

Who's Gone Fishing?

An iconographical and comparative study of the so-called
“fishing Erotes” mosaics in the Roman Mediterranean



Claudia Bini
ARKM24 Spring 2024
Master's Thesis in Classical Archaeology and Ancient History
Supervisor: Maria Nilsson
Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, Lund University



LUNDS
UNIVERSITET

Abstract

This thesis presents an iconographical and comparative study of the “fishing Erotes” motif in Roman mosaics. Previous scholars have overlooked this scene despite its prevalence, and it has not been subjected to a comprehensive investigation. A selection of 15 mosaics from several Mediterranean locations were analyzed using the semiotic model as a theoretical framework and a qualitative approach. The key question around which the study revolved was related to the identity of these figures, to continue with the distinctive features of these scenes, what distinguished them, and finally, how and why the motif evolved. The study identified the figures of the “fishing Erotes” as a possible interpretation of a passage in *Halieutica*, a 2nd-century AD poem about fishing techniques, referencing Eros fishing. It also showed that not all figures depicted in the motifs are Erotes, a distinction that scholars could clarify when referring to the figures in a scene. Although there are several elements in common between the “fishing Erotes” scenes, the comparison between these mosaics highlighted a certain degree of variation and customization that did not suggest these images being a “stock decoration”, as previously assumed. The stylistic development of these scenes can be linked to the socio-cultural transformations of Roman society during the period between the 2nd and the 4th century AD. These changes led the “fishing Erotes” scenes, while remaining unchanged in their iconographic aspect, to slowly transition from a pagan to a Christian motif.

<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-5509-3044>



Keywords: Fishing Erotes, Erotes, Cupids, Roman mosaics, Roman Mediterranean, Roman Provinces, Roman Africa, Halieutica, Oppian, 2nd century AD, 3rd century AD, 4th century AD, semiotics, iconographical studies.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Maria Nilsson, whose guidance, encouragement, and insightful advice have been invaluable throughout this journey. Thank you for being an exceptional mentor. To my family and close ones, thank you for your support, patience, and belief in me. To my friends and fellow students, especially those with whom I have shared countless late nights and coffee breaks, thank you for making these five years memorable. Last but not least, everybody at the Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, your passion for archaeology has been a source of inspiration for my studies.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	5
1.1 Terminology.....	6
1.2 Previous research	6
1.3 Aim and purpose	9
1.4 Theory and method	10
1.4.1 Theory.....	10
1.4.2 Method.....	11
1.5 Material and limitations	12
2. Background	13
2.1 The development of the North African province	14
2.2 Eros and Erotes in mythology.....	15
3. Catalogue	17
4. Analysis	35
4.1 Erotes	35
4.1.1 Physical appearance.....	35
4.1.2 Activities	42
4.2 Deities and other figures	44
4.3 Boats and ships	46
4.4 Fishing gear.....	49
4.5 Marine fauna	51
4.6 Landscape and features	54
4.7 Spatial positioning in context.....	57
4.8 Chronology	59
5. Discussion	59
5.1 The identity of the figures.....	59
5.2 The distinctive elements and variations in depiction and spatial context	62
5.3 Changes in the motif over time, how and why.....	64
6. Conclusion and further research	67
7. Bibliography	69
8. List of illustrations	73
9. Appendix A	76

1. Introduction

The development of polychrome mosaic art produced in the North African provinces of the Roman Empire, starting in the 2nd century AD, gave rise to many remarkable artworks. Limestones and marbles in many shades of colour were readily available across North Africa, allowing artisans to explore new patterns.¹ If, at the beginning, the motifs were geometric and floral, over time, they became more complex, with motifs ranging from daily life scenes to representations of mythological stories. Some motifs, such as aquatic scenes, became remarkably popular and spread to other parts of the Empire, like Italy.² Within this genre of mosaics, there are two main groups: the Nilotic scenes and the sea *thiasos*.³ As the name suggests, Nilotic scenes occur along the River Nile and depict figures identified by scholars as Pygmies engaging in activities like fishing, hunting animals, and unedifying behaviours of all sorts.⁴

The sea *thiasos*, instead, have a more generic aquatic setting, the sea or a river; the composition can include one or more Greco-Roman sea deities, such as Poseidon and Amphitrite, surrounded by marine fauna and other mythological figures.⁵

