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A Mosaic Image of a Peacock from Osmaniye (Plain Cilicia): A Contribution to the Corpus of Cilician floor mosaics

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A floor mosaic with an image of a peacock has been recently documented in Plain Cilicia during an archaeological survey.[1] The mosaic was partially unearthed at an illicit excavation together with another mosaic fragment. The site of the mosaic find is registered as a cultural heritage site, yet there has been no systematic archaeological excavation conducted there.

The archaeological survey was carried out for three years and covered the entire territory of Osmaniye which dominates the eastern part of Plain Cilicia; the Amanus and Taurus mountains define the east and north boundaries of the territory, while the cities of Hatay and Adana are its neighbours at the south and west of the plain. Osmaniye is a modern town founded on the slopes of the Amanus mountain range at the turn of the twentieth century, whereas its land yields archaeological heritage belonging to periods from the prehistoric, Hittite, classical, late antique and medieval periods. Late antique culture survived in the region until the area became a frontier between the Arab and Byzantine armies. In the seventh century the region became a no man's land due to the abandonment of the towns. (Honigmann 1932: 37) The archaeological survey also records the absence of material culture dating to the seventh and beginning of the eighth century. Evidently the production of floor mosaics ceases and late antique sherds disappear from the region.

The floor mosaic subject to the study presented here was one of the new discoveries of the region in 2004 and was documented during the 2005 survey. A corpus of floor mosaics of the entire Cilicia region, of both Rough and Plain Cilicia, has been recently carried out recording all the extant mosaics, including ones that have been lost since publication, and also unpublished mosaics.[2] The Corpus of Cilician floor mosaics encompasses thirty five entries with over one hundred mosaic panels. The corpus contains twelve floor mosaics dispersed through the Osmaniye territory. Although the mosaic corpus has been completed, new mosaic finds are always anticipated as additions that enrich the perpetually changing corpus.

Description

The floor mosaic that the survey documented is located on a plateau in a rural area, remote from the Osmaniye town centre. Looters uncovered two separate sections of the floor mosaics of the same structure. One of the mosaics bears a peacock figure, single framed in a medallion with its tail-wide spread, while the other floor mosaic contains a geometric decoration.

The peacock is depicted frontally with its neck and head turned to its right; its feathers are wide-spread on a white background in reddish-purple and blue limestone tesserae. Majestically fully-spread purple plumage encircles the peacock with eye motifs on them, and the fringes of the purple feathers point upwards. The eye motifs are blue, and white tesserae highlight the feathers and the eyes on them. The figure of the peacock is set in a medallion framed with a band of crow step motif which alternates in purple and white colours. A band composed of a trifid lotus flower motif in linear arrangement is tangent to the medallion. The trifid lotus flowers of the band are alternately inverted with wide-spread thick leaves and each flower is delineated with a line of purple tesserae. The trifid lotus flowers are executed in white, and each has bottom parts coloured alternately in purple and blue.

The lotus flower band is placed traversely to the medallion of the peacock. Obviously the lotus band separates the peacock mosaic from the mosaics to the west of it. However, the lotus band might have been utilized also as a frame to encompass the arrangement with medallion of the peacock. There is a space between the medallion and the lotus band which contains an image of a bird. The bird is possibly a dove with feathers wide open to both sides, almost ready to fly. On a blue background the dove is executed in white. This arrangement recalls a composition in which a medallion and its spandrels which contain fillers are set in a square. As stated above, the composition with the peacock image might have been framed by a square decorated by a lotus band. The full composition of the floor mosaic is not yet clear, since it has been only partially unearthed. However, the placement of a dove figure leaves no doubt that it is part of the arrangement related to the medallion and the lotus band. Arrangements of a a medallion set within a square are frequent on both Plain and Rough Cilician mosaics, such as the Yarbaşı mosaic, the north aisle floor mosaic of the Misis Edifice, the reconstructed Adana mosaic, the Al Oda Rock-cut Church nave floor mosaic, and the Silifke Ganymede mosaic. (Tülek 2004: Yarbaşı mosaic Fig. 21.1; The reconstructed floor mosaic in Adana Museum. Fig.1. 23; Al Oda Rock-cut church mosaic Fig. 26.10; Anemurium Burial B I 16a and b mosaic Fig. 27. 43; Silifke Ganymede mosaic Fig. 36.18) Similar floor mosaic compositions are found in the mosaics of Antioch and Apamea mosaics, as well. (Levi 1947: IV A 9 House A, Room 31 in Antioch) In these

[1] The Archaeological Survey of Osmaniye has been carried out since 2005 by the present writer.
[2] Numerous unpublished mosaics have been examined and noted by Tülek for the first time in Tülek 2004 and in Tülek 2006b.

mosaics pelta, labris or floral scrolls fill in the spandrels of the square frames. These mosaics are from secular and religious or funerary contexts and they date from the early fourth to the middle of the fifth century.

