regarded images of personifications as capable of attracting the very qualities they represented.

This can be likened to the way images of saints were regarded. Christians believed saints were directly linked to specific subjects, whether it was St Demetrios of Thessaloniki being associated with soldiers, or St Christopher being associated with travel. When appealing to the saints, the devotee would direct their thoughts to the saint deemed most appropriate to their cause. Now consider how personifications were perceived. Each personification represents a quality or a concept, and it is possible to interpret many of them as beneficial qualities, whether Health, Favour or Victory. Because saints could not be petitioned to in floors, personifications were perceived as an alternative form of imagery from which to acquire power. To demonstrate this I will begin with a discussion of a floor mosaic at Kourion in Cyprus.

#### *KTISIS'* FOUNDATIONAL POWERS AT KOURION

My argument is that the personification of *Ktisis* (Foundation/Creation) was selected as a means of providing the building with powers through a supernatural means. At the same time, I will demonstrate that images that are shown on their own (in isolation), with their own framing devices, are an indication (to us), that a mosaic had a supernatural function. Figure 40 provides a starting point of what I mean by an image shown by itself. This fifth-century mosaic comes from the central room of a bath complex dedicated or donated by an individual named Eustolios (cat. 25).<sup>346</sup> The room is similar to an entrance hall, with different baths leading off from it. Towards the north end of the long room there is a medallion containing the bust of a human figure. The medallion is depicted amongst a wider design of abstract, geometric patterns. This means the only piece of figural imagery in the room is the bust in the medallion. It depicts a woman with brown hair that falls to her shoulders; she also wears a green dress with two brown straps around the shoulders. Her body is slightly turned to her right-hand side, and she holds up her right arm, adorned with a bracelet. She stares intently at her right hand, which holds a rod measuring 29.3 centimetres, almost the

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<sup>346</sup> Michaelides, *Cypriot Mosaics*, no. 47, pp. 40-42.

exact length of a Roman foot.<sup>347</sup> Either side of her head are letters that spell KTICIC (*Ktisis*), a word for the foundation, donation or creation of a building. The use of an adjectival word alongside the depiction of a figure or bust was a common convention in Early Byzantine art for denoting a personification. The bust at Kourion is a personification of foundation or the donation/creation of a building. Because the personification comes from a hall, visitors would have had to walk through this space, over *Ktisis* to get to the various rooms and baths. The figure was, in a sense, unavoidable.

Kourion's *Ktisis* personification is an example of what I call an image depicted in isolation. Because the bust is shown on its own with no other visual aspects within the medallion shape, and it is used against an abstract-patterned field, it may suggest its designer(s) or patron(s) were trying to convey something in particular. It indicates that the personification was intended to have a specific function beyond purely being something to look at. It is difficult to speculate what an image might mean, but such representations could be interpreted in terms of sympathetic magic and as having a supernatural function.

Early Byzantine primary sources do not tell us much about the significance of images that are shown by themselves. In order to find the significance of such imagery, scholars have looked to other methods. One approach is to look at the architectural context of a building in order to explain why images that are shown individually are placed in certain locations. For example, Dunbabin has shown that representations of the sea-god Okeanos were depicted on thresholds in order to attract protective powers.<sup>348</sup> Though Dunbabin explained how Okeanos' image came to be seen as powerful, her argument did not go into great detail about how such isolated images worked. Her point is useful but it was conceptual rather than empirical. It reflects an attempt to find answers where literary sources were scarcer.

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<sup>347</sup> Ruth Leader-Newby, 'Personifications and *Paideia* in Late Antique Mosaics from the Greek East', in *Personification in the Greek World: From Antiquity to Byzantium*, ed. by Emma Stafford and Judith Herrin (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 231-246 (p. 240).

<sup>348</sup> Dunbabin, *MRNA*, pp. 154-155.

Henry Maguire also regarded imagery that was shown by itself as an attempt to attract supernatural powers. Writing about symbols that were depicted within frames, shapes and borders, Maguire argued that the way in which this imagery was shown imparted a special significance to it.<sup>349</sup> For example, if a symbol was the only element within a shape, then it suggested it was depicted for a specific reason. In order to determine a supernatural function, Maguire then looked to the architectural context and speculated why a symbol might be significant for that part of a building. He then researched the history or significance of a particular motif to show how it could be seen in supernatural terms. Maguire did not expand further upon the point. He looked at the composition of the mosaic itself and concluded that an image shown by itself must have held significance, one element being that it was an attempt to attract supernatural power.

Both Dunbabin and Maguire's arguments on the isolation of imagery highlights something that other scholarship on ornament and decoration has traditionally not acknowledged. Yet, their argument might be taken further. What both Dunbabin and Maguire do not say explicitly is what cognitively goes through the minds of those when that imagery is depicted for supernatural purposes. Seeing images that are shown by themselves as working through sympathetic magic might strengthen Dunbabin and Maguire's argument. Those images can be seen as an attempt to attract what was depicted. For example, the Early Byzantines believed that the Christian cross had protective powers: on lintels and gemstones, crosses were often shown on their own, not combined with other symbols or imagery. The image represented what a person desired (the powers that were believed to be manifest in the cross). Having this image depicted on an object gave a sense of belief to someone that the powers in the image or object could be attracted. This isolation may also imply the image's meaning was clearer, as it could not be linked with other imagery and other meanings.

An examination of other Early Byzantine objects also indicate that imagery that is depicted by itself was a means of attracting supernatural power. For example, the imagery depicted on coins is often shown by itself, and as will be shown below, this may have contributed to the perception of coins as having potency.<sup>350</sup> Images of

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<sup>349</sup> Maguire, 'Magic and Geometry', p. 268.

<sup>350</sup> P. J. Casey, *Understanding Ancient Coins: An Introduction for Archaeologists and Historians* (London: Batsford, 1986). Philip Grierson, *Byzantine Coins* (London: Berkeley, 1982).

emperors and empresses were shown either with a bust of their head or in full profile. Other figures that might be depicted in isolation include deities or beneficial personifications. Lastly, even monograms might be the only piece of decoration on coins, as can be seen with the *chi-rho* in early fourth-century coins. The use of this kind of imagery on coins may have been in part because of the restricted surface size of those objects. But the use of isolated imagery may have added to the perception that coins could attract beneficial powers. Henry Maguire has shown that in Early Byzantium coins from previous generations were collected because they were perceived to attract powers.<sup>351</sup> Possessing a coin from the reign of a successful emperor was believed to attract the beneficial qualities associated with that emperor for a person's advantage.

The use of imagery shown by itself was also employed on gemstones, items that also had supernatural functions. Byzantine gemstones were objects that were usually round or oval. In the centre of the gems were engraved pictures or inscriptions, which were usually the sole focus of attention. The material of the gem was more prized than the imagery or words, yet the way in which imagery was depicted might suggest that this form of imagery was an appropriate or functional way of trying to attract supernatural powers.<sup>352</sup> However the Byzantines did not greatly distinguish what was the most powerful element; they regarded both the gem and what was depicted on it as being empowered. It would appear that this style of representation was deemed appropriate or most applicable when the Byzantines wanted assistance from the supernatural realm. It seems to have been a style that linked a person to the image, and it depicted a visualisation of what that person desired.

When personifications were depicted with other figures, or even other visual elements, it can become more problematic to interpret the purpose of the particular iconography. For example, at the so-called House of Aion in Nea Paphos, Cyprus, one of the fourth-century mosaic panels has several personifications and gods in one scene (fig. 41).<sup>353</sup> Hermes sits with the infant-god Dionysos on his lap, and surrounding them are Silenos, nymphs and more abstract and less common personifications of Nectar,

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<sup>351</sup> Maguire, 'Magic and Money in the Early Middle Ages', pp. 1038-1040.

<sup>352</sup> Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets*, p. 43. Michel, *Die magischen Gemmen im Britischen Museum*. Jeffrey Spier argued that gems hold more functions than just supernatural ones. Spier, *Late Antique and Early Christian Gems*.

<sup>353</sup> Michaelides, *Cypriot Mosaics*, pp. 28-29.

Ambrosia (the food or drink that the gods consumed), Upbringing, among others. There is little relationship between the latter personifications as they were presumably intended to guide the viewer in understanding the mythological scene: they are qualities that surround Hermes and Dionysos. The Nea Paphos example portrays the personifications in a scene: they are not the main focus of attention. They were depicted, instead, to help convey a narrative from mythology. This was a way of depicting something visually that could not easily be represented, such as the good upbringing of a child: this is hard to convey in Byzantine imagery, where to portray this might require successive scenes. These personifications probably had an added significance in perhaps being portrayed to show the owner of the building as educated and cultured.<sup>354</sup> It is hard to see the mythological scene as an attempt to attract supernatural power. If, however, the personifications had been shown by themselves and framed within a shape, the attention would move to them individually, rather than to the scene as a whole, and might suggest an ulterior purpose.

In sympathetic magic terms, when an image such as Kourion's *Ktisis* is depicted, it could be seen as an attempt to attract the quality of the personification.<sup>355</sup> Because the Greek word *ktisis* means both foundation or the creation/donation of a building, a distinction needs to be made as to which of these qualities the medallion might be attracting. It would seem unlikely that the donation/creation aspect would be wished for in sympathetic magic terms, unless the image attracted powers for the donor or creator of the mosaic or the building. It would seem more likely that power was sought through the other meaning of the word *ktisis*, 'foundations'. Foundations were important in Early Byzantium and the ancient world as they provided a secure platform for buildings so that structures did not collapse. The need for strong foundations was of high importance in Early Byzantium as the Eastern Mediterranean was (and still is) vulnerable to earthquakes. Both major and minor earthquakes were recorded in every century and were interpreted as punishments sent from the divine.<sup>356</sup> Strong foundations

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<sup>354</sup> Colloquially called *paideia*. See Elsner, *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph*, pp. 106-113. Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992).

<sup>355</sup> Henry Maguire, *Nectar and Illusion: Nature in Byzantine Art and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 30.

<sup>356</sup> Gilbert Dagron, 'Quand la terre tremble...', *Travaux et Memoirs*, Vol. 8 (1981), 87-103. Glanville Downey, 'Earthquakes at Constantinople and Vicinity, A.D. 342-1454', *Speculum*, Vol. 30 (1955), 596-600.

were needed to counteract and protect a property from seismic activity. A depiction of the personification of *Ktisis* on the floor might be interpreted as a way of providing extra foundational support to the building.<sup>357</sup> It was, in a sense, a protective measure. But the cue for this interpretation is the way in which the image is shown by itself.

So far I have argued that images that are shown on their own, within a framed shape, might be an indication of an attempt to attract the qualities of the image. It could be questioned whether depicting images in this way reflected a wider trend. James Trilling has argued the framing of individual images grew in popularity in Early Byzantium because of a rising fashion in the use of medallions.<sup>358</sup> Trilling showed how that imagery was used as a device in Late Roman and Early Byzantine textiles and floor mosaics. He did not suggest that medallions were used to impart supernatural powers, but he acknowledged that the designers were aware that they could draw attention to certain images and evoke certain meanings through the use of framing devices. Trilling essentially argued the rise in framing images (medallions) reflected a Byzantine desire to enclose images.<sup>359</sup> He also argued the popularity of framing devices encouraged the use of imagery that is shown by itself.<sup>360</sup>

When imagery is shown by itself against plain or abstract patterns, such as the *Ktisis* personification at Kourion, it could be seen, by us, modern viewers, as an attempt to attract the power that the image represents. From a twenty-first century point of view in trying to understand Early Byzantine imagery, if several images that are shown by themselves are combined together it seems to reduce the chances of them having a purely supernatural function. This is because the more imagery that is included, the more other non-supernatural themes can be read into it. Alternatively, from the point of view of the patron or the mosaic designer, the *Ktisis* image was placed on its own to 'honour' the personification – to depict it, is to honour it; and by depicting it on its own is to show more reverence and honour to the image. When shown in this way, in the mind of the patron or designer, there was no confusion that what was desired was its prized qualities. I argue the personification at Kourion is an example in which

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<sup>357</sup> This was tentatively suggested by Leader-Newby, 'Personifications and *Paideia* in Late Antique Mosaics', p. 241.

<sup>358</sup> Trilling, *The Medallion Style*, pp. 12-14, 20-21, 31.

<sup>359</sup> Trilling, *The Medallion Style*, p. 69.

<sup>360</sup> Trilling, 'Medieval Interlace Ornament', pp. 66-67.

foundational power was sought for the building. The isolated way in which the image is depicted, and the abstract quality of *Ktisis* might be seen as an attempt to attract the personification's trait. The power came via the *Ktisis* image and this reflects a Byzantine belief in the potency of the visual sphere. What is also significant is that the power was sought for the building in order to protect all of those in bath complex: the power being sought, once again, had a communal purpose rather than a personal motivation due to a mosaic's communal function in serving the need for multiple amounts of people.

#### THE 'FRUITFUL MOTHER OF ALL THINGS': *GE* AT ANTIOCH

Another example in which a personification may have been used to attract powers via supernatural means can be seen in a fifth-century mosaic at Antioch, modern Turkey.<sup>361</sup> The mosaic comes from a domestic building called the House of *Ge* and the Seasons. Unfortunately an area including one of the corners in the square-shaped mosaic has not survived (fig. 42, cat. 12). The centre of the mosaic consists of a square, while in the border there are repeating octagonal shapes. Within the central square are five medallions, each containing a personification in the four corners (one has not survived), and one in the centre. The central medallion depicts a woman in a sleeveless violet tunic that is fastened by two clasps and two rings at the shoulders (fig. 43). The figure's head leans against her left shoulder while her eyes gaze down to the ground. She wears a wreath of fruit and flowers around her head, pearl earrings and her hair falls to her shoulders. Against the figure's left arm is a cornucopia filled with pomegranates and grapes. Either side of her head are two Greek letters reading ΓΗ (*Ge*), the word for earth. The floral and fruit associations are fitting attributes for someone that represents the earth. The luxurious nature of *Ge*'s jewellery and her sumptuous clothing mark her out as a significant figure, reminiscent of the visual treatment a goddess might receive.

The medallions in the corners of the mosaic depict personifications of the Four Seasons. The surviving three are shown as female and each figure is depicted with a pair of wings on their back and an inscription identifying them as one of the four seasons of the year. The medallion in the lower right shows the personification of Spring (ΤΡΟΙΗ ΕΑΡΙΝΗ). She is shown with a yellow tunic and has a violet fabric at

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<sup>361</sup> Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*, Vol. 1, pp. 346-347.



her elbow that probably held a basket full of flowers, the tops of which can be seen. She wears pearl earrings, a garland of flowers around her head, and has green leaves that project from her ears. The medallion in the top right shows a personification of Summer (ΤΡΟΙΗ ΘΕΡΙΝΗ). She wears a violet tunic that is fastened at the left shoulder leaving her right breast exposed, and she has a hat that has a single strand of hay on it. She leans her hand against her right shoulder and holds a sickle in her right hand. Lastly, the figure in the lower left medallion depicts Winter (ΤΡΟΙΗ ΧΙΜΕΡΙΝΗ). She has a grey mantle that is draped over her head, and her head slightly leans to the side. The medallion depicting Autumn has not survived. The personifications are dressed and carry items that are associated with that season.

A case might be made that the mosaic at Antioch was designed to attract what the personifications stood for. *Ge* could be seen as attracting the powers of nature and the abundance of the earth, while the Four Seasons might be seen as attempts to attract all year-round abundance and the bounty that each season brings. When depicted together, the personifications make a fitting combination because they all seek beneficial associations. Although a personification of *Ge* was never explicitly referred to in literary sources, it is possible to see from other written sources that there were beliefs in the power of the earth. As will be shown, this was of some concern to the Church Fathers who had to condemn such thinking. What makes the accounts interesting is that their disapproval was not directed at pagans, but at Christians. The sources imply that there were some in society who believed nature and the earth were imbued with supernatural forces distinct from God. John Chrysostom described the earth as our nurse, our mother and as the source from which to feed upon.<sup>362</sup> But he was keen to argue that Christians should not worship the earth and the bounty it produces. Instead, authors such as Athanasios of Alexandria (c. 296/298-373) wanted Christians to direct their attention away from the earth, to the one who created it in the first place, God.<sup>363</sup> Augustine of Hippo argued a similar point, stating that Christians who worshipped the earth were in effect worshipping a goddess and not the Creator. He says

“[...] we do not give the name creator even to the earth herself, although she shows herself the fruitful mother of all the things that she thrust up when they burst with young shoots, while she

<sup>362</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Genesin*, 1, 9, 2; PG 53, p. 77.

<sup>363</sup> Athanasios of Alexandria, *Oratio contra gentes*, 27; PG 25, 52C-56A.

holds them fast by the roots; for likewise we read “God gives it a body as he has chosen and to each of the seeds its own body” (1 Corinthians 15:38).<sup>364</sup>

It is not clear whether the Church Fathers were referring to *Ge* as a personification, or some kind of continuing belief in the Greco-Roman goddess of the earth, Gaia (mother of the earth). Whether or not the Church Fathers were discussing the extent to which personifications were believed to have power, these texts do seem to suggest that there were beliefs that the earth was seen as a source that could be petitioned.