A recurrent motif in the North African mosaics, that can be part of a *thiasos* but is also found as self-standing, are winged figures fishing, often from boats. Scholars, such as Katherine Dunbabin, have identified these figures as “Erotes”, but for a long time, they have paid little attention to them.⁶

This iconographical and comparative study is based on 15 mosaics depicting fishing Erotes from locations around the Mediterranean, covering a period from the 2nd to the 4th century AD.⁷ The study focuses mainly on the Erotes figures; therefore, the iconographic elements pertaining to them were analyzed in detail, while the surrounding elements, such as boats, gears, and fish, were approached in more generic terms. Two Latin inscriptions, also made in mosaic, accompany two catalogue scenes. They are presented as elements part of the scene without going into a detailed linguistic analysis. The comments provided in the analysis refer to

¹ Dunbabin 1999, 103.

² See Wilson 1982 for the influence of North African mosaics in Sicily.

³ From the Greek θίασος, a group of worshippers of a god, often in connection with Dionysus, can also refer to other deities. See full reference in Oxford Classical Dictionary online 2005, www.oxfordreference.com

⁴ Barrett 2013, 3.

⁵ For a more detailed definition of the marine *thiasos*, see Lattimore 1976, 1.

⁶ Dunbabin 1999, 139.

⁷ Of the 15 mosaics, 13 clearly depict fishing Erotes, while the remaining two are fragments of mosaics for which the fishing activity cannot be determined with certainty.

specialized scholars who have worked on translating and interpreting these texts. The translation is reported in the original language since these scholarly papers are in Spanish and Italian. A proposal for an English translation is also given in the footnotes.

1.1 Terminology

Before delving into the object of the study, it is essential to define the terminology used throughout this thesis. The first issue to solve was which term to use when referring to these winged figures. Scholars from different linguistic backgrounds have called these figures “Erotes”, “Putti”, “Cupids”, “Amorini”, “Amours pêcheurs” and even “Génies ailés”.⁸ While, in essence, these figures are interpreted similarly among scholars, their denominations can change from one paper to another, creating unnecessary confusion.

As an Italian native speaker and the author of this study, terms like Putti, Amorini, and even Cupids are often associated with the toddler-like figures of the Baroque period.⁹ However, the figures depicted in the selected mosaics do not always conform to this appearance. Therefore, in the interest of precision, these terms were set aside in the present study. The choice was, instead, to refer to the figures by their Greek name: Eros for the singular and Erotes for the plural. The terms “winged figure” or “figure” were employed when needed to avoid repetitions of a same name in a sentence. Section “1.2. Previous research”, and chapter “3. Catalogue” mark, in text or with a footnote when a scholar has used a term other than Eros or Erotes. The reason for this choice was to highlight the variety of terminology and perhaps reassess the nature of the figure itself within a specific scene in accordance with the sea *thiasos* motif.

1.2 Previous research

Over the past fifty years, the depiction of Erotes has transitioned from being merely mentioned in books about Roman art to a subject receiving more scholarly attention. Despite this, there is still a lack of comprehensive studies on Erotes across various art forms, from sculpture to wall paintings to frescoes and mosaics. However, several studies have focused on

⁸ See for example Dunbabin 1999 for “Erotes”, Strong 1976 for “Putti”, Mitchell 2018 for “Cupids”, Pensabene 2009 for “Amorini”, Ben Hassen Hassine 2001 for “Amours pêcheurs” and Yacub 1995 for “Génies ailés”.

⁹ An example of Baroque with toddler-like figures is Peter Paul Rubens’s “The Feast of Venus”, dated 1636.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Peter_Paul_Rubens_-_The_Feast_of_Venus_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg

specific periods, locations, or aspects of the Erotes.¹⁰ Notably, the fishing Erotes, a popular motif in Roman mosaics of North Africa, have been subject to limited investigation, primarily focusing on style and provenience of craftsmanship.¹¹ Yet, a comprehensive study is still to be undertaken.