Lotus flowers linearly arranged as bands framing compositions are also frequent in Plain Cilician mosaics such as the Karlık Church floor mosaic in Adana and the Düziçi floor mosaic in Osmaniye (Tülek 2004: Fig. 14.8; and Düziçi north mosaic panel Fig. 9. 1). Both the lotus bands of the Karlık and Düziçi mosaics have the flower depicted in trifid form with thick leaves. The Karlık mosaic lotus flower is cut deeply half way at its body separating its white leaves on both sides. The tips of the leaves unite the white frame of the band and continue along the bottom of the alternately inverted lotus flower meeting the tips of the successive lotus flower. Also the wide cut leaves create two triangular dark spaces in the flower, which are treated with three white tesserae creating an excessively embellished, jeweled effect. The Karlık lotus flowers are softly degraded with dark colours at the bottom purple pink to white at the middle and top. The Düziçi floor mosaic also has a lotus flower in linear arrangement utilized as a frame. The Düziçi lotus flower differs in the partition of its leaves, which are close to the top, the colour changes from red to white tesserae at the middle of the flower is sharp without degradation and the alternately inverted flowers are separated from each other neatly with delienation in black tesserae. Both the Karlık and Düziçi mosaics are dated to the end of the fifth century based on inscriptions and stylistic features. The workmanship of the two lotus flower motifs differs. Apparently, they are products of different mosaic workshops with different workmanship and design. The colouring of the Osmaniye mosaic lotus flower is quite different than the former two in having alternately solid blue or solid purple bottoms at the one third of the way up the flower, while the top two thirds of it is in white colour. There is no colour degradation, since colouring of the each flower is arranged only with two contrasting colours, white and blue and white and purple. Although the transition of the colours is sharp, the white leaves parting to two sides delicately curve meeting the frame, and each of the alternately inverted flowers is neatly delineated by a purple line.

The head of the peacock is turned to its right, to the north of the floor mosaic, and the peacock figure is oriented east-west. The second fragment was found two meters away from the peacock figure, at its northwest. There are almost no standing ruins on the ground at the spot where the mosaics were uncovered except a square opening in rubble and brick masonry indicating existence of a subterranean section of a structure. Sherds of roof tiles and pottery are scattered over a large area. It should be noted that isolated late antique settlements are characteristic for the region.

Corpus of the Cilicia mosaics

Among the twelve floor mosaics compiled from the Osmaniye territory for the corpus of Cilician mosaics there is only one image of a peacock, found on a floor mosaic in a three-aisled basilica at Koyuntaş (Tülek 2004: Figs.16.8; Tülek 2006a). The main nave floor mosaic of the basilica is arranged in two mosaic panels dividing the nave floor in two halves; an eastern and western panel. The eastern mosaic panel has a design of diagonally arranged serrated trellis. It is filled with birds, quadrupeds and liturgical objects filling each of its compartments. A single framed peacock image is one of these fillers on the eastern mosaic panel. The single peacock is depicted in profile, single with a small branch at the feet, and executed very crudely on a white background.

Peacock illustrations on the mosaics of other towns of Plain Cilicia have also been found, particularly, on the mosaics of Adana. The church of a mountain village in Adana, Cıvıklı, had a peacock image depicted in profile in the apse floor, now lost (Tülek 2004: 80, Fig. 7.1). The Misis edifice shows a peacock figured in profile in procession around the Ark along with the rest of the birds and quadrupeds on the floor mosaic of the main hall. There are also four peacocks illustrated in profile and each is framed single in the U-cross composition on the eastern mosaic panel of the main hall (Tülek 2004: 128, Figs.18.6, 14). While the Cıvıklı mosaic is dated to the sixth century, the Misis Edifice mosaics are dated to the fifth century (Hild 1991: 228). None of these Plain Cilician mosaics illustrate peacock figures frontally with tails fully spread. Yet there is no peacock image found on the mosaics of Rough Cilicia. Thus, the Osmaniye peacock mosaic represents the sole example of the frontal type with tail fully spread in Cilicia.