Maguire has argued that *Ge* was particularly perceived to have earthly connotations in arid lands, reflecting sincere hopes for good harvests.<sup>365</sup> He suggested that when lands were not as fertile as other areas, the populace believed that *Ge*'s qualities could be acquired through the depictions of her. That *Ge* could bestow powers can be seen through an examination of other contemporary objects. Her iconography accompanied inscriptions that had talismanic powers in seeking earthly and beneficial powers. For example, her image appears on a tapestry with the inscription ‘The Hearth, rich in blessings’, while on clay lamps she is illustrated next to inscriptions such as ‘Good Fortune’.<sup>366</sup>

With these associations in mind, it could be argued that the Antioch mosaic has a depiction of *Ge* and the Four Seasons to attract the abundance and bountiful powers in and of nature. The Four Seasons are traditionally depicted in floor mosaics as floating heads in the borders of designs. But since they are shown in a different manner at Antioch – in medallions, confronting the viewer – they are an example of a traditional motif that, by being depicted with visible bodies, is shown in an unusual way. As Dunbabin has argued, when the Four Seasons are depicted in ways that are not common, it is possible to interpret them as attempts to attract all-year round prosperity.<sup>367</sup> Taken together, the personifications at Antioch can be seen as an attempt

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<sup>364</sup> [...] sed ne ipsam quidem terram, quamvis mater omnium fecunda videatur quae germinibus erumpentia promovet et fixa radicibus continent, cum itidem legamus: Deus illi dat corpus quo modo voluerit et unicuique seminum proprium corpus. Augustine of Hippo, *De civitate Dei contra paganos*, 12. 26; Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, Vol. 4, p. 120.

<sup>365</sup> Maguire, ‘The Mantle of Earth’, p. 228.

<sup>366</sup> ΕΤΙΑ ΠΟΛΥΟΛΒΟC and ΤΥΧΗ ΚΑΛΗ. Maguire, ‘The Mantle of Earth’, p. 227.

<sup>367</sup> Dunbabin, *MRNA*, pp. 160-161. Also argued by Demetrios Michaelides when referring to the Four Seasons that frame a central image of Dionysos. Michaelides, *Cypriot Mosaics*, pp. 34-35.

to attract the beneficial power of nature, abundance and of ensuring prosperity for the patron.

There was a belief that earthly connotations could be attained from an image. The way in which the image was perceived to work was through transference of the qualities in the image to the building. This process is a supernatural one and it is important to acknowledge it because it shows that mosaics could be used for specific functions; they were not always surfaces to simply contemplate. Through the decoration of a floor, a mosaic could be designed to better someone's life or that of a building. The reason why the Byzantines might have desired the earthly connotations is because it was a way of ensuring all-year round prosperity. These images may have been perceived in a superstitious way: as something to put the mind at ease, knowing that some action had been taken to invoke beneficial powers. As Maguire had noted, the desire for these powers must have been important in areas where crops and livelihoods could be wiped out by a bad harvest, natural disasters or where cultivating the land was challenging. The power of nature and of the earth mattered to the Byzantines because this was a source of food and a source of income for the empire's citizens.

A similar supernatural function may lie behind the depiction of *Ge* when her iconography was depicted on other floor mosaics. For example, a bust of *Ge* is depicted in the sixth-century floor mosaic at the Upper Chapel of the Priest John in Nebo, Jordan (fig. 44, cat. 52).<sup>368</sup> Within a grid composed of vine leaves, *Ge* is represented inside a medallion-like shape just above the centre of the mosaic. Her face has now been damaged by what excavators called the curiosity of modern tourists. A photograph from the earlier part of the twentieth century illustrates the image before it was damaged (fig. 45). *Ge* is the only personification in the chapel's mosaic and she is recognisable because of the inscription either side of her head. She is dressed elaborately and carries a sash full of fruit. The image's centrally placed position in the mosaic might suggest *Ge* was depicted to attract earthly, bountiful powers. The rest of the imagery in the mosaic can be seen as depicting the kind of activities that are associated with the earth: a man hunts, another herds sheep, a woman carries a basket of fruit. An inscription at the top of the chapel states that the building was finished in the

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<sup>368</sup> Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan*, pp. 174-175.

year 565 under the priest John for the salvation of unnamed individuals.<sup>369</sup> The upper part of the nave portrays a four-columned *tympanum* (a vertical wall with a pediment) with an inscription in the centre naming an individual called Sergios who sought salvation for himself and his family; there are peacocks, trees and chicken in the background of the *tympanum*.<sup>370</sup>

*Ge* is an important figure in the mosaic: the rest of the imagery revolves around her central position. That is not to say that the latter are ‘generic images’. Since the other depictions represent earthly activities, they too might have an additional function in attracting earthly powers. But it is the depiction of the *Ge* personification and the Byzantines’ beliefs in their potency that make a supernatural function more noticeable (to us). Because the historian Eusebios described Nebo as an area that was dry and a desert-like place, the mosaic in the chapel might be taken as an example in which prosperity and fertility of the land was sought for the village of Nebo.<sup>371</sup> In both the Antioch and the Nebo examples, the way in which *Ge* is depicted by herself within a frame suggests the mosaics may be taken as attempts to acquire power.

Written sources suggest a belief in the potency of personifications was based on a complicated relationship between paganism, sympathetic magic and Christianisation. Personifications had connotations to a pagan past and seeking power from them could have been deemed heretical to many Christians. This was a belief that essences were manifest in images. This was a controversial point to Christians themselves, as there were some that embraced the use of this kind of imagery, while others regarded such images as idolatry. Once again, I would argue this reflects the cultural diversity of Early Byzantium. This was a period where many beliefs were still being regulated. This is very pronounced in how the Early Byzantines thought and reacted to imagery. The study of personifications shows that they were another form of imagery that could be depicted on floor mosaics to attract powers via a supernatural means. This function again highlights the ambiguous and controversial aspect the Byzantines had around imagery that was not purely Christian.

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<sup>369</sup> Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan*, pp. 174.

<sup>370</sup> Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan*, pp. 174.

<sup>371</sup> Eusebios of Caesarea, *Onomasticon*, 136, 6; Eusebios, *Eusebii Pamphili Episcopi Caesariensis Onomasticon*, trans. by F. Larsow and G. Parthey (Berlin: In aedibus Friderici Nicolai, 1862), pp. 294-296.

## SAFETY AND ENJOYMENT AT THE BATHS

The fifth-century floor mosaics excavated at the Baths of Apolausis provide another instance in which personifications could have been depicted for supernatural purposes (fig. 46, cat. 17).<sup>372</sup> The baths are situated in Narlidja, among the hills to the east of ancient Antioch. Within a square-shaped room is a large medallion containing a personification of Safety (CΩTHPIA). She is depicted facing the viewer with only a hint of her body turned to the side, and she slightly leans her head to her left shoulder. The figure wears a yellow tunic with half-sleeves, while a green mantle is draped against her body. She wears a garland of gold leaves around her head. A star of two interlaced squares frames the medallion; this itself is framed by a larger medallion. The personification is the only figural piece in the room, as the rest of that space is filled with abstract, geometric patterns.

In a small adjacent room, a mosaic also covers the floor, and it depicts a personification of Enjoyment (ΑΠΟΛΑΥCIC) (fig. 47, cat. 17). She is shown in bust form and wears a brown-sleeved tunic, a belt at her abdomen and trimmings on her shoulder. A veil falls from a diadem on her head to her shoulders and it covers her stern-looking face. In her right hand she holds a flower up to her face, perhaps a poppy. As is the case with the personification in the other room, Enjoyment is the only figural image in this room. The personification is in the centre, depicted against a backdrop of abstract patterns and a border consisting of a three-stranded guilloche, which could be interpreted as providing protective powers. A part of the mosaic in the semi-circular niche at the end of the room is filled with radiating lines.

Both the personifications at the baths can be seen in terms of sympathetic magic, attracting their particular qualities to the building. The images of Safety and Enjoyment might be interpreted as having a vital function for the bath's users. Dunbabin has shown how the baths provoked dual perceptions. On the one hand the baths were buildings that were meant for pleasure, where bathers could socialise with each other and enjoy the opulent decoration of the building.<sup>373</sup> On the other hand, they were considered dangerous. Demons and malevolent spirits were thought to inhabit the waters and the murky corners of the building, where they could attack naked bathers when they were

<sup>372</sup> Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*, Vol. 1, pp. 304-306.

<sup>373</sup> Dunbabin, 'Baiaurum Grata Voluptas', pp. 8-16.

most vulnerable and exposed.<sup>374</sup> For example Gregory of Nyssa explained how a demon inhabited a bath and made it impossible for the building to be used after sunset. Those who chose to brave the baths after sunset became possessed by the demon, who would throw fire, smoke, smells and beasts to those who entered.<sup>375</sup> It was not just Christians who perceived demons lurking in the baths; the pagan philosopher Eunapios of Sardis (c. 345-414) wrote of the necessity of exorcising a demon called Kausathas from a bath building.<sup>376</sup> That both pagans and Christians were concerned about demons in the baths perhaps reflects a common concern about the need to keep malevolent forces in check.

Bathers had to be on guard at the baths: many epigrams tell demons, especially Envy, not to enter and that he had no power.<sup>377</sup> As Dunbabin showed, the plotlines in contemporary stories had characters killed off in the baths, whether through demonic or terrestrial causes.<sup>378</sup> In addition, that baths had sinister and supernatural connotations can be seen in magical activities. Roman and Early Byzantine love spells specified that images and dolls had to be thrown into the furnace of the bathhouse for the spell to work, as can be seen in the Greek Magical Papyri.<sup>379</sup> Curse tablets also stated that they could be deposited in bath buildings, because the demons that lurked there made the spell work.<sup>380</sup>

With this in mind, the personifications at Narlidja might be seen as having supernatural functions. The personification of Safety was wished for, and needed, in order to provide protection to the building. That safety might be sought through the use of images is hardly surprising considering that gemstones and amulets were decorated for the same purpose. At the same time, the Safety image might be regarded as putting the bather's mind at ease, giving them a personal sense of protection rather than just the

<sup>374</sup> Dunbabin, 'Baiaurum Grata Voluptas', pp. 33-46.

<sup>375</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Εἰς τὸν βίον τοῦ Ἁγίου Γρηγορίου τοῦ Θαυματουργοῦ* (*De vita beati Gregorii*); PG 46, 952 A-D. This example is one of many. For more primary sources that say that demons lurked in baths see Campbell Bonner, 'Demons of the Bath', *Studies Presented to F. Ll. Griffith* (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1932), pp. 203-208.

<sup>376</sup> Eunapios of Sardis, *Βίοι Φιλοσοφῶν καὶ Σοφιστῶν* (*Vita sophistarum*), 4 (Porphyrius) 1, 12; Eunapios of Saradis, *Eunapii Vitae sophistarum*, trans. by Ioseph Giangrande (Rome: Typis Publicae Officinae Polygraphicae, 1956), pp. 8-9.

<sup>377</sup> Dunbabin, 'Baiaurum Grata Voluptas', pp. 33-34.

<sup>378</sup> Dunbabin, 'Baiaurum Grata Voluptas', pp. 35-36.

<sup>379</sup> For example, see PGM VII. 467-477; Preisendanz, Vol. 2, pp. 21-22 and Betz, p. 130. PGM II. 50; Preisendanz, Vol. 1, p. 24 and Betz, p. 14.

<sup>380</sup> Auguste Audollent, *Defixionum Tabellae* (Paris: Fontemoing, 1904), cxvi-vii, pp. 156-159.

building. The other personification, Enjoyment, might be seen as a polite wish for bathers to enjoy themselves. Such a wish can be found in other fourth and fifth century examples, where inscriptions could be stamped onto objects that wished pleasure, health and good fortune for owners and viewers: these did not use the word 'enjoyment', but they reflected a similar beneficial wish for pleasure.<sup>381</sup> A supernatural function may be the reason why the personifications were depicted at Narlidja. Why else would such abstract and unusual qualities be depicted if not to attract what they represented? The presence of the personifications can be seen as an attempt to reassure bathers that the baths had been protected, whilst beneficial powers were wished on them through the depiction of Enjoyment. Both of these are examples of supernatural powers. They were depicted to attract the qualities of the personifications through sympathetic magic means. This was a belief that through a supernatural means, those images could transfer their power to the building. This is neither pagan nor Christian power; this is a belief in the potency of images.

#### 'SMILINGLY YOU HAVE WATERED THE LAND': THE NILE AT SEPPHORIS

In this section I will show how a personification of the Nile may have been depicted with a supernatural function. At the same time, I will add further evidence to my argument in the previous chapter about rare or unusual images being an indication that the mosaic can be seen in supernatural terms. I examine a fifth-century floor mosaic at Sepphoris in modern Israel (fig. 48, cat. 35). The purpose of the building it was laid in is uncertain, but it was not one with a religious function.<sup>382</sup> In the top right of a panel is a large, now damaged, personification of the river Nile. The Nile was a popular subject in Early Byzantine art, where it was usually illustrated in images via the vegetation, creatures and landscape around the river. Even images of the Nilometre were depicted to evoke the Nile. This was a structure that measured the water level and the clarity of the river during its flooding season. Many of these themes were depicted in a number of other media, whether silver vessels, textiles or floor mosaics.<sup>383</sup> A

<sup>381</sup> Beatrice Caseau, 'Magical Protection and Stamps in Byzantium', in *Seals and Sealing Practices in the Near East: Developments in Administration and Magic from Prehistory to the Islamic Period, Proceedings of an International Workshop at the Netherlands-Flemish Institute of Cairo on December 2-3, 2009*, ed. by Ilona Regulski et al. (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters en Department Oosterse Studies, 2012), 115-132 (pp. 120-124).

<sup>382</sup> Ehud Netzer and Zeev Weiss, *Zipori*, trans. by Hani Davis (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1994), p. 46.

<sup>383</sup> Alice Vladimirovna Bank, *Byzantine Art in the Collections of the Soviet Museums*, trans. by Inna Sorokina (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1978), p. 15, 278. Pierre du Bourguet, *Catalogue des étoffes*

depiction of the Nile as a personification was more unusual in art. When it was depicted in that form, it was shown in either of two ways. It could be depicted on its own or as one of the Four Rivers of Paradise that are mentioned in Genesis. In the latter case the Nile was associated with the river Geon. For example, at Olbia in modern Libya, the four rivers are portrayed as personifications in the upper part of the nave (highlighted in fig. 49, cat. 51).<sup>384</sup> It can be said then that the representation of the Nile at Sepphoris depicts a piece of iconography that was rare and unusual, as that personification was not depicted with the Four Seasons.

Within the mosaic at Sepphoris, depicted on the opposite side to the Nile, is a personification of Egypt who is shown as female, reclining with an elbow on a basket full of fruit and holding a cornucopia in her other hand. Between the two personifications are depictions of sheep and goats grazing in a field, naked youths interacting with vegetation and animals of the Nile, and in the centre are youths who mark the water level on the Nilometre. Below the scene is a depiction of the river itself, complete with marine creatures and the people who made their living from the river.

The Nile was not just a popular depiction for those in Egypt, for that river was also depicted across the Byzantine Empire in a number of media. Across the Mediterranean, it was renowned as a symbol of fruitfulness. The river itself was of vital importance to the Empire. A fourth-century text called the *Expositio totius mundi* described the Nile and the fertile land around it as the provider of grain to Constantinople and the rest of the Empire.<sup>385</sup> Since grain was a valuable commodity in the ancient and medieval empires, vital for food production, it is possible to see why the rest of the Empire required the Nile to flood its banks annually. Many sources allude to the need to perform rituals to ensure that the Nile did flood its banks. For example, in the Roman Empire, sacrifices and blessings were offered to the Nile to ensure the water levels of the river rose adequately. This can be seen in a second or third-century letter in which a pagan priest stated the letter's recipient should go to the temple of Demeter to

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*coptes* (Paris: Éditions des musées nationaux, 1964), p. 132. Dauterman Maguire et al., *Art and Holy Powers*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>384</sup> Genesis 2: 10. For the Nile representing Geon see Maguire, 'The Nile and the Rivers of Paradise', p. 180.

<sup>385</sup> *Expositio totius mundi*, 34-36; Jean Rougé (ed.), *Expositio totius mundi et gentium* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1966), pp. 166-174.



perform sacrifices and offerings to the Nile to ensure a good harvest and a healthy climate.<sup>386</sup> Christians continued the practice of blessing the Nile to ensure a good, bountiful flooding. A sixth-century letter happily conveys the news that the Nile was successful in its annual flooding and that it had fertilised the land, and this was attributed to the power of Christ.<sup>387</sup> Another document attests that the Egyptian church performed ceremonies and rituals to bless the Nile's water and pray for a good flooding.<sup>388</sup> Lastly, Christian hymns also invoked the Nile and such content seems to blur the boundaries between pagan beliefs, superstition and Christianity. One hymn is ambivalent as to who has power: the Nile or Christ. The hymn is addressed to the Nile and it invokes the bounty the river provides, yet towards the end of the hymn it attributes the miraculous nature of the river to Jesus.

O most fortunate Nile, smilingly have you watered the land;  
 Rightly do we present to you a hymn...  
 You are full of wonders in all Egypt, a remedy for men and beasts;  
 [you have brought] the awaited season...  
 the fruit of your virtue is very great...  
 you have displayed to us a strange miracle;  
 you have brought the benefits of the heavens...  
 True illumination, Christ, benefactor[save] the souls of men,  
 now and  
 [forever].<sup>389</sup>

From the above examples it can be seen why representations of the Nile might be seen in sympathetic magic terms. It has led scholars such as Maguire to state that whether depicted as a personification or as a landscape, it is possible to interpret representations of the Nile as attempts to attract the prosperous, fertile and nature

<sup>386</sup> *Letter of Priest to a Priestess*, 2782; Revel A. Coles et al., *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, Vol. 36 (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1970), p. 79.

<sup>387</sup> *Letter concerning the Rise of the Nile*, 1830; Bernard P. Grenfell et al., *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, Vol. 16 (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1924), pp. 7-8.

<sup>388</sup> Vienna Coptic MS. K9740; Leslie S. B. MacCoull, 'Stud. Pal. XV 250ab: A Monophysite Trishagion for the Nile Flood', *Journal of Theological Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (1989), 129-135 (130-131).