The earliest mentions of Erotes in Roman art are generally reductive, considered merely decorative elements. Jocelyn Toynbee's book "*The Art of the Romans*" (1965) briefly describes the mosaics of the Sicilian villa of Piazza Armerina, giving an account of the motifs depicted on its floors. Although fishing Erotes are prominently present in three rooms, one of which is a large atrium with *nymphaeum*, she does not explicitly mention them. However, she describes the mosaics with a generic "bath scene".¹² Nine years later, when writing about the reliefs at the temple of Venus Genetrix in Rome, Donald Strong dedicates a brief discussion to the significance of the Putti, as he calls the Erotes, in Roman art. He traces the origin of these figures back to the Hellenistic period as impersonations of Eros in scenes with Bacchus, attributing them to the Chthonic role as a symbol of death and the afterlife due to their presence in funerary art. Overall, he defines them as a significant ornamental element in Roman art. Strong's interpretation of the Putti will also be shared by other scholars several years later.¹³

In an early monograph about mosaics of Roman North Africa, Katherine Dunbabin (1978) gives an account of the most popular subjects in mosaics. When referring to the fishing and vintaging Erotes, she dismisses them as figures used solely for decoration that did not carry a significant meaning.¹⁴ In her later book about Greek and Roman mosaics, Dunbabin (1999) still incidentally mentions them when they are part of a scene. For the fishing Erotes found in the villa of Piazza Armerina, she associates them as a mimic of the children's activities depicted in mosaics found in other rooms at the same site.¹⁵

Nicole Blanc and Françoise Gury (1986) provide a detailed chapter about Eros, including its mythological origin in the "*Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*". Commentaries span from the identification of Eros in different contexts to his appearance in multiplied form as Putti, as well as a critique towards some scholars regarding the role of the god in a funerary context.¹⁶ The volume is a catalogue of all forms the god Eros can assume and how they were communicated into depictions in Greco-Roman art. Among these images, under the term "Eros

¹⁰ See Eckersley 1995 with a study focusing on mosaics with vintaging (picking grapes) Erotes.

¹¹ Dunbabin 1999, 101-129.

¹² Toynbee 1965, 156.

¹³ Strong 1976, 74; Ramage and Ramage 1995, 144, 230.

¹⁴ Dunbabin 1978, 206.

¹⁵ Dunbabin 1999, 135.

¹⁶ Blanc and Gury LIMC III-1 1986, 850-852, 913.

pêcheur” (fishing Eroses in French), are listed several examples of artefacts and some of the mosaics included in the present study; however, Blanc and Gury provide no further analysis of the fishing Eroses motif.¹⁷

Tracey Eckersley’s iconographic master thesis (1995) examines the vintaging Eroses motifs in Roman Spain and North Africa. While no fishing Eroses are included, it is one of the first detailed analyses of mosaics with a specific motif.¹⁸ A few years later, in 2009, Lori Neuenfeldt, in her master’s thesis, makes an in-depth study of Eros and Eroses in Antioch’s mosaics. By examining how these figures were represented in the floor mosaics, she argues that their function was to enhance the patron's status with strategic placement. According to Neuenfeldt, the Antioch elite knew the significance of the many interpretations of Eros and the Eroses. They purposely used the various images of the god to convey specific messages of wealth and social position.¹⁹ Her research includes 20 mosaics featuring Eros or Eroses motifs, three of which have fishing Eroses. One of them, a panel from the House of Menander, is part of this study as Cat. no.12.²⁰

Patrizio Pensabene, also in 2009, publishes an article about the mosaics at Piazza Armerina, in which he discusses all the villa’s floor mosaics. Regarding the ones with fishing Eroses, he comes to a similar conclusion as Neuenfeldt, with the fishing activity expressing the patrons’ hospitality and wealth. He suggests that the motifs depicted in the mosaics of Piazza Armerina, as well as other African sites from the same period, range from mythological subjects to marine or allegorical scenes, and argues that these themes may also have been popular considering the philosophical and religious influence of that time, perhaps even of Christianity.²¹

Recent years have seen the emergence of two doctoral dissertations about Eros and Eroses. The first, from 2018, written by Elizabeth Mitchell, titled “*The Other Classical Body: Cupids as Mediators in Roman Visual Culture.*”, delves into the role of Eroses, or “Cupids” as she refers to, in Roman art of the imperial era, spanning from the 1st to the 5th century AD. Mitchell’s research encompasses a wide range of artworks, including floor mosaics, sarcophagi, and wall paintings from various geographical areas. She argues that the key to understanding the enduring popularity of this figure lies in its role as a mediator between the viewer and the artwork in which it is contextualized. In essence, Eroses function as a visual, and at times, even tactile, link used by the artist to connect the different parts of an artwork.²²

¹⁷ Blanc and Gury LIMC III-1 1986, 850-852, 913.