Peacock representations in neighbouring mosaic centres

Antioch, a neighbouring mosaic centre to Osmaniye, produced numerous peacock images depicted along with other birds populating mosaic compositions either in pairs facing each other or in procession with other birds and beast (Levi 1947: 366, Fig. 41 The House of the Bird Rinceau mosaic; 173, Fig. 34 The House of the Boat of Psyches mosaic). Selecueia Pieria, the ancient port of Antioch, has a peacock image depicted in procession with other birds on the floor mosaic of the Tetraconch Martyrion, similar to the peacock of the Misis Edifice. Both in Misis and in Selecueia Pieria the bird is shown in profile.

There are two peacock images illustrated frontally with tails fully spread among the Antioch mosaics. These are the mosaics of the Striding Lion and of the House of Buffet Supper. In the mosaic of the Striding Lion a peacock standing frontally with tail fully wide spread is placed in a panel of a diagonal serrated trellis *composition positioned centrally below the figure of the* lion (Levi 1947: 321, Fig. 47 Sector 10-Q mosaic). Another frontal peacock image with feathers wide spread was found in the House of Buffet Supper mosaics in Antioch (Levi 1947: 129-30, Pl. 23b). The House of

Buffet Supper yielded a dining room in the form of an apsidal hall elaborately decorated with two mosaic panels on the floor; one which occupies in apsidal part of the room illustrating a mythological theme of Ganymede and the Eagle, and next to it the other one which is an oblong panel illustrating a frontally depicted peacock figure in a crowded avian representation. Although these two peacock images represent the frontally depicted peacock type they are not single framed as in the Osmaniye mosaic.

Besides Antioch the closest mosaic centre to Plain Cilicia i.e. to Osmaniye, is the ancient city of Zeugma, to the east of Osmaniye, located on the upper Euphrates River. The Zeugma excavations produced exquisite floor mosaics of which the majority is figural. Among the rich mosaic repertoire of the Zeugma mosaics there are no peacock representations yet known to us, let alone a frontally depiction of peacock.

Cyprus is another mosaic centre near Plain Cilicia with numerous floor mosaics found distributed all over the island. On Cypriot floor mosaics both of the two types of peacock images, depicted in profile and frontally, are found in the House of Dionysus at Nea Paphos, a Roman villa which was lavishly decorated with floor mosaics. One of the two peacock images adorns the floor of the Room 3 facing the peristyle and the second one is on the mosaic of the triclinium (Michaelides and Daszewski 1988: 20-1; Kondoleon 1994: 117-9). Both peacocks are depicted frontally with tails wide spread. The peacock image in Room 3 is single, contained in a rectangular frame placed centrally in a geometric design creating a pseudo-emblema. The frontally figured peacock has its head turned to its right. Its tail is wide spread in full plumage. The second peacock image is on the big mosaic carpet of the triclinium placed in a vineyard scene. Although the scene is populated with other birds the peacock is singled out, in no relation to other figures, and it faces the entrance of the room. Similarly, this peacock is also depicted frontally with tail wide spread and its head turned to its right. The execution of the peacock differs from the Room 3 peacock image in the highlights of the feathers and eye motifs. The fringes of the full spread feathers are depicted in a different way than the Room 3 peacock. The Room 3 peacock resembles the Osmaniye peacock in the style they are figured and highlighted.

Kondoleon extensively examined the peacock images in the House of Dionysus and noted that the two peacock images on mosaics of Room 3 and the triclinium suggest *felicitas temporum*. As for an iconographic reading she surmised that the peacock image at the House of Dionysus is associated with Dionysus, and it 'is a *topos* for luxury, prosperity and good fortune' (Kondoleon 1994: 117). The Nea Paphos mosaic is dated according to the archaeological evidence to the second half of the second century and Kondoleon finds stylistic affinities with the late second century Antioch mosaics (Kondoleon 1994: 315, 318). The Nea Paphos Room 3 peacock image has affinities with the Osmaniye peacock, in not only being frontal with feathers fully spread and the head turned to its right but also in the way feathers are illustrated with fringes pointing upwards.