<sup>389</sup> ἄγαλμα καὶ πρόνοια πάντων Νεῖλοφ / βρῶσις ἀγαθ[οῖς], Νεῖλε εὐθ[ε]στάτε / γελῶν ἐπότισας τὴν γῆν / δικαίως ὕμνον σοι προσφέρομεν / ἑορτάσομεν πάντες ἐπὶ σοῦ / ζητούμενε εὐκαίρως ἔλαμψης / ἦλθης ἡμῖν πάλιν, εὐπρόσδεκτε / θαυμαστός εἰ ἐν πάσῃ Αἰγύπτῳ / ἱάμα ἀνθρώπων καὶ κτηνῶ[ν] / καιρὸν προσδοκούμενον α / λαὸν πτοχῶν ἀεὶ διαζώσεις / μέγιστον τὸ τῆς ἀρετῆς σου κά[ρ]πωμα / νεον εἰδεῖν τὴν τύχην θελ / ξένον θαῦμα ἐπέδειξας ἡμ[ῖν] / οὐρανῶν ἀγαθὰ προήγαγης / πάλιν εἶδαμεν τῶν ψυ / ῥάβδος εὐθ[ε]ας τῆς βασι / [ς]τέμματα φορεῖ εἰς... / τέλειον τὸ αἰ / ὑπελὸς εἰ παν / φωστὴρ ἀλη[θ]ιν / Χριστὸς ὁ εὐεργέ[της] / ψυχὰς ἀνθρώπ[ων] / ὡς νῦν καὶ ἐν. Manfredo Manfredi, 'Inno Cristiano al Nilo', in *Papyri Greek and Egyptian: Edited by Various Hands in Honour of Eric Gardner Turner on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. by P. J. Parsons and J. R. Rea (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1981), 49-62 (p. 56).

associations of the river for the patron's benefit.<sup>390</sup> So the mosaic at Sepphoris can be seen as a desire to attract the associations of the Nile to the building or its patron. An inscription just outside of the upper border reinforces this, as, when translated, it reads "Have good fortune", which can be regarded as another attempt to bestow beneficial powers via the mosaic.<sup>391</sup> Such an inscription begs the question as to whom the words are directed. They could be addressed to the patron and the visitors who saw it, because wishing good fortune to the patron or the building can be found in other inscriptions. The wording of the inscription also seems to fit with the beneficial theme of the imagery. The inscription could alternatively be interpreted for the *Nile* to have good fortune rather than a person, as primary written sources indicate that people believed they could acquire benefits from the Nile, but were just as concerned that the Nile itself needed good fortune.

This case study has argued that the mosaic at Sepphoris used imagery and an inscription to attract the associations of the Nile through a supernatural means. It was the use of the Nile personification that indicated this mosaic had a specific function, because it was shown on its own, without with the other rivers of paradise. It is the rarity and unusualness of the Nile personification that is a cue for us today to consider whether it may have had a supernatural function. The significance of this mosaic is that it shows how a personification could be used to attract various positive associations. The image was deemed a tool in which powers were manifest: powers were deemed to be in the image.

## GOOD FORTUNE AT KOS

Lastly, I will demonstrate that a late fourth or early fifth-century floor mosaic depicting a tyche can be seen in supernatural terms. The mosaic comes from a long, rectangular room within a domestic building on the island of Kos, in the eastern Mediterranean sea (fig. 50, cat. 21).<sup>392</sup> There were four panels that formed the decoration of the floor in the room: apart from a border with the Herakles knot one

<sup>390</sup> Dauterman Maguire, et al, *Art and Holy Powers*, pp. 14-15. Maguire, 'The Nile and the Rivers of Paradise', p.181.

<sup>391</sup> EYTY / XQC / XPΩ. Netzer and Weiss, *Zippori*, pp. 47-51.

<sup>392</sup> Charis Kantzia, 'Recent Archaeological Findings from Kos: New Indications for the Site of Kos - Meropis', in *Archaeology in the Dodecanese*, ed. by Søren Dietz and Ioannis Papachristodoulou (Copenhagen: National Museum of Denmark, Department of Near Eastern and Classical Antiquities, 1998), 175-183.

panel has not survived. The adjacent larger panel consists of a grid with squares that are filled with abstract patterns and *kantharoi*, and the third panel consists of a further abstract pattern. The panel that is of concern to this chapter has a female bust in a medallion. The panel with the figure is placed towards the end of the room: it is not in the centre. She wears a jewelled-turreted crown on her head, and her hair falls behind her shoulders. She wears a *chiton* (a garment draped over the shoulders), and beneath this a *himation* (a drapery that was usually worn by men). In the figure's right hand she holds a cornucopia that is filled with grapes, corn and pomegranates. There is no inscription with this depiction, but comparison with coins and gemstones indicates that this figure's iconography is reminiscent of a *tyche*.<sup>393</sup>

The figure represented on the mosaic is probably not the goddess form of *Tyche*, but a specific *tyche* representing the island of Kos. *Tyche* was viewed in two ways in Early Byzantium. On the one hand, there was the personification of *Tyche*, who was depicted on textiles and gemstones with a set iconography who did not need to be identified with an inscription. This was a depiction of what was once considered a goddess in the ancient Greek world, but had become a more generic quality of Fate or Fortune (*Tyche*). In this form *Tyche* was associated with chance, fortune, fertility and the ability to control individuals and entire cities.<sup>394</sup>

On the other hand, the term *tyche* had a more specific, local function (making it *tyche* rather than *Tyche-Fortuna*). Having once been considered a goddess of fate and chance in the ancient Greek world, it was believed there were many *tyches* each of whom represented or symbolised a city or town. Georgina Borromeo has argued that this development occurred in the Hellenistic period (323-31 BC) in response to the growing development of towns and cities.<sup>395</sup> Each town or city was perceived to have individual identities, characteristics and customs; a *tyche* was considered a visual way of portraying a municipality's character. At the same time, these *tyches* retained their

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<sup>393</sup> Ersi Brouscari, 'The Tyche of Cos on a Mosaic from a Late Antique House in Cos', in *Patron and Pavements in Late Antiquity*, ed. by Signe Isager and Birte Poulsen (Odense: Odense University Press, 1997), 65-77 (p. 69).

<sup>394</sup> Susan B. Matheson, 'The Goddess Tyche', in *An Obsession with Fortune: Tyche in Greek and Roman Art*, ed. by Susan B. Matheson (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1994), 19-33 (p. 23).

<sup>395</sup> Georgina E. Borromeo, 'Tyche-Fortuna: The Personification of Chance and Imperial Cities', in *Survival of the Gods: Classical Mythology in Medieval Art*, ed. by Sheila Bonde (Providence, RI: Brown University, 1987), 79-84 (p. 80). Also see Percy Gardner, 'Countries and Cities in Ancient Art', *The Journal of Hellenistic Studies*, Vol. 9 (1888), 47-81 (p. 80).

previous connotation that they could guarantee the good fortune of a town or city. In time, most municipalities grew to have a tyche that could be petitioned. Perhaps the best known examples are *Roma* and *Constantinopolis*, tyches of Rome and Constantinople. Their significance and potency was still acknowledged in Christian societies, as can be seen when emperors and the church advocated support for *Roma*.<sup>396</sup> By the fourth century, tyches came to encompass the good fortune and fertility of a city, whilst their images were considered to have a lucky potency too.<sup>397</sup> Liz James has shown how tyches encompassed both beneficial and apotropaic associations.<sup>398</sup> In terms of their iconography, these personifications looked very similar, often depicted with a turreted crown and elaborately dressed. But each tyche might have one or two individual iconographic traits that reflected the local area, perhaps the style of their dress or holding a specific attribute.<sup>399</sup> For example, *Roma* was usually depicted with one breast visible and with weapons, *Constantinopolis* might wear a helmet, while the tyche of Antioch was always depicted with her foot resting on a personification of the river Orontes. The tyche depicted at Kos is an example of the specific, local type of tyche and probably represents the island itself.

Elizabeth Gittings has described the popularity of tyches as reflecting the perception of them as apt symbols of communal identity and prosperity, whether the viewer was pagan, Jewish or Christian.<sup>400</sup> Judith Herrin and Sabine MacCormack have said that tyches began to be replaced from the sixth century with religious figures. For example in Constantinople the Virgin Mary seemingly took over the role of *Constantinopolis* as protector of the city, or at the least, the personification and the Virgin's roles became conflated.<sup>401</sup>

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<sup>396</sup> Mary Beard et al. (eds), *Religions of Rome: A Sourcebook*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 158-160.

<sup>397</sup> Wendy Watson, *The Art of Personification in Late Antique Silver: Third to Sixth Century AD*, Vol. 1 (University of Sussex, 2013), p. 168.

<sup>398</sup> James, 'Good Luck and Good Fortune', pp. 296-299.

<sup>399</sup> Jerome J. Pollitt, 'An Obsession with Fortune', in *An Obsession with Fortune: Tyche in Greek and Roman Art*, ed. by Susan B. Matheson (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1994), 12-17 (pp. 14-15).

<sup>400</sup> Elizabeth A. Gittings, 'Women as Embodiments of Civil Life', in *Byzantine Women and their World*, ed. by Ioli Kalavrezou (London: Yale University Press, 2003), 35-65 (p. 44).

<sup>401</sup> Judith Herrin, 'The Imperial Feminine in Byzantium', *Past & Present*, Vol. 169 (2000), 3-35 (p. 14). Sabine MacCormack, 'Roma, Constantinopolis, the Emperor and his Genius', *The Classical Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (1975), 131-150 (p. 149).

An examination of Byzantine texts may indicate that the *tyche* at Kos had a supernatural function. Images of *tyches* were perceived to have powers. Not only were they depicted on magical gemstones, the Byzantines also considered sculptures of them to be potent too. Reacting to a sculpture in Constantinople, the author of the *Parastaseis syntomoi chronikai* described how a statue of *Tyche* was crowned and celebrated so that the city would ensure good fortune for the rest of the year.

[...] a new little statue of the *Tyche* of the city was escorted in procession carried by Helios. Escorted by many officials, it came to the Stama and received prizes from the Emperor Constantine, and after being crowned, it went out and was placed in the Senate until the next birthday of the city.<sup>402</sup>

The passage attests to how cities could honour *tyches* to attain good fortune. The sculpture was crowned and honoured as if it were a living being, no doubt to ensure the prosperity of the city and keep the *tyche* on the city's 'side'. Other passages in the *Chronicon Paschale* and an account by John Malalas (491-578) refer to the same ritual and belief, how Constantine consecrated Constantinople with offerings to the *tyche* of the city and how it was celebrated every year.<sup>403</sup> Understood in these terms, honouring a *tyche* was a way of acquiring power.

Such beliefs make the distinction between pagan rituals, magic and supernatural power more difficult. The *tyches* seem to have semi-divine status: not quite goddesses but still a potent source to turn to. They were figures that could be appealed to and which were honoured with rituals. It is possible to see the honour given to *tyches* in other Byzantine texts, where Christians and pagans would invoke those personifications. For example, one account told of how a fourth-century deacon of the church pledged himself through 'the divine and holy *tyche* of our all-conquering lords', by 'lords' he meant the emperors.<sup>404</sup> In fifth-century Rome, the senator Andromachus

<sup>402</sup> Τοῦ δὲ Ἡλίου ἄρματος κατεχθέντος ἐν τῷ Ἱπποδρομίῳ, δορυφορούμενον εἰσῆει στηλίδιον καινόν, παρὰ Κωνσταντίνου κατασκευασθέν, ὑπὸ Ἡλίου φερόμενον, Τύχῃ πόλεως· ἐν βραβείοις πλείστοις εἰς τὸ στάμα εἰσῆει καὶ ἔλαβεν ἄθλα παρὰ τοῦ βασιλέως Κωνσταντίνου, καὶ στεφανωθὲν ἐξῆει | καὶ ἐτίθετο ἐν τῷ Σινάτῳ ἕως τῶν <ἐπιόντων> γενεθλίων τῆς πόλεως. *Παραστάσεις σύντομοι χρονικαί* (*Parastaseis syntomoi chronikai*), 38; Cameron and Herrin (eds), *Constantinople in the Early Eighth Century*, pp. 88-90.

<sup>403</sup> *Chronicon Paschale* 284, 14-15; PG 92, 710. John Malalas, *Χρονογραφία* (*Chronographia*), 13, 322; PG 97, 481.

<sup>404</sup> *Declaration of Land*, 2, 15; George M. Parássoglou, *The Archive of Aurelius Sakaon: Papers of an Egyptian Farmer in the Last Century of Theadelphia* (Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 1978), pp. 6-8. H. I. Bell et al., *The Abinnaeus Archive: Papers of a Roman Office in the Reign of Constantius II* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 20.

claimed that the city had become endangered after Pope Gelasius I (494-496) would not permit traditional sacrifices to the tyche and the Lupercalia festival.<sup>405</sup> In addition, in the sixth century, Zacharias of Mitylene described how the Patriarch of Alexandria, the city prefect and the senators decided to have a meeting in front of the Tychaion of the city in order to destroy idols being brought in from Menouthis, as if the tyche were an officiating, authoritative presence.<sup>406</sup> From these examples, it can be seen how tyches could be invoked whatever one's religious affiliation. It reflects the problems we have in differentiating between pagan, magic and Christian cultures. However, some Christian sources portray tyches in a less favourable light, disapproving of them and implying it was heretical to try to gain favour through them. This can be seen when Isaac of Antioch, writing in the fifth century, complained of citizens who continued to offer devotion and perform sacrifices to the city's tyche.<sup>407</sup> While in the sixth century Symeon the Stylite the Younger is said to have disapproved and criticised the pagan citizens of Antioch because when they sacrificed to the good fortune of the city (tyche), they were giving power to demons, who he considered as being the real force behind the tyche's potency.<sup>408</sup>

Because tyches were perceived to bestow power and deemed to have supernatural associations, the presence of the personification at Kos might be seen as an attempt to attract good fortune for the building, or even the island itself. She is the only figure in the room and for this reason it is possible to interpret the personification as a deliberate attempt to attract its quality, as represented in the image. Within the room, the panel is placed in front of a door, not enough to be considered a threshold, but potentially visible to someone if they walked into the room through that door (and if they were looking down). Depicting the tyche on the floor was a way of acquiring her good fortune associations. The depiction can be seen in sympathetic magic terms: the

<sup>405</sup> Otto Guenther (ed.), *Epistulae imperatorum pontificaliorum inde ab a. CCCLXVII usque ad a. DLIII datae Avellana quae dicitur collection* (Vienna, F. Tempsky, 1895), 100, pp. 453-465. Also see, William M. Green, 'The Lupercalia in the Fifth Century', *Classical Philology*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (1931), 60-69.

<sup>406</sup> Zacharias of Mitylene, *Vita de Severii*, fol. 114 r<sup>o</sup> a. - fol. 115 v<sup>o</sup> b.; Zacharias of Mitylene, *Vie de Séverè par Zacharie le Scholastique*, trans. by M. A. Kugener (Paris: Brepols 1903), pp. 27-35.

<sup>407</sup> A. C. Klugkist, 'Pagane Bräuche in dem Homilien des Isaak von Antiocheia gegen die Wahrsager', in *Symposium Syriacum 1972* (Rome: Pont. Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1974), 353-369 (p. 357). MacMullen *Christianity and Paganism*, p. 145 and ft. 148, p. 241.

<sup>408</sup> Βίος καὶ πολιτεία τοῦ ὁσίου πατρὸς ἡμῶν Συμεῶν τοῦ ἐν τῷ Θαυμαστῷ ὄρει (*Life of Symeon Stylites the Younger*), 50, 57; Paul van den Ven (ed.), *La vie ancienne de S. Syméon Stylite le jeune (521-592)*, Vol. 1 (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1962), pp. 46, 50-52.

image sought to attract the associations of *tyche* through supernatural means. Crossing the boundaries between pagan, Christian and superstition labels, it can be said that images of *tyches* were believed to impart powers through floor mosaics in Early Byzantium.

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Personifications represented a significant and popular form of human iconography in Byzantine floor mosaics. This chapter has argued that these personifications could be depicted to provide powers through supernatural means. The use of those figures to attract power seems to straddle the lines between pagan, superstitious and Christian categories. Personifications could be seen as becoming Christianised, but a belief that they were potent is one that some Christians would have found heretical. However we label these figures and whatever belief systems they best reflect, their images can be said to reflect a wider belief in the power of imagery. These were figures that were deemed capable of affecting the terrestrial realm. These particular beliefs further reiterate that supernatural assistance was sought in all aspects of Byzantine society and in all kinds of buildings, whether secular or religious. Because mosaics were laid to be surfaces that could be walked upon by the inhabitants of a building, whether these dwellers were permanent or temporary, they had an implicit aspect whereby the power that was sought via the floor could be acquired by all who walked on it: the mosaics' communal aspect gave mosaic a unique function in providing power to multiple amounts of people rather than just individuals.

I have argued that personifications were viewed as potent sources that could be petitioned. They could be depicted in many different media for this purpose. But the use of that form of imagery on floor mosaics is very significant because, I would argue, they were an alternative means of attracting power to that of Christian saints and other holy figures, who could not be depicted on the floor. Since personifications were perceived to have quasi-powerful status, the patron or mosaic designers regarded them as suitable substitutes in attempts to attract power. They were probably not considered an equivalent to the power of holy figures, but because the latter were not allowed to be shown on floors, personifications were arguably considered a way of attracting some form of beneficial power, even if this was rather different to the powers that saints and

holy figures could bestow. This would explain the popularity of personifications in floor mosaics, and why many of them were beneficial in theme, rather than malevolent.