¹⁸ Eckersley 1995.

¹⁹ Neuenfeldt 2009, 41.

²⁰ Ibid 2009; Cat.no.12, page 50.

²¹ Pensabene 2009, 81; 92.

²² Mitchell 2018, 3.

In her chapter dedicated to the mosaics of North Africa and Syria, Mitchell devotes a section to marine mosaics.²³ Here, she discusses how these motifs are often found in connection to pools, baths, or other water features, suggesting a high level of wealth. She argues that the role of the Erotes in these settings is to accompany the viewers into the seascapes depicted under their feet, effectively immersing them in the artwork. Mitchell acknowledges the scarcity of research specific to marine mosaics, even noting that some studies are yet to be published and remain inaccessible. She, thus, emphasizes the potential for future research in this area.²⁴

Finally, a doctoral dissertation published in 2021 completes this section on previous scholarship. Caroline Brunet focuses her research on the image of Eros in Egypt, from the Ptolemaic era to late antiquity. Her goal is to see how the iconography of Eros has developed through time by determining a typology of depictions. She also investigates the interplay between the Greek and Egyptian cultures and how this translates into visual art.²⁵ Brunet's source material ranges from architectural elements to pottery, statues, funerary art, and jewellery. There is one example of a fragmented mosaic from Thmuis, Egypt; it is the only mention of fishing Erotes in her research. Brunet uses it to highlight the difference between these kinds of aquatic scenes with Greek-inspired motifs and the Nilotic scenes, depicting animal life and human activities by the river Nile.²⁶

1.3 Aim and purpose

Previous studies on the fishing Erotes motif, a prevalent theme in Roman mosaics from the 2nd to the 4th century AD, have been limited in scope, often focusing on the origin of craftsmanship and sporadic comparisons between individual instances. This thesis, however, takes a novel approach by conducting a comprehensive iconographical study of the fishing Erotes, expanding the analysis to various locations across the Mediterranean areas of the Western and Eastern Roman Empire. The aim is to delve deeper into the role of this motif in Roman art and to analyze and perhaps trace its origin and transformation from iconographical, diachronical and social perspectives.

The main research question concerns the identity of the so-called Erotes, as stressed in the current title, "Who's gone fishing?". The second question observes the distinctive elements and

²³ Ibid 2018, 141-145.

²⁴ Ibid 2018, 144 -145.

²⁵ Brunet 2021, 1.

²⁶ Brunet 2021, 246.

variations in depiction and spatial context in the selected mosaics of fishing Erotes; finally, the third question examines whether the motif has changed over time how and why.

1.4 Theory and method

As underlined in the previous sections, the motif of the fishing Erotes, for which there is no established theoretical framework adapted to them, has been insufficiently documented. This section describes the theoretical perspective and methodological choices adopted in this study, which attempts to bridge existing gaps. The chapter initially presents an introduction to semiotics as a theoretical framework for this research. Subsequently, it describes the methodological approach adopted to achieve the aim set by the research questions.

1.4.1 Theory

For archaeologists who deal with iconographical studies, a depiction does not stand on its own; it is also connected to the material culture that carries it, which relates to the surrounding environment where it is found and, thereby, to a cultural context. Therefore, the possibility of providing a plausible interpretation of the past increases when addressing rising questions from multiple points of view.²⁷ However, choosing a theoretical perspective over another is an essential decision that can significantly impact the results.

Among the many theoretical frameworks available for visual studies, semiotics theory has found a place as a valuable resource. It was first developed at the beginning of the 20th century by the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and philosopher Charles Saunders Peirce.²⁸ The semiotics theory studies the system of signs, where, as D'Alleva efficiently synthesized, "a sign is something that represents something else." Semiotics theory was developed to help linguists study how signs connect and convey meaning. However, its application has also proved helpful in different fields, such as art history, giving rise to more specialized branches within semiotics.²⁹ Semiotics is articulated on three levels: semantics, syntactics, and pragmatics. When the semiotic model is applied in figurative art, the semantics level relates a depiction of

²⁷ Bracker 2020, 1.