Frontal peacock images in the distant mosaic centres

Among North Syrian mosaics, Shahba-Philippopolis has a mosaic with the mythological theme of Artemis and Actaeon which is framed with a band of richly arranged garlands among which are placed peacocks in profile.

A heavenly theme occupies the sixth and seventh century floor mosaics of the Holy Land with numerous mosaic compositions bearing vintage scenes, or foliage scrolls crowded with birds, quadrupeds, objects, and even with peasants. Peacocks, mostly depicted in pairs, are found on numerous floor mosaics such as in Ma'on Nirim on the synagogue nave floor mosaic with a vine scroll composition containing a pair of peacocks facing each other. The Kastron Mefaa floor mosaic of the main nave of the church of St. Stephen also contains a pair of peacocks in vine scroll. In the Khirbet el-Mukhayyat two peacocks are depicted flanking an inscription before the bema (Balty 2003: 159). Among the avian compositions a peacock image with tail wide spread has not, however, been found.

North African mosaic centres also produced peacock figures frontally depicted on mosaics. The two examples from El Jem and Carthage illustrate the bird with feathers fully spread and single framed. Both of the mosaics have an apsidal frame, or to be precise one is framed in a semi circle, the other in a U-shaped frame. The peacock of the El Jem mosaic is flanked by two putti, whereas the Carthage mosaic peacock is single with branches and leaves placed at its feet. Stylistically, the way these two peacock images are depicted differs from each other, as well as from the Osmaniye peacock, and the Nea Paphos Room 3 peacock.

Both types of peacock representation, frontal and in profile, were found on the main nave floor mosaic of the Basilica of Justinian in Sabratha. The nave mosaic has a composition of a vine scroll emerging from large vine leaves extending in branches to the sides and scrolls to the front. While two peacocks in profile with beautiful plumage flank on both sides of the issuing branches, a third peacock depicted frontally with fully spread tail stands on the other end of the scroll facing the entire composition. The Sabratha mosaic is one of the securely dated floor mosaics of the region belonging to the early Byzantine period to the 6th century (Aurigemma 1960: 27-9; Dunbabin 2000: 128).

Peacocks in Greek mosaics

In Greece, Basilica A at Nicopolis has an apse floor mosaic adorned with a unique composition of an arcade motif following the curvature of the apse encircling it. Each arch of the arcade contains a peacock image

depicted frontally with fully spread tail. Thus nine frontal peacocks are placed in the arcade motif decorating the apse. The mosaic has been dated to the second quarter of the 6th century (Dunbabin 2000: 219; Kitzinger 1951: Fig.31).

The search for comparisons for the Osmaniye peacock continues among the mosaics from other parts of Turkey[3] (Striker and Kuban, 1975: 314-5, Figs.12a, b). Among the mosaics found in the country peacock figures in profile are common features that are mostly found on church floors depicted in pairs, such as the peacocks flanking a kantharos found on a church floor mosaic which is part of a monastic complex unearthed in a village of Konya, possibly dating to the late sixth century (Ermişler 1992: 39).[4] In secular contexts there are no peacocks figured on mosaics known to us to date.[5] One would expect to find a peacock figured in profile or frontally on the floor mosaics of the Great Palace dated to the early 6th century, in the connotations of splendor, but non appear there.

The western part of Turkey, yielded a peacock image frontally depicted with fully spread tail on a floor mosaic. Excavations in Perinthos, in Tekirdağ, yielded floor mosaics with peacocks depicted both in profile and frontally (Asgari 1994:344; Işın 1994: 63; Işın 1995: 29). While the main nave and the apse of the basilica are paved with marble slabs, the South and North aisles are decorated with floor mosaics in opus tessellatum technique. The south aisle of the basilica contained a frontal peacock image set in a medallion positioned within a square measuring 4 by 4 meters. The peacock is featured with its head turned to its right and eye motifs embellish its feathers with highlights in white colour in a very linear style. The fringes of the fully spread tail are also delineated linearly almost like streaks. A circular band is embellished with almonds and diamonds which are linked to each other with simple cross motifs. From inwards to outwards another frame composed of bay leaves encircles the arrangement. Finally a simple strap encircles the peacock interlooping on its four sides to create a square which all of the arrangement is set in. Thus, the design consists of a square that houses concentric circles at the centre of which the frontal peacock stands majestically. Similarly the north aisle floor mosaic contains an image of two peacocks perched on both sides of a kantharos drinking water. Both peacocks are depicted in profile with tails elegantly extending below. An octagon frames the image of the birds, which is set in a frame of two interlaced squares, and which is also alternately framed by a circle at the sides looping to form an outer square frame.