Using personifications for these purposes was a belief in sympathetic magic and a belief that power could be transferred from an image to a building.

In this context, Kourion's personification of *Ktisis* was depicted to attract stability and strength (foundations) in keeping the building safe in the face of natural disasters. In addition, my case study at Kourion argued that images that are shown by themselves, within a frame, can be seen in terms of sympathetic magic. I then showed how personifications of *Ge*, the Earth, may have been depicted at Antioch and Nebo to attract the bounty that the earth produces. It was then demonstrated that safety and enjoyment were wished on the users of the bath at Narlidja through the use of personifications, as the baths were regarded as unsafe locations. I also argued that it is possible to interpret the mosaic at Sepphoris as an attempt to attract the associations of the Nile. The imagery on that mosaic included many references in which power might be sought, but it was the personification of the Nile, a rare image, that was the cue for this interpretation. In my last example, I argued that an image of a *tyche* was depicted on the floor at Kos to attract good fortune for the building or the island itself.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE POWER OF WORDS: INSCRIPTIONS IN EARLY BYZANTINE FLOOR MOSAICS

In the previous chapters I argued that certain kinds of images could be portrayed in floor mosaics in order to attain power. In this chapter I will demonstrate that inscriptions could also be used in mosaics for supernatural purposes. Within my database, twenty-seven of my seventy-six entries could be considered as investing power to a mosaic through the use of text. In this chapter, I will refer to twelve of the mosaics listed in my database. Through an examination of examples that come from Kourion, Skala, Tell Basul, Beit She'an and Memphis, I will show that words were depicted on floors for protective and beneficial purposes. These mosaics have been included because with some examples a supernatural significance is clear. Some of these mosaics have also been included because the content of the inscription provides an essential discussion of how much a modern reader can 'read' into an inscription. This chapter will explore why some inscriptions were more explicit in their supernatural function than others, and it will document a significant change in tone from the inscriptions that date to the fourth century to those of the seventh century. By comparing the content and the tone of inscriptions between floor mosaics and other supernatural objects, I will show that text was perceived to have a visual potency in Early Byzantium. I will also add further evidence of the significance of the threshold, by showing that many supernatural inscriptions were positioned around these particular areas of buildings.

Inscriptions were a common and prominent feature in floor mosaic designs and they can be understood in two ways. On the one hand they can be seen in Byzantine terms where, Bente Kiilerich has argued, they had specific functions.<sup>409</sup> Byzantine inscriptions were written to communicate various kinds of information: sometimes recording a mosaicist's name, captioning an image (such as providing the name *Ktisis* at Kourion), or recording the names and deeds of donors. Kiilerich has also noted that the inscriptions could be very long; this is because some quoted passages from the Bible,

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<sup>409</sup> Bente Kiilerich, 'Visual and Functional Aspects of Inscriptions in Early Church Floors', *Acta ad archaeologiam et atrium historiam pertinentia*, Vol. 24, N.S. 10 (2011), 45-63.

while others were more like epigrams in terms of their appearance and the use of rhetoric.

Byzantine floor inscriptions can also be seen in a second way, as a retrospective resource that is useful for scholars (writing many centuries later) in trying to reconstruct the past. For example, the classicist Mary Beard has reiterated the importance and usefulness of inscriptions in understanding ancient cultures.<sup>410</sup> Beard regarded them as providing an alternative resource to author-written, primary sources; in some cases, she used them *as* primary sources because they provided insights that hand-written texts did not. In this vein, inscriptions are interesting because they convey information and a ‘voice’ to someone from that time and culture. They are pieces of information that the Early Byzantines wanted to express in written form.

With a retrospective view, inscriptions can be regarded as another method which can be applied to determine whether a floor mosaic can be seen in supernatural terms. Dunbabin explicitly stated the importance of the written word in mosaic. She argued that mosaics with supernatural functions can be identified with some certainty through an examination of inscriptions.<sup>411</sup> However, as some mosaics do not have this form of text, it can be difficult, for us, to demonstrate this. In other words, without an inscription, images can be interpreted in numerous ways. Inscriptions can indicate what message or function (if any) the designer or the patron wanted the mosaic to have.

#### BENEFICIAL POWERS AT KOURION

That inscriptions can help us to identify a mosaic with supernatural power might be seen from an inscription at the Eustolios complex in Kourion, Cyprus. It comes from the entrance to the building and was placed over the threshold, an important and significant area in which to seek power, as has previously been described (fig. 51, cat. 27). The Greek inscription is positioned within a garland-wreath of flowers. When translated it reads “Enter to your good fortune, with good luck to the house”.<sup>412</sup> The inscription is quite clear in that it wishes the building’s visitors good fortune as they

<sup>410</sup> Beard et al. (eds), *Religions of Rome*, Vol. 2, p. xi.

<sup>411</sup> Dunbabin, ‘Baiaurum Grata Voluptas’, p. 46.

<sup>412</sup> ΕΙCΑ[ΓΕ] / ΕΠΙ ΑΓΑΘ[Ω] / ΕΥΤΥΧΩC / ΤΩ ΟΙΚΩ. T. B. Mitford, *The Inscriptions of Kourion* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1971), no. 201, pp. 352-353.

pass through and wishes the same beneficial power to the building too. It is notable that the house – οἶκο[v] – is mentioned in the inscription's content. The *Liddell-Scott-Jones* lexicon describes οἶkov as referring both to someone's home and as a household's family, meaning the inscription might ask for protection for the house's inhabitants and for the building itself. The inclusion of the word 'house' might be interpreted as wishing the house's inhabitants have good luck or it may be referring to the building itself, so that the building might be safe from natural disasters, not need repairs or that it would ensure a healthy income. Whichever meaning of the word the inscription refers to, whether the house, its inhabitants or both, it still might be taken as protective power.

This was not simply hopeful wishes but explicitly targeting good luck and good fortune: these were attempts to attract supernatural power. It was a belief that beneficial powers could be granted to an individual or a building. These powers had to be attracted, bestowed or manipulated through a supernatural dimension; they were not of the terrestrial realm. Gaining good luck may have even be regarded as a means of counteracting bad luck: bad luck cannot strike the person who has good luck on their side. Modern cultures have neutralised or normalised the perception of good luck to the point where it has become devoid of its supernatural dimensions, but to the Byzantines, such beliefs had clearer supernatural overtones. Good luck and good fortune were frequently sought in spells, and the same wishes were sought through gemstones.<sup>413</sup> For example, one spell promised the spell's user they would 'prosper greatly' if the user made a three-headed statue and sacrificed a falcon, while gemstones were frequently engraved with acclamations to bring about a long and healthy life.<sup>414</sup> This is all in addition to a culture that regarded personifications of *Tyche* and *Nike* as lucky, and they were immensely popular.<sup>415</sup> The psychologist Matthew Huston has explained that from a psychological point of view, an attempt to acquire good luck says two things: it gives a person a sense of confidence, but at the same time it says more about that person's anxiety or what they fear.<sup>416</sup> A person that seeks luck is often scared of misfortune and

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<sup>413</sup> For good luck spells see *PGM* VII. 186-190; *PGM* VII. 1017-26; *PGM* XII 182-89; *PGM* XII. 270-350; *PDM* xiv. 309-34; *PGM* XXXV. 1-42; *PGM* XXXVI. 211-30; *PGM* XXXVI. 275-83; *PGM*. LXX. 1-4; *PGM* XCII. 1-16. For good luck gemstones see Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets*, pp. 123-139, 179-180.

<sup>414</sup> "εὐπορεῖσθαι μεγάλως" *PGM* IV. 3125-71; Preisendanz, Vol. 1, pp. 174-176 and Betz, p. 98-99. Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets*, pp. 179-180.

<sup>415</sup> Shelton, 'Imperial Tyches', pp. 27-38. James, 'Good Luck and Good Fortune', p. 298. Watson, *The Art of Personification*, pp. 188-189.

<sup>416</sup> Huston, *The 7 Laws of Magical Thinking*, pp. 72-73, 78-84.

is looking for control in their lives. With this in mind, the beneficial inscription at Kourion could be seen as reflecting a cultural fear of misfortune rather than sincere attempts to attain good fortune. The inscription may also have provided the patron or the building's users with a sense of comfort, knowing that through the presence of the words on the floor, some form of action was taken to provide good luck, and therefore, a degree of protection.

The tone of the inscription at Kourion is intriguing. It was a welcoming greeting, but it wished luck on the visitor whether they needed it or not. It was not a choice; it was an order. Having an inscription in commanding and imperative tones is strongly reminiscent of the inscriptions on other supernatural objects. For example, gemstones were inscribed with text written in the imperative, such as "Health!", "Digest! Digest! Digest!" or "Protect me!".<sup>417</sup> In addition, it was a common convention for spells to finish with a command or an imperative to make the spell work, such as one example which asked "Depart lord... go off...!", or the more common device of "At once, at once!".<sup>418</sup> The same use of commands and imperative also appeared on Christian holy objects, which again suggests the similarities between magic, superstition and Christian objects. Gary Vikan has shown that holy figures gave clay blessing tokens, known as *eulogia*, to Christians which were stamped with short captions such as "Health!" (fig. 52).<sup>419</sup> The inscriptions on these objects do not just reflect what the objects' owners desired, they are commands and attempts to attract what the words represent. This is a belief in sympathetic magic. Power was believed to be present in the words, and those powers could be acquired through supernatural means. Just as images could be potent, so too could the depictions of words. The words were considered a way of attracting what the words represented. The inscription on the threshold at Kourion is not restricted to one or two words as in these examples, but it does have a similar commanding tone in seeking good luck for the viewer and the building.

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<sup>417</sup> BOHΘEI; ΠIECCE, ΠIECCE, ΠIECCE; ΦYAACTE. Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets*, pp. 179-180.

<sup>418</sup> "Depart lord... go off..." ἄπελθε, δεσποτα... χάρεαι. *PGM* II. 178-181; Preisendanz, Vol. 1, p. 30 and Betz, p. 18. "At once, at once!": ταχύ ὀρκίζω, ταχύ ὀρκίζω; Meyer and Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic*, no. 54, p. 101.

<sup>419</sup> [H]YΓ[IE]IA. Vikan, 'Art, Medicine and Magic', pp. 69-70. Also see, James Russell, 'The Archaeological Context of Magic in the Early Byzantine Period', in *Byzantine Magic*, ed. by Henry Maguire (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1995), 35-50 (p. 41).

Whether a visitor was aware that luck was being wished on them depended on whether they were literate or if they noticed the inscription in the first place.

Determining literacy rates in Byzantium is a contentious topic. Some, such as Robin Cormack, have argued that literacy was restricted to a privileged few, suggesting that less than ten per cent could read.<sup>420</sup> Other scholars, such as Robert Browning, have asserted that literacy levels were probably much higher, and even if someone was not literate, this does not take into account people who were partially literate and who had to use some reading skills in daily activities, such as using and distinguishing coins.<sup>421</sup> There seems no way to determine whether people could read an inscription, but the question of literacy and whether people noticed inscriptions leads to questions of how supernatural inscriptions functioned. Did they need to be read in order to be effective? Alternatively, did they work by themselves and not require human interaction at all?

It might be argued that the inscription at Kourion did not need to be interacted with in the first place. The presence of the inscription alone might be what made it potent.<sup>422</sup> By this I mean images and words lose their noticeability over time to those who encounter them frequently. The more an image or a text is confronted, the more it loses its significance. This does not mean that viewers did not know an image or an inscription was there. Such devices had a presence and they did not need to be interacted with, because it was known the device was there. In this interpretation, Kourion's inscription could be seen as being effective through sympathetic magic. What was written in the text could be attracted through a representation of it. The power was in the words.

Liz James has argued that texts on Byzantine churches acted in the same vein. She suggested that some in society perceived texts as having an ornamental role, where

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<sup>420</sup> Robin Cormack, *Icons* (London: British Museum Press, 2007), p. 10.

<sup>421</sup> Robert Browning, 'Literacy in the Byzantine World', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, Vol. 4 (1978), 39-54. Margaret E. Mullet, 'Writing in Early Medieval Byzantium', in *The Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. by Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 156-85. Michael Jeffreys, 'Literacy', in *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies*, ed. by Elizabeth Jeffreys et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 796-802 (p. 796). Markopoulos, 'Education', pp. 786-787.

<sup>422</sup> This idea was inspired by Tara Hamling, 'To See or Not to See? The Presence of Religious Imagery in the Protestant Household', *Art History*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (2007), 170-197.

they were viewed as signs and not as something that was necessarily read.<sup>423</sup> James argued texts had supernatural potency and could be depicted for a supernatural realm. With this in mind, the inscription at Kourion might have worked through the perceived potency of words. The text did not necessarily need to be read or noticed; so long as it was depicted there, it gave a sense of comfort to those who acknowledged it. To put it in Hutson's terms, the inscription provided a sense of confidence to the patron or visitors that entered the building.

When determining how citizens interacted with written texts, scholars also have to acknowledge more practical issues. The inscriptions on Byzantine floor mosaics were not always written in a perfectly grammatical way nor were all the letters of a word present. Some words were commonly abbreviated to one or two letters when there was not enough room for the full inscription. Whether this prevented Byzantine contemporaries from interacting and reading the texts is difficult to answer. Would people have taken the time to guess the remaining letters that made up a word? Were they familiar with abbreviations? In itself that requires a familiarity with the language and literacy. Would people have taken the time to read an inscription that required that much work? Or do such questions reflect scholarship (and the retrospective view) that puts its bias onto the past, seeing the missing letters and lack of grammar as a frustration? The latter may be the case, but it should be acknowledged that reading the inscriptions might have been problematic for those that were literate in the first place.

The inscription at Kourion wished beneficial powers onto the viewer and the building through the use of text. The way in which it worked was probably through sympathetic magic. It did not need to be interacted with: knowing that it was positioned there gave the patron or viewers comfort. The power of the inscription was in the visual aspect of the text, not necessarily in a literal reading of the text. The position of the inscription at Kourion is also significant, as it was placed just over the threshold, thereby providing good fortune to those that walked over this hazardous area of a building. Yet, mosaic inscriptions might also be written to attract powers that were more protective in theme, as can be seen in my next case study.

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<sup>423</sup> Liz James, "‘And Shall These Mute Stones Speak?’: Text as Art", in *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture*, ed. by Liz James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 188-206 (195-205).

# 'THE GHASTLY EXAMPLE OF THE PERISHING ENVIOUS'

I will next discuss a mosaic that comes from the island of Kephallonia in the Ionian sea. In the village of Skala, many rooms of a villa were decorated with floor mosaics that were laid during the third and fourth centuries. I will focus on a mosaic which comes from a room whose function is not clear (fig. 53, cat. 2). Part of this mosaic is divided into panels; one has a figural scene and below it is another panel with a long Greek inscription. The panel with the image depicts a naked male youth in the centre, his arms raised to his face and his feet tied with rope. Four big cats attack the man, their teeth and front paws poised for impact; a lion and a leopard are depicted on one side of the man, a tigress and leopardess on the other. Below this panel is a Greek inscription. When translated it reads:

“Phthonos, this image of your mischievous nature the painter drew, which then Krateros set in mosaic stones. Not because you are honoured among men but because you, envying the fortune of the mortals, have taken this form. So stand [here], in front of everyone, stand [here], wretched, and present the ghastly example of the perishing of the envious”.<sup>424</sup>

The inscription expresses the fear, hatred and animosity towards the figure of Phthonos. This was a malevolent figure who was believed to be the force behind the Evil Eye, the malevolent glance of an envious neighbour. In Greek-speaking cultures this figure was known as φθόνος (*phthonos*) or βασκανία (*baskania*), whilst in Latin-speaking cultures he was known as *invidia*, *fascinatio* or *fascinus*.<sup>425</sup> As Matthew Dickie has argued, at all levels of society, people feared this being greatly.<sup>426</sup> Amulets, gemstones, bells and all manner of other objects were designed to prevent him from harming someone in their daily activities, whether a person were walking to a market, cooking or sleeping.<sup>427</sup> It was even a common convention when writing letters to include the recipients' children with, a formula to protect them from harm; “may the Evil Eye not touch them”.<sup>428</sup>

<sup>424</sup> Ω ΦΘΟΝΕ, ΚΑΙ ΣΟΥ ΤΗΝΔΕ ΟΛΟΗC / ΦΡΕΝΟC ΕΙΚΟΝΑ ΓΡΑΨΕ / ΖΩΓΡΑΦΟC, ΗΝ ΚΡΑΤΕΡΟC ΘΗΚΑ / ΤΟ ΛΑΙΝΕΗΝ / ΟΥΧ ΟΤΙ ΤΕΙΜΗΕΙC CΥ ΜΕΤ ΑΝΔΡΑ-/CΙΝ, ΑΛΛ ΟΤΙ ΘΝΗΤΩΝ / ΟΛΒΟΙC ΒΑCΚΑΙΝΩΝ CΧΗΜΑ ΤΟ-/ΔΕ ΑΜΦΕΒ[Α]ΛΟΥ / ΕCΤ[ΑΘ]Ι Δ[Η] ΠΑΝΤΕCΙΝ ΕΝΩΠΙΟC / ΕCΤΑΘΙ ΤΛΗΜΩΝ / ΤΗΚΕΔΟΝΟC ΦΘΟΝΕΡΩΝ ΔΕΙΓΜΑ / ΦΕΡΩΝ CΤΥΓΙΟΝ. Engemann, ‘Zur Verbreitung Magischer Übelabwehr’, p. 25.

<sup>425</sup> Martin Hinterberger, ‘Emotions in Byzantium’, in *A Companion to Byzantium*, ed. by Liz James (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010), 123-134 (pp. 130-132).