Stylistically, the depiction of the Perinthos peacock with its highlights is not close to the Osmaniye mosaic. Yet, in the way the images are framed and the layout of the mosaic design, they are similar to each other. Also it seems it is canonical for such frontal peacock representations to be depicted with heads turned to the right, particularly placing eyes on plumage delineated in white.

An exhaustive research for comparisons to the Osmaniye peacock image through presently available resources found only two peacock mosaic images with close affinities to the Osmaniye peacock, the Nea Paphos peacock of Room 3 and the Perinthos Basilica peacock.

The Nea Paphos peacock is in a secular architectural context found in a villa urbana; the Perinthos peacock image is in a religious building, in a basilica. The examples of Basilica Sabratha, Nicopolis and Perinthos are from religious contexts, whereas the rest are from secular contexts. The site where the Osmaniye peacock image was found has not yet been excavated and thus the architectural identification of the structure is not possible. The Osmaniye mosaic probably belongs to a very large estate judging from the roof tiles spread over a large flat area. On such mountainous terrain, a flat space also points to a deliberate building activity at the site which dominates the valleys and hills below.

Peacock images regardless of being from secular or religious contexts, are found on both late antique and early Christian floor mosaics. In imperial art the peacock is considered to be the bird of Hera (Juno) and the eyes on the plumage are the eyes of the goddess which was also associated with the empresses. The peacock represents splendor with its colourful plumage, and its renewing feathers are associated with renewal and with spring. The peacock image also represents paradise and heavenly gardens and the image gains deeper symbolic meaning by the fifth century in Christian art as redemption and creating an imperial imagery of eternal triumph in heaven (Weyl Carr 1991: 1611-2).

Peacock imagery is found in all media of art including textiles. A Coptic fragment shows peacocks depicted in profile framed single among flowering bushes similar to the single framed peacock images on the floor mosaics in Misis Edifice (Effenberger and Rasemowitz 1974: 244; (Tülek 2004: 137-142).[6]

Dating

The earliest mosaics of a frontally positioned peacock with widely spread tail are the one in the triclinium of the House of Dionysus in Nea Paphos dated to the late second century, the one in Antioch from The House of

[3] A frontally depicted peacock with full spread tails is found carved on marble dating to the 10th-11th century in İstanbul at Kalenderhane Cami. The marble slab is used as a sarcophagus lid.

[4] The author leaves the dating undetermined noting that the coins of Heraclius are a terminus ante quem for the dating of the structure. The excavation also yielded coins of Constans II and Constantine IV pointing to a late 6th century dating. This dating is reinforces our stylistic evaluation of the floor mosaic.

[5] There is always possibility of new soundings of mosaics in the country which is exclusively rich in archaeological heritage.

[6] Effenberger stylistically dates the Coptic textile to the early 4th century.

Buffet Supper mosaic dated to the 3rd century, and the Striding Lion mosaic dated to the 5th century. The earliest single framed frontal peacock with widely spread tail from the Room 3 mosaic in the House of Dionysus in Nea Paphos dates to the late second century, while the one in Perinthos Basilica dates to the fifth century. On stylistic grounds, considering the historical development of floor mosaics in Cilicia, the Osmaniye peacock mosaic should tentatively be dated to the middle of the fifth century.