<sup>426</sup> Dickie, ‘The Fathers of the Church and the Evil Eye’, p. 12.

<sup>427</sup> Russell, ‘The Evil Eye in Early Byzantine Society’, pp. 543-544.

<sup>428</sup> [...] τὰ ἀβάσκαντα ‘αὐτ’ οὐ τέκνα [...] *Private letter*, 3312; J. R. Rea (ed.), *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, Vol. 46 (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1978), p. 99. [...] τὰ ἀβάσκαντά σου παιδιά [...], *Publius to Apollonius*, 2981; G. M. Browne et al., *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, Vol. 41 (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1972), p. 79. [...] ἀσπάζομαι τὰ ἀβάσκαντά οἱμῶν ταίκνα ἐν θεῷ [...] *Letter from N. N to*

Phthonos was perceived to encompass many malevolent characteristics and he did not have a fixed or shared identity.<sup>429</sup> Rather, he had shifting and complex identities, sometimes being associated with the Devil, at other times being a demon, whilst to others he was considered the personification of envy. There was a more general consensus that he was perceived to cause misfortune on those that had good fortune. He did not just harm people on his own accord; he might cause misfortune through the actions of men and women. When a person became envious of another person (whether consciously or unconsciously), Phthonos became activated and would work to undo someone's good fortune, as he could not bear to see people being happy.<sup>430</sup> Fear of Phthonos was an empire-wide belief, and one that was believed in whatever one's religious affiliation. Pagans, Jews and Christians feared this being and would use many means to ward him off.<sup>431</sup> Mosaics can be seen as one form of media that was put to this use.

The image and the inscription at Skala can be taken as working in unison. As the inscription's content refers to Phthonos, the two panels might be taken together, where the figure being mauled by the creatures represents Phthonos himself. A depiction of that figure being harmed in this way was not unusual in Late Roman and Early Byzantine art. A more common convention was to depict him in the form of an eye, which was being violently attacked by creatures and pierced by instruments, as can be seen from a second-century mosaic from outside Antioch (fig. 54). Presumably the logic of the design was that by showing the eye being hurt and destroyed, the real Phthonos would be hurt and unable to do his work. The latter motif was especially common on gemstones and was also depicted on other Roman floor mosaics to prevent misfortune.<sup>432</sup> The motif of an eye being attacked has come to be referred to in academic literature as the 'much-suffering eye'. This term was appropriated from a Greek text dating between the second and fifth centuries known as the *Testament of*

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*Taarpaesis and Tausiris*, 76; P. J. Sijpesteijn, *The Wisconsin Papyri II* (Zutphen: Terra Publishing Co., 1977), pp. 137-138.

<sup>429</sup> Dickie, 'The Fathers of the Church and the Evil Eye', p. 12.

<sup>430</sup> Dunbabin and Dickie, 'Invidia Rumpantur Pectora', p. 10.

<sup>431</sup> Dickie, 'The Fathers of the Church and the Evil Eye', pp. 13-15.

<sup>432</sup> Dauterman Maguire et al., *Art and Holy Powers*, pp. 4-5. For the motif being depicted on Roman floor mosaics see Engemann, 'Zur Verbreitung Magischer Übelabwehr', pp. 24-40. And Levi, 'The Evil Eye and the Lucky Hunchback', pp. 220-228.



*Solomon*.<sup>433</sup> The text is a story of how the “Lord Saboath”, a pseudo-magical name for the Judeo-Christian God, instructed the Archangel Michael to give an engraved stone to King Solomon. This stone gave Solomon power and the ability to summon all thirty-six demons of the world before him, whereupon he demanded their names, how they could affect the terrestrial world and how they could be neutralised. The thirty-fifth demon was male and he was responsible for the evil eye. “My name is Rhyx Phthenoth. I cast the glance of evil at every man. My power is annulled by the engraved image of the much-suffering eye”.<sup>434</sup>

Just as images were used to ward off Phthonos, so too were texts. Christian lintels were inscribed to warn Phthonos not to enter; as if the words had the power to ward him off. This can be seen in a sixth-century example from El-Bardouné in Syria, which stated “Where the cross stands, Envy (*Phthonos*) cannot enter”.<sup>435</sup> Repelling Phthonos in the same way in floor mosaic inscriptions was just as common.<sup>436</sup> Lintels, being placed over doorways where demons might enter, were inscribed with texts that were seen as capable of warding off these threats. Franz Joseph Dölger’s perception of the texts on lintels as apotropaic can be applied to the inscriptions on Early Byzantine floor mosaic inscriptions. Many lintels’ texts invoked God, Christ or the sign of Christ.<sup>437</sup> The similarity between the texts on lintels and floor mosaics can be compared to another example from Kourion, where a threshold on the southeast hall of the bath complex has a Greek inscription, which translates as “In place of big walls and sold iron, bright bronze and even adamant, this house has girt itself with the much venerated signs of Christ” (fig. 55, cat. 26).<sup>438</sup> This inscription can be seen as invoking protective power through the ‘signs of Christ’, commonly seen as a reference to the cross. The text

<sup>433</sup> Sarah Iles Johnston, ‘The *Testament of Solomon* from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance’, in *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, ed. by Jan N. Bremmer and Jan R. Veenstra (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 35-49, (pp. 36-39).

<sup>434</sup> ὁ πέμπτος καὶ τριακοστὸς ἔφη· »ἐγὼ καὶ Ῥῦξ Φθηνεὼθ καλοῦμαι. βασκαίνω πάντα ἄνθρωπον. καταργεῖ με δὲ ὁ πολυπαθῆς ὀφθαλμὸς ἐγχαραττόμενος., 18, 39. *The Testament of Solomon*, trans. by Chester Charlton McCown (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1922), p. 58\*. Trans. by D. C. Duling, ‘Testament of Solomon’, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. 1, ed. by James H. Charlesworth (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983), 935-987 (p. 981).

<sup>435</sup> [C]ΤΑΥΡΟΥ ΠΡΟΚΙΜΕΝΟΥ ΟΘΑΕΝ ΙCXYEI Ο ΦΘΟΝΟC. Louis Jalabert et al., *Inscriptions de la Syrie* (Paris: Geuthner, 1955), p. 322.

<sup>436</sup> Dunbabin, ‘Baiaurum Grata Voluptas’, pp. 33-34.

<sup>437</sup> Dölger, ‘Beiträge zur Geschichte des Kreuzzeichens’, pp. 24-32.

<sup>438</sup> ΑΝΤΙ ΛΙΘΩΝ ΜΕΓΑΛΩΝ ΑΝΤΙ CΤΕΡΕΟΙΟ CΙΑΗΡΟΥ / ΧΑΛΚΟΥ ΤΕ ΞΑΝΘΟΙΟ ΚΑΙ ΑΥΤΟΥ ΑΝΤΑΔΑΜΑΝΤΟC / ΕΙΔΕ ΔΟΜΟΙ ΖΩCΑΝΤΟ ΠΟΛΥΛΛΙΤΑ CΗΜΑΤΑ ΧΡΙCΤΟΥ. Michaelides, *Cypriot Mosaics*, p. 41.

implies that the only protection the building needs is the cross, even though no cross or any other 'sign of Christ' is depicted immediately around the inscription. Power is invested in the building through the name of the cross. Whereas metal clamps were used to secure buildings, the inscription would have us believe that crosses were a way of securing the building, both in construction terms and in protecting against dangers.<sup>439</sup> This inscription at Kourion conveys just some of the connections between the texts on lintels and those on floor mosaics, where both had a function in attracting supernatural powers.

The mosaic at Skala can be argued to have had a supernatural function, in which it was an attempt to repel Phthonos from the building. The inscription is addressed to Envy himself. The last lines of the text ask him to stand and look at the image of himself being destroyed by beasts. The image reflects the inscription's content and the text reflects what is depicted in the image. Both were depicted to avert evil, in the belief each of these forms of visual communication had potency. They had vital functions in keeping Phthonos away from the building so that he could not harm the inhabitants or guests inside. To a twenty-first century viewer, the inscription may seem the more important or most useful in interpreting the function of the mosaic. The inscription lets us, today, know that the mosaic was designed to prevent the malign force from having any influence. Whether the mosaic's contemporaries regarded the text as more important is harder to determine.

There is an on-going debate in art history about how art and text can be seen and studied, and this is relevant to the example at Skala: is the image more important than the text when interpreting works of art, or vice versa? For example, debating whether a caption influences the analysis of an image, Michel Foucault declared the text was more significant.<sup>440</sup> Scholars such as Simon Franklin have pointed out how supernatural inscriptions tend to be more important to scholars, as it helps them interpret accompanying imagery, though it does not tell us much about how ancient or medieval

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<sup>439</sup> Engemann, 'Zur Verbreitung Magischer Übelabwehr', pp. 47-48. Dauterman Maguire et al., *Art and Holy Powers*, p. 19.

<sup>440</sup> Michel Foucault, *This is Not a Pipe*, trans. by James Harkness (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

cultures viewed the text.<sup>441</sup> While Maguire has argued that when inscriptions were *not* depicted with images of saints, this meant more power could be invested in the picture: if an image did not have a caption to identify a saint then multiple saints' qualities and powers could be attracted at once.<sup>442</sup> For Maguire, when text is present on an object, it gives a precise meaning, whereas when it is not, the image can have many interpretations. Such approaches probably say more about twentieth and twenty first-century cultures and the importance *we* give to text and captions, rather than a reflection of Early Byzantine ones. Liz James proposed an alternative way round the debate by suggesting that we examine the art and text as working together, rather than as competing entities.<sup>443</sup> She suggested both art and text wanted the same things: to be viewed and interacted with so that they could take the Byzantine viewer to a higher place. Such a view gives a hint of our modern perceptions and our eagerness to see art and text as separate categories (*we* may see that as useful), but the same view does not seem to have been replicated in Byzantine culture. This might suggest that when we look at inscriptions on floor mosaics, the inscriptions might indicate how any surrounding imagery can be interpreted; but the Byzantines themselves may have regarded the image and text as having to be read together, as both were significant devices in floor mosaics.

If the inscription at Skala had not been included, it would be more difficult for modern readers to identify whether the image could be seen in supernatural terms. Without that text, iconographic methods and cross-comparisons would have to be used to try to determine what was meant by the imagery. The same could be argued in my first inscription example at Kourion, which wished good fortune to the viewer and the house (fig. 51). It is the text that suggests to us modern viewers that the mosaic had a supernatural function, and it might be seen as the more important tool. Yet the surrounding imagery itself may have had clearer meanings to the Byzantines. A wreath, a common visual device that accompanies well-wishing inscriptions, frames the Kourion inscription. The wreath itself was regarded a visual motif in attracting

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<sup>441</sup> Simon Franklin, *Writing, Society and Culture in Early Rus, c.950-1300* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 268-269.

<sup>442</sup> Maguire, *The Icons of their Bodies*, pp. 101-106. Henry Maguire, 'Eufraasius and Friends: On Names and Their Absence in Byzantine Art', in *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture*, ed. by Liz James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 139-160 (p. 141-143).

<sup>443</sup> Liz James, 'Introduction: Art and Text in Byzantium', in *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture*, ed. by Liz James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1-12.

felicitous, beneficial powers and the bounty it symbolised.<sup>444</sup> Wreaths had connections to victory as they were given to the victors in chariot races.<sup>445</sup> Elsewhere the inscription's octagonal frame creates poised square shapes that are filled with Solomon's knots, symbols that may have been used to add potency. These additional images may have made the mosaic's supernatural function as noticeable as the inscription to the Byzantines.

The mosaic at Skala was laid in order to prevent the malevolent Phthonos from causing misfortune. The mosaic used art and text as a weapon to stop this supernatural threat, and the mosaic had a function in the same way as a gemstone or an icon. I pointed out that whilst inscriptions may be useful for modern scholars when determining whether mosaics had supernatural functions caution is required: the Byzantines themselves may have regarded the images and texts as equally potent and important.

#### FROM EXPLICIT TO IMPLICIT: THE CHRISTIANISATION OF SUPERNATURAL INSCRIPTIONS

In this part of the chapter I will argue that supernatural inscriptions in the fourth and fifth centuries are notably different to those in the sixth and seventh centuries. In the fourth and up to the mid-fifth century, attempts to attain supernatural power through inscriptions were quite explicit. In this period it was common to have inscriptions that wished to avert malevolent powers, such as the previous example at Skala (third-fourth century). The same centuries also used inscriptions to acquire beneficial powers, as can be seen from examples from a fourth-century mosaic inscription at the House of Manios Antoninos "[...] May the fortune of the house be prosperous, and prosperous too the restorer of the house [...]" (fig. 56, cat. 14) or the fifth-century inscription from a Jewish bath in Hulda (Israel), wishing luck to its donors Eustochios, Hesychios and Evagrios (cat. 37).<sup>446</sup> What is significant about the inscriptions from these centuries is

<sup>444</sup> Dunbabin, 'Baiaurum Grata Voluptas', pp. 16-20.

<sup>445</sup> 'Wreath' in Alexander Kazhdan (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, Vol. 3 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 2205.

<sup>446</sup> ΜΑΝ[ΙΟC] ΠΑΙC ΑΠΙCΤΟΚΛΙΑC / ΕΥ ΤΕΧΙ ΤΩ Η ΤΥΧΗ ΤΗC ΟΙΚΙΑC ΕΥ ΤΥΧΙ ΤΩ ΚΑΙ ΟΑΝΑΝΕΩ... ΤΙC ΟΙΚΟΛ... ΜΑΝΤΩΝΙΑC ΜΕ ΤΑΠΗC ΓΥΝΗ ΘΕΟC ΗΓΟΥ[ΜΑΙ]. Konstantinos L. Zachos, 'Conservation and Restoration of the Nikopolis Mosaics: A Program for Integrated Management and Presentation of the Archaeological Site', in *Lessons Learned: Reflecting on the Theory and Practice of Mosaic Conservation*, ed. by Aïcha Ben Abed et al., (Los Angeles: Getty, 2008), 151-159

that the beneficial or protective power comes from a broad, unclear supernatural source and could be labelled as superstition; many do not ask or invoke God or the gods' powers.

The fourth and fifth-century inscriptions reveal the Byzantines' Roman heritage, as the themes in these texts were also written on Roman mosaics. To take just one example, the Byzantine well-wishing inscriptions can be compared to a third-century Roman example that wished "Good luck to the one from Nagidos" (cat. 3).<sup>447</sup> These examples also have a courtesy factor. They are on the one hand polite greetings, but they also have an undertone of coveting beneficial powers. The link between the fourth/fifth century inscriptions with Roman ones might be expected from a culture that regarded itself as a continuation of that empire. However, a different tone emerges after the mid-fifth century.

Such explicit sentiments become harder to identify in the late-fifth, sixth and seventh-century inscriptions, whether in religious or secular settings. It is not that floor mosaics ceased to have supernatural functions in those centuries; instead the inscriptions became Christianised. Inscriptions from these centuries used Christian rhetoric and it becomes clearer that the power comes from a Christian source, rather than from an unclear supernatural source. This power might still be called supernatural but it does take on more of a distinct Christian identity. From a modern perspective, these inscriptions might not seem especially potent, as our familiarity with Christianity has reduced the perception of them as seeking power, but to the Early Byzantines, these inscriptions were regarded as devices that could acquire beneficial and protective powers. For that reason they are not too different from those of earlier centuries; the only difference is that these inscriptions are under a Christian rubric. For example, rather than asking that Phthonos be destroyed, a fifth or sixth-century mosaic inscription from the threshold of a room within a monastery at Beit She'an (modern Israel) appropriated a passage from the Old Testament when it asked "Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in and blessed when thou goest out" (fig. 57, cat. 46).<sup>448</sup> The text

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(p. 153). EYTYXΩC / EYCTOXIΩ / KAI HCYXIO / KAI EOYATPIΩ / TOIC KTIC-/ T[AI]C. Ovadiah and Ovadiah, *Hellenistic, Roman and Early Byzantine Mosaic Pavements*, no. 104, p. 73.

<sup>447</sup> ΝΑΓΙΔΟC / EYTYXΩC. Russell, *The Mosaic Inscriptions of Anemurium*, no. 6, pp. 36-38.

<sup>448</sup> Deuteronomy 28: 6. + EIPHNH H EICOΔOC COY K[AI] H EΞOΔOC. Ovadiah and Ovadiah, *Hellenistic, Roman and Early Byzantine Mosaic Pavements*, no. 28, p. 32.

implies a person will be protected as they walk over the threshold. The passage comes from the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy which gives a list of blessings that will be bestowed upon a person if they abide by Moses' laws. Being blessed whilst walking in and out is one of the benefits, alongside such things as the good fortune of a city, the health of a child, and a bountiful harvest. Taken on its own, the passage on the threshold from Beth She'an could be seen as referring to the prevalent beliefs around doorways and the need to garner extra protection: it could be an attempt to attract protective power as a person walked over the dangerous area of the threshold. In this view, the inscription provided power to the person who walked over the vulnerable area of a building. If not that interpretation, then at the very least, the inscription could be a reminder to someone to abide by the laws of Moses, otherwise they would not gain protection as they crossed over the doorway.

A similar Christianisation of power inscriptions can be seen in an example at Caeseria Maritima, which sought beneficial, prosperous powers through a supernatural means when it stated "The Lord God will bless your grain and your wine and your oil and He will increase [them]" (fig. 58, cat. 44).<sup>449</sup> Both of these examples have a Christian dimension, and both are coincidentally passages from the Bible. Not all of the inscriptions from these later centuries come from the Bible, but there is a noticeable difference in tone, theme and certainty that these powers come from God. They are addressed to Him or are directed at Him. Both of the above are less explicit than those of earlier centuries. They still seek beneficial and protective powers but under the rubric of blessings. Blessings should be considered as a form of supernatural power; from an objective point of view there is little difference between the two. To receive a blessing is to be granted an advantage in life, and the way in which this is attained is through an intervention from a supernatural realm to the terrestrial realm. The term 'blessings' can be considered another word for supernatural power. With this in mind, the later Christianised inscriptions can be considered in the same vein as the earlier century examples. This is not surprising considering this happened in other media across the empire.

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<sup>449</sup> Deuteronomy 7:13. K[YPIO]C O Θ[EO]C EYΛO-/ΓHCEI TON CITON / COY KAI TON OINON / COY KAI TO EΛ[AI]ON / COY KAI ΠΛHΦY-/NEI AMHN. Ovadiah and Ovadiah, *Hellenistic, Roman and Early Byzantine Mosaic Pavements*, no. 67, p. 50.

The discrepancy between the fourth/fifth century inscriptions and those in the sixth/seventh also occurred in other Byzantine media. In a study of seals that were stamped on bread, clay and amphorae, Béatrice Caseau highlighted the Christianisation of inscriptions in Early Byzantium.<sup>450</sup> She showed that the inscriptions on fourth and fifth-century stamps commonly had well-wishing functions, asking for “Life!” or “Health!” (fig. 59). These inscriptions were phrased as commands. But by the sixth and seventh centuries there was a Christianisation of stamp inscriptions which meant that the tone of the texts referred more to Christ, acclamations of “One God” or had the inclusion of a cross. Caseau argued these inscriptions were still written to attract powers, but the stamps’ designs had to be more discrete in the later centuries otherwise they might be considered idolatrous or magical. The inscriptions on floor mosaics can be seen in the same vein. Attempts to attract power through words had to be seen as coming from God, not from a broader, unclear or heretical supernatural realm.<sup>451</sup>

The Christianisation of inscriptions of the later years highlights a further issue that Caseau also encountered: how to distinguish supernatural power from religious statements. There is a fine line between the two and it is not clear whether the Byzantines could distinguish between a supernatural inscription and a religious one. For example, the inscription on the threshold of a room at Tell Basul highlights the difficulty. The inscription, perhaps dating to the seventh century, when translated reads as “This is the gate of the Lord into which the righteous shall enter” (cat. 19).<sup>452</sup> In light of Caseau’s argument, Tell Basul’s inscription could be interpreted as a disguised attempt to attract protective powers, in which demons were forbidden to enter as they were not considered righteous. The placement of the text over the threshold could be seen as a further indication that the text was laid there to avert the malevolent beings. Yet the inscription might be understood simply as a religious statement and a conviction of religious faith. It may have sought to attract power, but it might be saying that only those that followed God’s laws could access the room. If this latter interpretation is correct, it was not an attempt to prevent demons from entering; it was a reminder to the monastery’s users of the importance of following doctrine.

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<sup>450</sup> Caseau, ‘Magical Protection and Stamps in Byzantium’, pp. 115-132.

<sup>451</sup> Caseau, ‘Magical Protection and Stamps in Byzantium’, pp. 125-128.

<sup>452</sup> [AYTH H ΠΙΥΛΗ (TOY) KYPIOY, ΔΙ]K(AIOI) EICEAEYC(ONTAI) EN AYTH. Ovadiah and Ovadiah, *Hellenistic, Roman and Early Byzantine Mosaic Pavements*, no. 235, p. 138.

A similar ambiguity between supernatural power and religious statements can be noted when comparing power with prayer. When prayers were written in inscribed form, they might be construed as attempts to acquire power. Since prayers tend to ask for assistance, power and blessings, it can be seen why prayers are not too different to inscriptions from the earlier centuries of Byzantium. Both seek what they desire from a supernatural realm. Consider an inscription at the centre of the nave from a church in Memphis in Israel. When translated it reads “Lord save Thy servant Nilos, who loves Christ, the builder of this [holy place], and Lord guard his house” (fig. 60, cat. 38).<sup>453</sup> The inscription asks God to save and guard Nilos’ house (οἶκος), meaning both the person’s home as well as the inhabitants of it. The inscription might be taken as an example of attracting protective power. It is addressed to God and it asks Him to provide protective forces to keep Nilos’ family or the building safe: it asks God to intervene in the terrestrial realm and provide the powers. The mention of the Judeo-Christian deity might imply that power was sought from Him: this makes the power in the inscription Christian rather than just supernatural. Yet the desire for real protective power at Memphis is not as explicit as the earlier centuries and is disguised behind religious statements. The inscription could be interpreted in two further ways. It was either deemed that there was protective power in the words, or the inscription was just a message to God: in the latter case, power was not in the words. Rather, it asked God to intervene, and only then would God decide whether or not to lend his powers.

Whatever the difference between supernatural and religious power, if any, both might be understood as efforts to gain from a supernatural realm and they reflect a belief that benefits can be attained. Fifth, sixth and seventh-century floor mosaic inscriptions fit into this ambiguous category and they reflect the growing Christian influence. Depicting the written word could be used to acquire power, but the text had to be directed to God, so that the power came from Him. The text might be disguised as blessings or prayer, but the intent behind the inscriptions was still an endeavour to attain powers from a supernatural realm. Like the examples from the fourth and fifth century, the inscriptions might still be taken as reflecting the hopes and fears of individuals in

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<sup>453</sup> Κ(ΥΠΙ)Ε ΩΝΩΝ / ΤΟΝ ΔΟΥΛΟΝ / ΚΟΥ ΝΙΛΟΝ ΤΟΝ / ΦΙΛΟΧΡΙΣΤΟΝ ΤΟΝ / ΚΤΙCΑΝΤΑ ΤΑ Ο-/ΔΕ ΚΑΙ Κ(ΥΠΙ)Ε ΦΥΛ(ΑΞΕ) ΤΟ-/Ν ΟΙΚΟΝ ΑΥΤ(ΟΥ). Ovadiah and Ovadiah, *Hellenistic, Roman and Early Byzantine Mosaic Pavements*, no. 174, p. 105.



Early Byzantium. It tells us about their desire to keep loved ones safe, living in a beneficial and peaceful afterlife, and a terrestrial desire for good fortune to ensure success and favour in this life. The inscriptions again reiterate the perceived potency in the visual sphere: the words that make up an inscription were believed to be potent. The power came from the words, not necessarily the tesserae.

## LITERAL AND RHETORIC INTERPRETATIONS

There are some mosaic inscriptions that might appear to seek power, but on closer inspection, probably did not have that function. Whether the Byzantines themselves recognised this ambiguity will be discussed. One issue that arises is how much we can read into these inscriptions? Are they to be taken literally or are they rhetoric? Consider one that comes from a bath building at Anemourion in southern Turkey. This fifth-century text comes from a room where a person washed before having a bath (*apodyterium*). In the centre of the floor, amongst numerous symbols, the inscription might, at first sight, be interpreted with a supernatural function. When translated it reads as

“Copious is the charm of the buildings; in charge of everything is the strategos Mouseos whom nature has adorned with shining qualities. May Envy (*Phthonos*) keep away from the excellence of the mosaic” (fig. 61, cat. 43).<sup>454</sup>

Like the inscription at Skala, it refers explicitly to Envy (under the name of Φθονος *Phthonos*). But was it an attempt to garner protective powers to ward him off? Is the inscription asking for *Phthonos* to be kept away from citizens? A literal interpretation of the text would suggest not. It flatters the building’s manager or owner, Mouseos, and says he had created such a beautiful building that it might attract envy. The words do not ask for *Phthonos* to be attacked or destroyed, nor does it ask for power to combat it. Rather, it seems to be a *topos*, a rhetorical epigram here attesting to belief in envy. It essentially says that the building was so beautiful that envious eyes might cause harm to it, but it does not ask for help in warding envy off. This is quite different from attempts to use text to attract powers. Yet this conclusion is based on a retrospective, literal interpretation of the text.

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<sup>454</sup> ΠΟΛΛΗ ΜΕΝ ΕC[ΤΙ]Ν Η ΧΑ[ΡΙ]C ΤΩΝ ΚΤΙCΜΑΤΩΝ / ΚΥΡΙΟC ΑΠΑΝΤΩΝ Ο CΤΡΑΤΗ[ΓΟ]C ΜΟΥCΕΟC / ΟΝ Η ΦΥCΙC ΚΟCΜΗCΕ ΛΑΜΠΡΑΙC ΑΞ[ΙΑ]ΙC / ΦΘΟΝΟC Τ ΑΠΕCΤΩ ΤΗC ΑΡΕΤΗC ΤΗC ΨΗ[ΦΙΔ]ΟC. Russell, *The Mosaic Inscriptions of Anemurium*, no. 7, pp. 39-40.

Above I have suggested that through a literal reading, the ambiguous inscription at Anemourion was probably intended as a rhetorical device that did not seek powers in averting Phthonos. But this presumes the Early Byzantines took note of every inscription and, if literate, would take the time to read them. A second way the Anemourion inscription might be interpreted is through the eyes of the Early Byzantines. A casual misreading or misunderstanding from not contemplating the inscription properly could have led some Byzantine viewers to think the inscription had a supernatural function. When confronted with a text, scholars today tend to analyse it in great detail, often missing important questions such as whether anyone took the time to read the inscription in the first place? How long did Byzantines spend reading them? Were these inscriptions analysed in great detail, in the same way that modern scholars examine them? Could people have read the texts when fellow citizens may have been standing on the mosaic? Would people have looked down at a mosaic when their eyes might instead be looking at the walls, ceiling or human activities in a room? Did those who could not read still know what the text said because it was received knowledge within the community? Such questions are not always possible to answer, but it seems plausible to suggest that not every Byzantine studied inscriptions with the detail of modern scholarship. At Anemourion, it seems reasonable to suggest the inscription could have been misunderstood as seeking to avert malevolent powers through the ambiguous wording.

From what is known about Byzantine education, the ability to read and a familiar knowledge of classical grammar (and use of *topos*) was not accessible for all.<sup>455</sup> This means that even if someone were partially literate, they may not have been aware of the *topos* and rhetorical style of the inscription. The last part of the inscription (“May Envy keep away from the excellence of the mosaic”) could have been interpreted as an attempt to ward off Phthonos. Some of the bath’s users may not have been literate at all. They might have regarded the text as James had suggested, as signs that were only glanced at, unaware of the significance of the inscription. Because the Byzantines read texts aloud rather than silently in their heads, the illiterate may have heard another bath user read the inscription aloud or heard in passing that the inscription mentioned

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<sup>455</sup> Markopoulos, ‘Education’, pp. 786-789.

Phthonos. If any of the above were true, then the mosaic could be seen in Hutson's terms as providing the bath's users with a sense of confidence, as they knew that action was being taken (the inscription) to prevent misfortune, even if that inscription had been misinterpreted.

The fourth-century inscription at Sheikh Zoweid is another example of the ambiguity in attempts to attract or avert power through text (fig. 37, cat. 13). The mosaic was laid within a room whose function is now unknown. It has two large panels that depict figural imagery of gods and mythical characters. There are inscription panels at the very top, in the centre and below the lowest panel. At a first glance, the middle inscription might be seen as referring to supernatural powers. A translation reads as

“Friend, observe with pleasure the charming things which art has placed in the mosaic cubes petrifying and repelling the jealousy and the eyes of envy (*Phthonon*). You are one who is often proud of the enjoyable art”.<sup>456</sup>

A literal interpretation might say that, although Phthonos is referred to, the inscription does not seek to expel Envy. Instead, it uses *topos* and rhetoric to refer to the mosaic and the building as beautiful enough to attract envy. This is not an attempt to attract power; this is praise for the mosaic and the building. A supernatural function does not match the accompanying imagery either. The other two inscriptions above and below would not appear to have a supernatural dimension either; they also attest to the beauty of the mosaic and the building.<sup>457</sup> This is a literal interpretation of the inscriptions. But like the Anemourion example, it could be speculated that the building's contemporary viewers gazed at the inscription rather than interpreting it, and those who were partially literate or illiterate may have overheard the reference to envy and regarded it as attempt to avert Phthonos.

<sup>456</sup> ΔΕΥΡ ΙΔΕ ΤΑC ΧΑΡΙΤΑC ΧΑΙΡΟΝ, ΦΙΛΕ, ΑC ΤΙΝΑC / ΗΜΙΝ ΤΕΧΝΗ ΤΑΙC ΨΗΦΟΙC ΕΜΒΑΛΕ, ΠΗΞΑΜΕΝΗ / ΤΟΝ ΦΘΟΝΟΝ ΕΚ ΜΕCCOΥ ΚΑΙ ΟΜΜΑΤΑ ΒΑΚΑΝΗC, ΤΗC / ΙΛΑΡΗC ΤΕΧΝΗC ΠΟΛΛΑΚΙC ΕΥΞΑΜΕΝΟC. Ovadiah and Ovadiah, *Hellenistic, Roman and Early Byzantine Mosaic Pavements*, no. 69, p. 52.

<sup>457</sup> The top inscription when translated reads “You could see Nestor the builder, lover of beauty” ([ΙΔ]ΟΙC ΝΕCΤΟΡΑ ΤΟΝ ΦΙΛΟΚΑΛΟΝ ΚΤΙCΤΗΝ). The lowest inscription when translated reads “If you love me, gentlemen, enter gladly into this grand hall and then your soul will enjoy the works of art herein. Cypris wove the splendid peplos of the Charites by a mosaic of delicate cube stones, into which she put a lot of charm” (ΕΙ ΜΕ ΦΙΛΕΙC ΩΝΘΡΩΠΕ, ΧΑΙΡΩΝ ΕΠΙΒΑΙΝΕ ΜΕΛΑΘΡΩΝ / ΨΥΧΗΝ ΤΕΠΙΟΜΕΝΟC ΤΕΧΝΗΜΑCΙΝ ΟΙCΙΝ ΠΙΘΩ ΗΜΙΝ). Ovadiah and Ovadiah, *Hellenistic, Roman and Early Byzantine Mosaic Pavements*, no. 69, pp. 51-53.

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In this chapter I have argued that inscriptions could be depicted in floor mosaics for supernatural purposes. The Byzantines believed powers were manifest within the words. Alternatively, the texts could be addressed to deities who could provide the powers. The written word, like the perception of images, was considered a device to acquire power in floor mosaics. These inscriptions can be considered in terms of sympathetic magic. I compared floor mosaic inscriptions with texts that were written on lintels, gemstones and papyri spells to argue that there are similarities between them. Text was used as a device to attract powers from a supernatural realm to the floor. The mosaic acted as a conduit to contact the supernatural realm. The power of a mosaic came from the words and images depicted on it. This reiterates the argument in this thesis that floor mosaics could be designed for specific supernatural functions and they can be considered in the same vein as objects such as gemstones and lintels, although since mosaics (implicitly) sought to attract powers for all who walked upon them, they have a different function to other supernatural objects. The reason why this chapter is crucial to understanding the significance of these inscriptions is because it shows how text is not just useful for scholarship when determining the date of the mosaic, indicating which workshop made the mosaic or providing a glimpse as to what a mosaic might mean; rather, I have illustrated in this chapter how the Byzantines perceived text to be potent and how it had as vital a role as images in attracting power.

Inscriptions could be used for supernatural power whatever one's religious affiliation. The use of text in seeking power transcends religion and it instead reflects a belief that visual representations, whether images or text, were potent. I argued that text was used to attract beneficial and protective powers, invoking luck, wishing prosperity or ensuring demons could not cause harm. I showed that inscriptions were depicted at Kourion to attract power. The threshold at the entrance used text to wish good luck and good fortune to the visitor and to the building. A second inscription within the hall of the same building used an inscription to invoke "the signs of Christ" to attract protection via a supernatural means. I also demonstrated that the mosaic at Skala sought to ward off Phthonos, a malevolent being who was believed to cause misfortune. I showed how both art and text played a crucial role in repelling him. Through examples at Memphis, Tell Basul and Beit She'an, I revealed how inscriptions went through

changes in tone and style in the late fifth, sixth and seventh centuries to become Christianised. This was a conscious effort to ensure that the power being sought through text came through God, so as to avoid accusations of magic, heresy and idolatry.

In this chapter I argued that examining mosaic inscriptions is one method a scholar can use when determining whether a floor mosaic had a supernatural function. Those texts need to be taken at two levels. The first is through a literal reading, which might reveal what the patron or designer intended. Yet, that approach does not account for a second, more conceptual interpretation whereby Byzantines may not have read the inscription with as great a detail as scholars do. This second interpretation takes into consideration the idea that other contemporaries may have only gazed at the text, if it was even noticed at all. I also suggested scholars need to be careful with this method. While some inscriptions used text to attract supernatural powers, at other times they only refer to supernatural themes.

## CONCLUSION

My thesis has argued that Early Byzantine floor mosaics have the potential to be seen in supernatural terms. The images and words depicted on mosaics were a way of attracting powers from a supernatural realm. The means by which I undertook my examination was through the medium of floor mosaics and by comparing them with objects whose supernatural functions were more explicit, such as gemstones and papyri spells. Its purpose was to demonstrate that some floor mosaics had specific purposes in being an aid to provide a sense of security or good fortune.