Abbreviations

AST *Araştırma Sonuçları Tolantısı*
DOP *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*
MKKS *Müze Kurtarma Kazıları Semineri*
TTHK *Türk Tarih Kurumu Kongresi*

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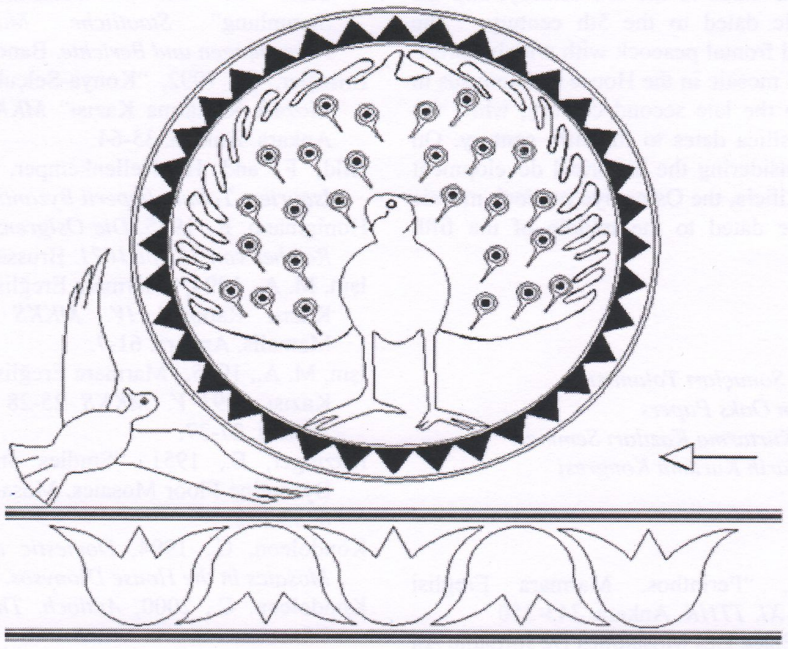
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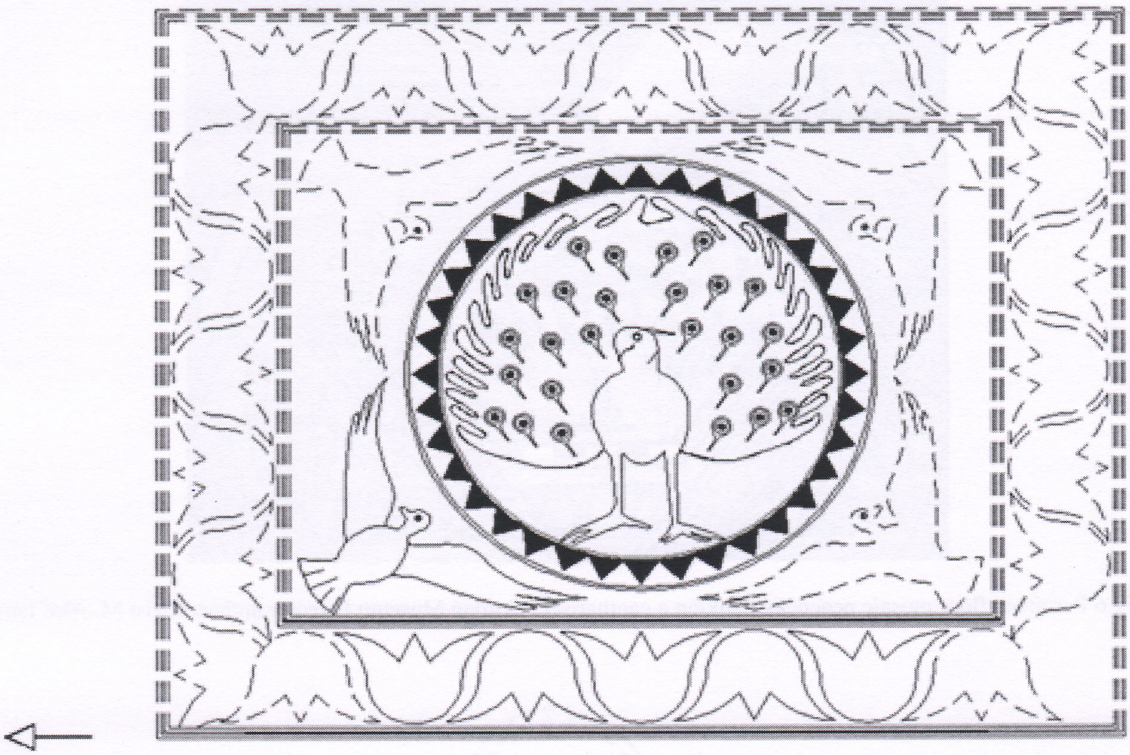
Fig.1 Osmaniye peacock mosaic