This approach sought to develop a broader historical understanding of the Early Byzantine period. I argue that this period needs to be readdressed: rather than being regarded as a pious and holy society, it was actually more diverse and un-orthodox than that. Our view of Early Byzantine history is indebted to the writings of the Church Fathers who discuss Christian ideals and it is these that tend to get applied to this period. But these texts have a certain bias. Not only do they give the view of a minority of educated, Christian men; these texts also contain a lot of disapproval of non-Christian beliefs. Interestingly though, the disapproval was not just aimed at pagans; the authors of these texts vented their frustration at Christians who chose to engage with non-Christian themes and who were not being pious enough for the Church Fathers' liking. The Church Fathers actually attest that everyday Christians were not particularly holy or pious: people were engaging in magical, superstitious and alternative beliefs alongside Christian religious practices. This was a society that sought supernatural assistance through charms and rituals that were not necessarily approved by the Church Fathers and church authorities. This prevalence of non-Christian beliefs in society is rather different to the orthodox and pious Early Byzantine society that produced religious art, which is portrayed in some Byzantine literature, such as those by Antony Eastmond and Robin Cormack.<sup>458</sup> My thesis has shown that to understand the Early Byzantine period, it needs to be acknowledged that at many levels of society people were living in a world of spiritual diversity. Pagan presence could still be felt, there were communities of Jews in the major cities, magic was a source to turn to and superstitions were commonplace. This interest in the supernatural was so strong that Byzantines expressed their

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<sup>458</sup> Cormack, *Byzantine Art*, pp. 2-3. Eastmond, *The Glory of Byzantium and Early Christendom*, p. 7.

supernatural hopes and fears through the use of floor mosaics, whether those beliefs were Christian, borderline-Christian or non-Christian.

By putting my emphasis on how floor mosaics can reflect the beliefs of Byzantine citizens, I have demonstrated how art historians can get closer to the minds of those that viewed mosaics and, hence, understand this period much better. Looking at Byzantine beliefs, whether magical, superstitious or religious, reminds the Byzantinist that they can look beyond the aesthetic factors of how Byzantine art looks and of what quality they were made. Mosaics, like other objects and other works of art, were created because they were a way of expressing the supernatural wishes, desires or fears that individuals felt. Remembering that objects and images can express the beliefs of people, rather than just a society's aesthetic tastes, is an important issue for art historians. It reminds us that users and viewers of art, both past and present, use objects and images to express their devotion or spirituality. When studied, this reveals rewarding and intriguing cultural insights into how past societies used, viewed art, and hence interacted with the world around them, which is rather different to how we see art in contemporary societies.

In addition, this thesis has argued that the Byzantines had a different perception to us, in the twenty first century, of what art was. Among other things, the Byzantines believed objects and works of art could contain supernatural powers. This is an interesting topic, but one that is rarely discussed in art history. This is surprising considering looking at such a topic reveals far more cultural information about those that are under discussion: it brings us closer to the people of the past. We realise that we have the same hopes, fears and aspirations about those we study. It makes those we study more humane. Whereas a twenty-first-century perception of art tends to revolve around who made it, when it was made, and what it was made from, the Byzantines regarded art as an effective tool whether in disseminating information (propaganda) or in containing supernatural essences. It is the latter that, until recently, has been overlooked by art historical studies. This is not to the detriment of art-history. Rather, this thesis has helped to show how art history can begin to acknowledge and look to the cultural factors that were involved in art and objects: when objects were made, cultural aspects inform the motivation for that manufacture.

My contribution to the understanding of the Early Byzantine period and my contribution to art history can be illustrated by three different examples that were discussed in my thesis. By looking at three different examples we can see why the Early Byzantine period needs to be readdressed as a more diverse and plural society. With the same examples we can also see that looking at cultural factors can help art historians in understanding how art was used. The so-called Eustolios complex at Kourion (figs. 40, 51, 55 and cat. 25-27) is an example of a building where many of its mosaics are in tact and several of which suggest the floors of the building were designed to provide supernatural power. As well as invoking Christian power through the 'sign of Christ', the mosaics also seek good fortune through an unclear supernatural source, as well as through personifications. The combining of these supernatural sources together suggest a diverse period and one where combining Christian themes with non-Christian ones was quite acceptable. In turn this helps to highlight the mind-set of some of those that commissioned the mosaic, indicating their hopes and fears. The mosaic at Adeitha (fig. 1, cat. 75) is an example of a mosaic, whose entire surface was depicted with supernatural symbols. With this mosaic, there was another instance of varieties of Christian and non-Christian designs being used, which suggest a more plural society that was keen to acquire as many powers as possible in a non-orthodox manner. Rather than a specific mosaic, I have also referred to groups of mosaics together, such as my discussion of personifications in Chapter Three, where it can also be seen that those figures were depicted to attract the quality that the images represented. This power was a mixture of pagan, sympathetic magic and unclear power sources, which, suggests we need to readdress how 'orthodox' Early Byzantium actually was, as it would seem to reflect a society that believed images and words held power. That some of these words or images were not entirely Christian suggests that non-Christian beliefs were quite apparent in society and acceptable to display to guests who might see the floor. It also shows us that by studying this, we can see that the citizens of the empire were anxious or keen to gain as much powers or confidence as they could in an uncertain world. The way in which this helps art historians is that by realising some floor mosaics have a supernatural function, it becomes clear that the mosaics were not just viewed as decorative pavements: they were designed to have a specific purpose in attracting powers from a supernatural realm. This in itself informs us that Byzantine culture



sought protection and good fortune, and it brings us closer to understanding the mind-set of those that used and commissioned art. Art meant something very specific to the Byzantines which is not necessarily present to many people in modern societies: art and objects were sources that could manipulate, appeal or channel supernatural powers. Art was not something just to look at; works of art could be powerful things that affected people's mood, could instil confidence and affect a supernatural realm.

In this thesis I used five methods of how we, modern viewers, might go about identifying whether a mosaic can be seen in supernatural terms. Establishing with certainty whether the images or words on a mosaic had those functions proved troublesome, as the Byzantines did not write greatly about floor mosaics, let alone how they might be interpreted. One method that can be used is to look at images that are depicted by themselves within a frame. I illustrated with the personification of *Ktisis* at Kourion, that isolation implied the image had a specific meaning or purpose. I argued that this way of portraying images can be seen in sympathetic magic terms: the images were perceived as attracting the content of what they represented. Another method was to look to threshold areas of buildings. Since that area was perceived to require protection, the images and words on that part of a mosaic can be considered as being positioned there for protective purposes. The symbols depicted on the threshold of a room in the House of the Phoenix Antioch, and the words on the threshold of the room at Beit She'an were specifically placed there to protect these areas from malevolent beings. Reading the inscriptions on floor mosaics was another method that can be used. The text provides a direct 'voice' or insight as to what the patron or designer of the mosaic intended and thus is a way to determine whether a mosaic sought to attract power. As was demonstrated with the *anguipede* at Antigoneia and the personification of the Nile at Sepphoris, images that are unusual or which are portrayed in an unconventional way provided an additional method that was useful. When shown in these ways it suggested an image had a specific purpose, and it is worth considering whether it can be seen in supernatural terms. Lastly, looking to motifs that are repeated provided yet another means of analysis. As I argued with an example at Zahrani, this can be seen as multiplying the powers that the image represents.

Even using these various methods, identifying whether a floor mosaic can be seen in supernatural terms is still not a straightforward matter. The problematic nature for us, today, and perhaps too for the Byzantines, is that their imagery could be interpreted in multiple ways. How one person interpreted an isolated peacock might be different to another. What this signifies is that even if a mosaic was designed to attract power, other viewers may have interpreted the mosaic in non-supernatural terms. Likewise, even if a mosaic was not intended to have a supernatural function, contemporaries still might have interpreted it as having one. The potential for multiple interpretations in floor mosaics may derive from the lack (and prohibition) of images of Christian figures on floors. If this had been permitted, supernatural functions might be easier to identify. Without these images, the designers and patrons of mosaics had to use other iconography and another means to attract powers; this meant using depictions of symbols, creatures, personifications and inscriptions, which could easily have been interpreted in non-supernatural ways as well.

At the beginning of this thesis I asked four questions: what were mosaics for, what a supernatural function could inform us about Early Byzantium, what depictions were suitable for attracting power, and what were the beliefs surrounding these images. In addition to being surfaces to walk upon, floor mosaics could be designed with a further function whereby inscriptions and images could be utilised to attract supernatural powers. In this sense, floor mosaics were regarded as surfaces (or objects) that were infused with power. They provided a permanent source of power to a building. The supernatural functions of mosaics tells us that Early Byzantium was a period that was more diverse than is traditionally thought. Supernatural assistance was required in all aspects of life: using the floor in this manner builds a perception of a society that was keen to acquire advantages in as many ways as possible. The types of subjects that were depicted in the mosaics included symbols, creatures, personifications and inscriptions. These floors were believed to be infused with supernatural power through processes of sympathetic magic. The words and images were perceived to possess what they represented: to depict a cross was to attract the power of Christ; to depict a peacock was to attract the associations of immortality; to depict a personification of Safety was to attract its quality. There was a mixture of beliefs present in the mosaics' powers: Christian, magical, pagan and unclear ones. What is significant is that the lines between these different beliefs overlapped and were not

clear-cut. However these beliefs are categorised, what this thesis has highlighted is a significant Byzantine belief in the power of words and images.

Ultimately, however, floor mosaics should be compared to gemstones, amulets, lintels, icons and other objects whose supernatural functions are more pronounced. As well as being surfaces to walk on, mosaics were also surfaces that could be perceived to have supernatural power. These mosaics had a vital role in providing a level of safety or a sense of good fortune through the depiction of imagery and words. Further studies might ask whether the use of supernatural power was exclusive to the floor by asking whether Byzantine wall mosaics can be seen in the same terms.

In light of my study it can be said that the powers in floor mosaics bore no relation to the medium of floor mosaic. It was not the little cubes of tesserae and mortar that were seen as potent. This is in some contrast to other supernatural objects such as gems or curse tablets, where power was perceived to come as much from the material as the images or inscriptions. Yet it would not seem that the same could be said of mosaic. Rather, it was the resonance of position and the imagery and words on the mosaics that were deemed powerful. My thesis has reiterated that the Byzantines believed that art and text could convey and embody power; they could be used as devices to avert or attract supernatural powers. Power was perceived to be *in* images and it was believed it could be acquired through that. The use of art and text for these purposes shows an aspect of the Byzantines that scholarship does not tend to stress often; we might interpret this as reflecting their hopes and fears. Protection was sought out of fear of malevolent forces who might cause misfortune or harm at any moment, night or day; while the mosaics also reflected a desire for a long, healthy and fortunate lives. Floor mosaics were not the only form of media that could be utilised to attract powers, but the use of these surfaces for that particular function can be seen as reflecting a society where powers were sought wherever possible, in whatever media.

Because mosaics have been thought to be expensive commodities, these pavements have been taken by mosaic historians to represent esteemed surfaces that represented the tastes of the upper classes of Byzantium. That some mosaics may have used images and words to attract powers presents a rather different cultural perception. It shows that mosaics could have specific functions and they reflected the Byzantines'

ambiguous stance towards alternative beliefs; this is rather different to the academic assumption that these were surfaces for contemplation. I have moved away from discussions of style, technique and dating to look at the function of mosaics. I have argued that in some cases, mosaics were perceived to attract supernatural powers. This is important to acknowledge as it forces the Byzantinist to reconsider how to study the Early Byzantine era. The Byzantines' attempts to attract supernatural power through art and text, whether that power was pagan, magical or superstitious, reflects a society that was not as Christian as Cormack and Eastmond have portrayed. Arguments that Early Byzantium was Christian and mostly produced religious art lead to generalisations that societies were orthodox, pious and wholly obedient to church laws. Though society was becoming socially and politically more Christian in Early Byzantium, there were many non-Christian beliefs and practices that continued to exist, in the form of magic, superstition or pagan cults. The existence of these alternative beliefs is important to recognise, because it shows that Early Byzantine society was considerably more plural and diverse than generalisations that have been put forward in some scholarship. That a mosaic might include these alternative beliefs shows that supernatural power was sought in this society and people could practice alternative beliefs alongside mainstream ones.





Unlike other supernatural objects, mosaics sought powers for a building or on behalf of groups of people, rather than an individual. A floor mosaic in a residential house, church or bath sought power for all of those in its building. This was probably because of a floor mosaic's function in being used by many people. Although there were some inscriptions that sought power for an individual, there were also many that sought power for the entire community. Perhaps it was deemed courteous to ask that others could benefit from the supernatural powers too. The communal aspect of this power is also markedly different to personal supernatural objects, found in objects such as gemstones, because a mosaic is a more permanent form of media: gemstones were portable and could be used as-and-when power was needed (for example, perhaps wearing one when heading to the baths). Yet floor mosaics were a fixed part of a building and the power in the words and imagery depicted on the floor was constant twenty-four hours a day and worked whether a building's inhabitants were aware or not. This permanent form of protection must have provided a great sense of comfort.

This thesis has reiterated that art and text were perceived to be potent devices in Early Byzantium. The Byzantines believed supernatural essences were within depictions and they could be acquired, whether that essence was Christian, pagan, magical or a broader supernatural power. In this thesis I have highlighted the role of sympathetic magic in the Byzantines attitude towards art and text. Like other cultures, the Byzantines believed that a depiction, whether in the form of imagery or words, was a way of acquiring what was represented. Depicting that on an object was considered a way of attracting those powers. I have argued that Early Byzantine floor mosaics need to be considered in this vein too. Far from being surfaces to contemplate or admire for their aesthetics, mosaics fulfilled a vital function in Early Byzantine buildings where they were believed to provide supernatural power.

## APPENDIX

In this part of the thesis, I present the database that I created to record the floor mosaics that I considered could be discussed in supernatural terms. The database takes the form of a table and it has seventy-six entries. The list is not exclusive and it is not to be taken as a record of every supernatural mosaic that has survived from the Early Byzantine period. Rather, it is a list of entries that I recorded from archaeological records. Some of the entries were recorded because a supernatural significance is clear, others were included because other scholars regarded them as having supernatural functions. In other cases, I included mosaics whose supernatural significance is more dubious, but nevertheless warranted inclusion.

I have presented the table in a particular way. Each mosaic has been given a number, and this is the content of the first tab. The rest of the table is organised by what century the mosaic is thought to have been made in (tab 2). Each century has been given a particular colour for easier reference, as can be seen in the key below.

Fourth century	
Fifth century	
Sixth century	
Seventh century	

When there are multiple mosaics that date to the same century as each other, I have listed the mosaics in an order that resembles the structure of my thesis: inscriptions would be listed first, then creatures, then personifications and then inscriptions (tab 3). The fourth tab records the name of the site, town or city the mosaic was laid in. The fifth tab lists the modern country where that mosaic was laid. The next two tabs then provide what kind of building the mosaic was laid in, what kind of room it was laid in or the position within a room/building the supernatural mosaic was laid in. The eighth tab briefly lists why the imagery or inscriptions might have supernatural significance. The last tab is a beginning point to where further literature on each mosaic can be found or to the archaeological records. In this last tab, I have given abbreviated forms of the bibliography, details of which can be found below.

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No.	Date of the production of the mosaic	Classification of the decoration	Site, town or city of the mosaic	Modern country	Type of building	The part of the building	Why the mosaic might be discussed in supernatural terms	Literature on the mosaic
1	Second century	Inscription	Chania	Crete (Greece)	Baths	Threshold of a changing room or a <i>caldarium</i>	Inscription with a <i>lamda</i> and an <i>alpha</i> , which stands for “Bathe safely”, which Rebecca Sweetman regards as apotropaic.	Sweetman, no. 133, pp. 70-71, 241.
2	Late third/early-fourth century	Personification/ Inscription	Skala	Kephallonia (Ionian island), Greece	Domestic building	Room whose function is not known	Depiction of Phthonos (Envy) stands with his legs and arms tied. Four animals depicted around him are about to attack him. Below is a long inscription wishing to avert Envy’s powers in that house.	Engemann, pp. 37-38. Dunbabin and Dickie, pp. 8-9.
3	Late third/early-fourth century	Inscription	Anemourion	Turkey	Uncertain	Threshold of a room, whose function is not known	An inscription reads “Good luck to the one from Nagidos”.	Russell, no. 6, pp. 36-38.
4	Third or fourth century	Inscription	Eleutherna	Crete (Greece)	Church	Entrance	Inscription urges visitors to be pious and reinforces the sanctity of the place they are visiting.	Sweetman, no. 111-114, p. 71, 227-230
5	Early-fourth century	Personification	Haidra	Tunisia	Not known	Not known	Personification of Time ( <i>Aion</i> ) stands within an oval decorated with signs of the zodiac. In each of the four corners are <i>erotes</i> , each one doing an activity of a season of the year.	Dunbabin, <i>MRNA</i> , p. 158.
6	Fourth century	Symbol	Mount Nebo	Jordan	Church (dedicated to Moses)	Sanctuary	A cross is depicted with a guilloche pattern inside it. It is depicted against a plain background. The isolation of the depiction suggests an ulterior motive. The cross and	Piccirillo, p. 144.

							guilloche can also be seen in supernatural terms.	
7	Fourth century	Personification	Antioch	Turkey	Villa	A room whose function is not known	Personifications that have no inscriptions to identify them. Doro Levi discusses this mosaic as having powers.	Levi, 1, p. 253.
8	Fourth century	Creature/ Figure	Piazza Armerina	Sicily (Italy)	Villa	A room near some baths	The floor depicts an entire hippodrome, complete with <i>spina</i> , charioteers and horses.	Dunbabin, <i>MGRW</i> , pp. 133, 135. Wilson, pp. 18-21.
9	Fourth century	Creature	Carthage	Tunisia	Domestic building	Uncertain	A peacock is depicted facing the viewer head-on within a niche. <i>Kantharoi</i> are in the corners. Below are four horses eating vegetation that grows from four separate seasons.	Dunbabin, <i>MRNA</i> , 104, 168-169. Merlin, pp. 129-154.
10	Fourth century	Creature/ Figure	Thugga (Dougga)	Tunisia	Uncertain	A room whose function is uncertain	A charioteer leads a quadriga of horses (only three survive) that are depicted with fauna and attributes of the four seasons.	Dunbabin, <i>MRNA</i> , p. 97
11	Fourth century	Creature/ Figure	Thugga (Dougga)	Tunisia	Uncertain	A room whose function is uncertain	A charioteer is depicted in a central medallion, with four separate horses depicted around him, near the borders.	Dunbabin, <i>MRNA</i> , p. 99, 158.
12	Fourth century	Personification	Antioch	Turkey	Domestic building	A room whose function is uncertain	A personification of <i>Ge</i> is depicted within a medallion in the centre. In the corners were four medallions with depictions of the Four Seasons. The background consists of interlaced swastikas.	Levi, 1, pp. 346-347.
13	Fourth century	Inscription/ Figures	Sheikh Zoweid	Egypt	Uncertain	Hall	Top panel depicts Phaedra and Hippolytus. Below is an inscription asks that Envy be kept away from the mosaic. Another panel below depicts various mythological figures.	Ovadiah, no. 69, pp. 51-52. Russell, p. 46.

14	Fourth century	Inscription/ Symbol	Nikopolis	Greece	Domestic building	A room whose function is uncertain	Inscription reads "... May the fortune of the house be prosperous, and prosperous too the restorer of the house...". An isolated Solomon's knot is in the centre of the inscription.	Zachos, pp. 153-154.
15	Late-fourth century	Symbol	Between Tremithous and Tremetousha	Cyprus	Basilica of Ayios Spyridon	Nave	There is a jewelled cross, with further crosses below, each one filled with a guilloche.	Michaelides, p. 36.
16	Late-fourth century	Symbols	Outskirts of central Antioch	Turkey	Martyrium of Babylas	East arm of the building	Crosses depicted just before the central area that housed Babylas' remains	Kitzinger, pp. 639-640.
17	Late-fourth century	Personification	Antioch	Turkey	Baths of Apolausis	Two rooms	Personification of <i>Soteria</i> (Safety) and <i>Apolausis</i> (Enjoyment) in two separate rooms to attract the personification's qualities.	Levi, 1, pp. 304-306. Leader-Newby, p. 231, 242.
18	Late-fourth century	Personification/ Figure	Ain-Témouchent	Algeria	Not known	Not known	Face of Okeanos stares at the viewer in a frontal manner. Nereids depicted on either side. A Latin inscription below used in conjunction to avert the Evil Eye.	Dunbabin, <i>MRNA</i> , pp. 151-152.
19	Late-fourth century	Inscription	Tell Basul	Israel	Monastery	A room whose function is not known	A medallion has the inscription "The Lord will guard thy coming in and going out, henceforth and forever (Psalms 121:8)" and on the threshold of the room is the inscription "This is the gate of the Lord into which the righteous shall enter (Psalms 118:20)".	Ovadia, no. 235, pp. 137-138.
20	Uncertain (perhaps	Symbol?	Madaba	Jordan	Domestic building	Threshold	Sandals depicted on threshold. Dunbabin has argued that	Piccirillo, p. 78.

	fourth or fifth century)						sandals had apotropaic and lucky functions when placed there.	
21	Fourth or fifth century	Personification	Kos	Kos (Greece)	Domestic building	Hall	Personification of the tyche of the island depicted in a medallion with no inscription.	Broucarsi, p. 69.
22	Uncertain (perhaps fourth century)	Personification	Antioch	Turkey	Domestic building (so-called House of Ktisis)	Room whose function is not known	Bust of <i>Ktisis</i> in a medallion, depicted without her rod. Plain background.	Levi, 1, pp. 357-358. Leader-Newby, p. 240, 246.
23	Uncertain (perhaps fourth or fifth century)	Inscription	Kisamos	Crete (Greece)	Domestic building	Entrance or a corridor	Inscription reads "Good luck fortune, to be on Pheidias". Rebecca Sweetman regards it as apotropaic.	Sweetman, p. 71.
24	Early-fifth century	Symbol	Apamea	Syria	Palace	A room whose function is uncertain	In the centre of a room is a medallion with an eight-rayed sign.	Maguire, <i>MG</i> , p. 265.
25	Early-fifth century	Personification	Kourion	Cyprus	Baths of Eustolios	Hall	A personification of <i>Ktisis</i> (Foundation/Creation/Donation) is set against an abstract background of geometric patterns to attract the quality the personification represents.	Michaelides, p. 42.
26	Early-fifth century	Inscription	Kourion	Cyprus	Baths of Eustolios	Threshold of a hallway	Inscription says it has girt itself with the much-venerated sign of Christ.	Michaelides, p. 41. Maguire, <i>MG</i> , p. 271. Engemann, pp. 47-48.
27	Early-fifth century	Inscription/Symbol	Kourion	Cyprus	Baths of Eustolios	Threshold to entrance	Inscription with a laurel wreath says "Enter to your good fortune, with good luck to the house". Depicted around the wreath are Solomon's knots, among other symbols.	Mitford, pp. 352-353.
28	442/443	Symbols	Evron	Israel	Church	Room (separate to the church)	Crosses and cross monograms.	Ovadiah, no. 80, pp. 59-60.

29	Fifth century	Symbols	Bethlehem	Palestine	Church of the Nativity	Two sets of steps before the chancery area	One panel is placed before the steps with Solomon's knots and an <i>Ichthys</i> inscription. The other panel was placed on the other side of the church with more Solomon's knots.	Ovadiah, no. 19, pp. 21-23. Kitzinger, pp. 642-645.
30	Fifth century	Symbol	Roglit	Israel	Church	South aisle	An octagon panel with a tree in the centre, around which are shapes filled with Solomon's knots, the Star of David and intricate patterns.	Ovadiah, no. 210, p. 124.
31	Fifth century	Symbol	Shavei Zion	Israel	Church	All	In the nave there are crosses, one is filled with a guilloche pattern. In the north aisle there is a grid with a central medallion with a further cross. In the south aisle there is a grid formed by swastikas.	Ovadiah, no. 215, p. 127.
32	Fifth century	Symbol	Butrint	Albania	Villa	Courtyard	Western walkway has an eye, a Solomon's knot, crosses, birds and other patterns within a grid composition.	Mitchell, pp. 281-287.
33	Uncertain (probably fifth century)	Symbols	Pella	Jordan	Church	Southeast part of the building	Crosses and chi-rhos depicted on the borders of the building to impart protective powers.	Piccirillo, pp. 330-331.
34	Fifth century	Personification	Antioch	Turkey	Domestic building	Room whose function is not known	Personification of <i>Ananeosis</i> (Renewal) with a medallion in the centre, with further personifications of the Four Seasons in the corners. Invoking the power of nature over the cyclical year.	Levi, 1, pp. 320-321.
35	Fifth century	Personification/ Inscription	Sepphoris	Israel	Uncertain	A room whose function is not certain	Rare personifications of the Nile and Egypt. The Nile and other Nilotic themes are depicted below. An inscription	Maguire, <i>TNRP</i> , p. 181. Netzer, pp. 47-51.

							in the border reads “Have good fortune”.	
36	Fifth century	Inscription	Mount Nebo	Jordan	Church of Amos and Kasiseos	Chapel – (so-called ‘Lower Chapel of the Priest John’)	Two inscriptions wishing “Good health” to a bishop and a deacon.	Piccirillo, p. 176.
37	Fifth century	Inscription	Hulda	Israel	Jewish baths	A room whose function is not known	Inscription within a medallion reads “Good luck to Eustochios and Hesychios and Evagrios the founders”.	Ovadiah, no. 104, p. 73.
38	Fifth century	Inscription	Memphis	Israel	Church	All	Inscription within a medallion “Lord save Thy servant Nilos, who loves Christ, the builder of this (holy place), and Lord guard his house”.	Ovadiah, no. 174, p. 105.
39	Uncertain (probably fifth century)	Inscription	Gadara of the Decapolis (Umm Qays)	Jordan	Baths (so-called Baths of Herakleides)	Hall	Within an octagon shape is a laurel wreath with an inscription wishing health to the builders and those that used the baths.	Piccirillo, p. 328.
40	Mid-fifth century	Personification	Beit She’an	Israel	Domestic building (so-called Kyrios Leontis)	Room whose function is not known	A male personification of the Nile invokes the prosperous power of the Nile.	Ovadiah, no. 31, p. 35.
41	Fifth century or later	Symbol	Alexandroupolis	Greece	Uncertain	Not known	A grid is formed by Herakles knots.	Spiro, p. 643-646.
42	Late-fifth century	Personification/ Symbol	Antioch	Turkey	Domestic building	Corridor	A panel takes the form of a cross, with four personifications in the corners of <i>Ktisis</i> , <i>Ananeosis</i> , <i>Euandria</i> (Manliness), and <i>Dynamis</i> (Strength).	Donceel-Voûte, p. 349. Maguire, <i>NI</i> , pp. 30-31.
43	Late-fifth century	Inscription	Anemourion	Turkey	Baths	<i>Apodyterium</i>	Inscription asks that Envy kept away from the mosaic.	Russell, no. 7, pp. 39-40.
44	Late-fifth century	Inscription	Caesarea Maritima	Israel	Uncertain, but probably a church	All	Inscription says God will bless the grain, wine and oil, and then increase them (Deuteronomy 7:13).	Ovadiah, no. 67, pp. 50-51.

45	Fifth or sixth century	Inscription	Arraba	Israel	Chapel	Western room	Inscription says with God's strength, Christ's help, the mosaic was made under the bishop Gregorios.	Ovadia, no. 3, p. 12.
46	Fifth or sixth century	Inscription	Beit She'an	Israel	Monastery (so-called Imoff)	A threshold of a room whose function is uncertain	Inscription on threshold is a passage from Deuteronomy 28:6 – "Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed when thou goest out". Elsewhere there are beribboned birds.	Ovadia, no. 28, p. 32.
47	Between the fifth and seventh centuries	Creature	Constantinople	Istanbul	Palace (so-called 'Great Palace')	Courtyard	Among many motifs is an isolated image of an eagle and snake in combat.	Wittkower, pp. 308-318. Brett, pp. 40-41. Trilling, pp. 59-60.
48	512	Symbols	Hazor-Ashdod	Israel	Church	Hall to the north	A medallion has a jewelled cross. Around it were intricate patterns and four letters I X A Ω. Around the medallions are squares filled with Solomon's knots and intricate patterns.	Ovadia, no. 93, p. 68.
49	530	Symbols	Nebo	Jordan	Baptistry	East	A pool is surrounded by knot symbols.	Piccirillo, pp. 146-147.
50	535/536	Personification	Nebo	Jordan	Church of Saint George	Nave	Personifications of the Four Seasons and <i>Ge</i> (Earth) depicted to attract earthly powers	Piccirillo, p. 178.
51	539-540	Personification	Olbia (Qasr-el-Lebia)	Libya	Church	Nave	Within a grid are squares, each are filled with motifs. Amongst them are personifications of the Four Rivers of Paradise, <i>Ananeosis</i> , Creation, <i>Kosmesis</i> and a figure labelled <i>Kastalia</i> .	Maguire, <i>EO</i> , pp. 44-48. Maguire, <i>PI</i> , pp. 23-25. Maguire, <i>OI</i> , pp. 63-65.
52	565	Personification	Nebo	Jordan	Church of Amos and Kasiseos	Chapel (so called 'Chapel of the Priest John')	Personification of <i>Ge</i> (Earth) amongst genre scenes showing activities involving the earth to attract earthly powers	Piccirillo, p. 174.



53	567	Inscription	Beit She'an	Israel	Monastery (dedicated to Lady Mary)	Hall	Inscription asks God to protect John and his house with the help of saints.	Ovadiah, no. 26, p. 26.
54	567	Inscription	Beit She'an	Israel	Monastery (dedicated to Lady Mary)	Corner of the chapel	Inscription threatens to curse the person that hinders the Lady Mary.	Ovadiah, no. 26, p. 28
55	578	Personification	Madaba	Jordan	Church of the Apostles	Nave	Personification of <i>Thalassa</i> (Sea) set against a background of beribboned pigeons to attract the quality of the personification.	Piccirillo, pp. 96-98.
56	587/588	Personification/ Creature	Umm al-Rasas	Jordan	Church of the Bishop Sergios	Nave	Personification of <i>Ge</i> (Earth) within an acanthus medallion. In another medallion is a nimbus-rayed phoenix.	Piccirillo, pp. 234-235.
57	Early-sixth century	Creature	Antioch	Turkey	Domestic building	Courtyard	Phoenix with a radiating nimbus stands on a rock against a background of rosebuds. Same iconography used on magical gemstones. The border with goats and beribboned wings.	Levi, 1, pp. 351-355.
58	Sixth century	Symbol	Beit Mery	Lebanon	Church	Entire floor, especially the surviving aisle	Aisle has concentric circles, swastikas, the eight-rayed sign and other <i>characteres</i> . Symbols have supernatural dimension.	Donceel-Voûte, p. 337-344. Maguire, <i>MG</i> , pp. 265-274.
59	Sixth century	Symbols/ Inscription	Ma'in	Jordan	Church	Apse	Multiple Solomon's knot, <i>kantharos</i> and an inscription in which Theodore asks for protection and salvation.	Piccirillo, p. 202.
60	Sixth century	Symbol/ Inscription	Livias (Shunah al-Janubiyah)	Jordan	Church	Nave	An octagon shape has a multiple Solomon's knot, with an inscription around it reading "God is with us".	Piccirillo, p. 322.

61	Sixth centuries (with some surviving fourth century parts)	Symbols	Zahrani	Lebanon	Church	North aisle	Solomon's knots and crosses are repeated several times within the same mosaic.	Donceel-Voûte, p. 427.
62	Sixth century	Symbols	Antioch	Turkey	Domestic building	Threshold of a room, whose function is uncertain	Two Solomon's knots and a knot of eight loops depicted on threshold.	Levi, 1, pp. 351-352. Kitzinger, p. 643.
63	Sixth century	Creature	Antigoneia	Albania	Church	Fills most of the space of the small 'church'.	In the centre is a panel depicting the <i>anguipede</i> . This creature usually reserved for magical objects.	Mitchell, pp. 297-304.
64	Sixth century	Creature	Apamea	Syria	Cathedral	A threshold at the south east of the building	Threshold panel was depicted with a tiger killing doe. Eunice Dauterman Maguire and Henry Maguire argued this panel had a talismanic function in warding off evil.	Maguire, <i>OI</i> , p. 67.
65	Sixth century	Personification	Madaba	Jordan	Domestic building	Hall	Personifications of Rome, Gregoria and Madaba. Attracting the power of the tyche to the floor.	Piccirillo, p. 57 and 66.
66	Sixth century	Personification	Antioch	Turkey	Domestic building	Room whose function is not known	<i>Ktisis</i> is depicted with a rod within a medallion in the centre amongst animal imagery	Maguire, <i>EO</i> , p. 50. Leader-Newby, p. 240, 245.
67	Sixth century	Figure	Madaba	Jordan	Uncertain	Uncertain	Panel depicting Herakles wrestling with a lion. Same iconography used on magical objects.	Piccirillo, p. 80.
68	Sixth century	Figure	Beit Guvrin	Israel	Church	North and south aisles	Jonah is depicted sleeping under a vine in the north aisle. South aisle depicts Jonah being thrown to a sea monster. Both of these images were	Ovadia, no. 17, pp. 19-20.

							depicted on Christian magical gemstones.	
69	Sixth century	Inscription/ Symbol	Shiqmona	Israel	Monastery	All	Inscription in the western room of the central hall “This is the place of lucky days” within a medallion. In the north lateral room was a grid with birds facing each other and disguised crosses.	Ovadia, no. 220, p. 131.
70	Mid-sixth century	Creature	Sabratha	Libya	Church	Nave	A frontal peacock and a frontal phoenix are depicted within respected medallion-like shapes, amongst foliage.	Dunbabin, <i>MRNA</i> , pp. 166-169, 189-190. Maguire, <i>EO</i> , pp. 61-66
71	Late-sixth century	Symbols	Between Ktima and Paphos	Cyprus	Basilica of Shyrvallo	An apse to the baptistery	A triple knot followed by Solomon’s knot increasing in numbers. These are interceded by increasing numbers of rosettes. Power of repetition and it has a charm-lie character.	Michaelides, p. 51. Maguire, <i>MG</i> , p. 269.
72	Sixth or seventh century	Symbol	Madaba	Jordan	Church (dedicated to the Virgin Mary)	Nave	Concentric circles and isolated Solomon’s knots.	Piccirillo, p. 50, 64-65.
73	Uncertain (probably sixth century or later)	Creature/ Inscription	Mount Nebo	Jordan	Church (dedicated to Deacon Thomas)	Aisle	An eagle is depicted within a medallion, with an <i>alpha</i> and <i>omega</i> either side. The two Greek letters were used on Christian magical gemstones.	Piccirillo, p. 188.
74	Uncertain (was removed from a site before archaeological excavations could take	Inscription	Husn (near Ibid)	Jordan	Not known	Not known	Numbers in the form of Greek letters are depicted within a circle. Numbers have links to magical numbers.	Piccirillo, p. 338.

	place, probably sixth century or later)							
75	637	Symbol	Adeitha (Khirbet al- Samra)	Jordan	Church	Nave	Nave has Solomon's knots, crosses, <i>kantharoi</i> , intricate patterns, guilloches and other symbols. Symbols have a supernatural dimension.	Piccirillo, pp. 306-307.
76	691	Inscription/ Symbol	Zoara (Ghor al-Safy)	Jordan	Church	Chancel area	A cross is inscribed with word overlapping another. It reads "Good End". This is similar to apotropaic and beneficial inscriptions on stamps.	Piccirillo, pp. 336-337.

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