FFig. 2 Osmaniye peacock mosaic drawing



Fig.3 Osmaniye peacock mosaic detail, the dove



F

ig.4 Osmaniye peacock mosaic reconstruction

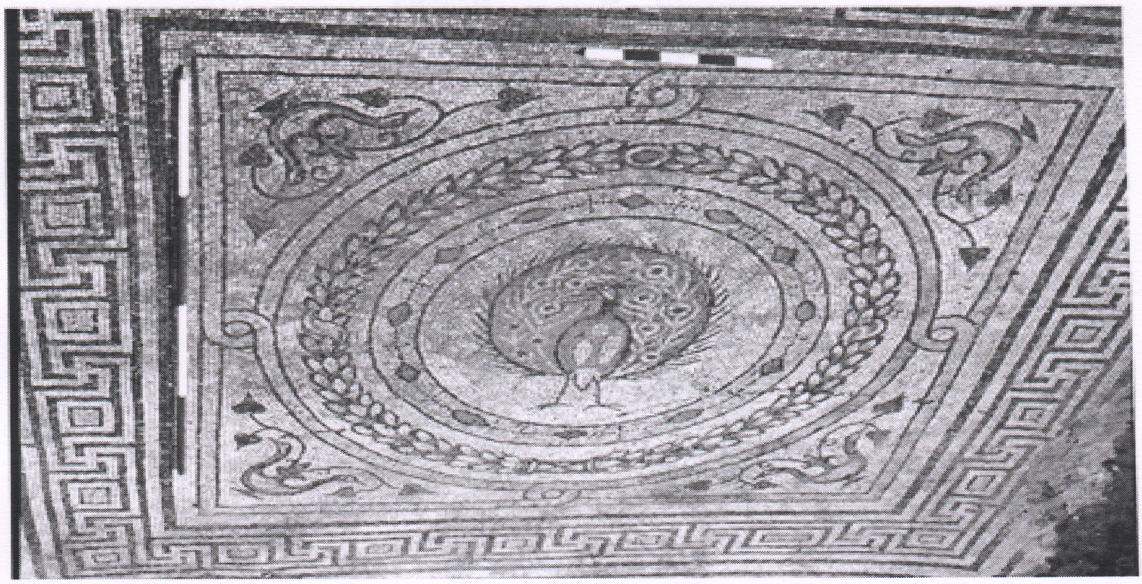


Fig.5 Perinthos peacock mosaic (Tekirdağ Museum Director archaeologist M. Akif Işın)



Fig.6 Perinthos floor mosaic peacocks flanking a cantharos (Tekirdağ Museum Director archaeologist M. Akif Işın)

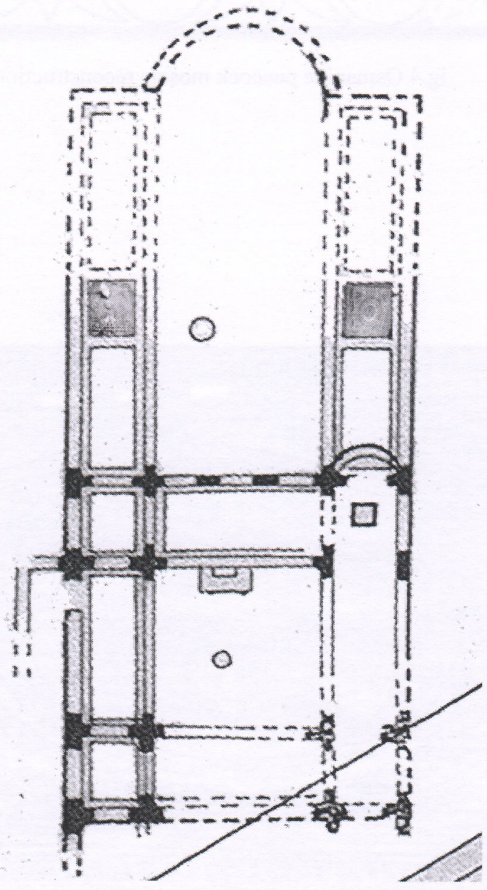


Fig.7 Perinthos Basilica plan (Tekirdağ Museum Director archaeologist M. Akif Işın)