²⁸ D'Alleva 2021, 52.

²⁹ D'Alleva 2021, 51, 57; Liepe 2022, 50; Nilsson 2010, 20-24.

an object to its real or fictive counterpart. The syntactics level refers to how depictions correlate within a composition. Finally, the pragmatics level stands for how the use of a depiction affects social interactions. There are further distinctions and notions within these levels, but according to Hölscher, the semiotic model in figurative art can be summarized as follows: a sign, in the form of a work of art, an author, as in the one who produced or patronized the work of art, a receiver, meaning an active viewer, and a context.³⁰ This model is highly relevant to the current study.

Equally, it must recognize the agency aspect, which serves to contextualize the cultural environment in which the images are created and how their usage affects the creator, patron, and viewer.³¹ This aspect is critical in understanding the full depth and breadth of an image's meaning, underscoring the importance of considering the cultural context in image interpretation. The semiotic model applied to this research, starting from several mosaics with the theme of the fishing Eroles, breaks down the motif into its single element. Each unit has been compared across all depictions, and the results have been discussed further.

1.4.2 Method

The time frame for this study was approximately three months, necessitating the adoption of a qualitative approach, which ensured the thorough gathering of source material, data collection, and preparation of the catalogue to analyze 15 mosaics. The wide geographical distribution of the motif across the Mediterranean area and the limited time available made it impossible to observe and collect photographic material firsthand. Hence, the decision was made to source material from online databases and professional photographers, where available, ensuring the validity and reliability of the data.

The first step was to create a spreadsheet for each mosaic with preliminary information, ranging from chronology to number of figures and boats, appearance, type of activities, landscape, and presence of marine fauna. This involved a systematic review of each mosaic, noting the relevant details in a structured manner. Subsequently, all mosaics were organized in a catalogue, making up Chapter 3, with individual entries containing pictures and a brief description. The choice to insert the catalogue in the text and not as an appendix was taken to

³⁰ Hölscher 2015, 667–669.

³¹ Hölscher 2015, 674.

accustom the reader to the images, which are then analyzed in Chapter 4. Additional illustrations that are found in the text serve as support for the analysis.

The analysis of the motifs was performed using spreadsheet data for comprehensive guidelines. Each entry has been thoroughly reviewed, comparing every element among all the selected mosaics and providing an accurate analysis. The spreadsheets can be found in Appendix A. Eight main topics were identified and divided into sections, some containing subdivisions providing further analysis of specific features. Throughout the study, the figures appearing in the motif have been referred to as “Erotes” for convenience, as clarified in section “1.1. Terminology”.

The main body of the study is preceded by the introductory background in Chapter 2. The first section covers the significant historical and cultural context in which the fishing Erotes motif had maximum diffusion. The second section summarises the myth of Eros and provides an account of the current religions of the time.

1.5 Material and limitations

The material for this study was selected based on the availability of photographic material and complete documentation, such as reports of archaeological excavations or previous studies. The selection includes examples of polychrome mosaics with marine scenes, in which the anthropomorphic figures were identified as “fishing Erotes” by previous scholarship. It is worth pointing out the existence of similar marine scenes, called “Nilotic scenes”, where the figures have been identified as Pygmies. However, they present different characteristics from the Erotes and have not been included in the present study. An additional criterion for limiting the number of mosaics was to include scenes depicting at least one boat.

Chronologically, the study incorporates scenes from the 2nd century AD, with early examples of this motif in North Africa, to the 4th century AD, when it was at maximum diffusion. The study, with its extensive geographical scope, focuses on the Mediterranean; therefore, Roman Britannia was not included in this study. The selected mosaics come from the Western and Eastern parts of the Roman Empire; several examples are from North Africa, where these scenes were considerably spread, while others are from Italy, Spain, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Syria, Turkey, and Bulgaria. In the lack of complete mosaics, two fragments of mosaic with traces of Erotes motifs were included in the study for France and Egypt. The scene chosen to represent Piazza Armerina is the one located in the atrium with a *nymphaeum* because of the motif’s

complexity and for the best state of preservation of the mosaic; for Antioch, the scene included is from the peristyle, the only one where a boat is depicted.³²

Working exclusively with photographic material presents issues to be aware of. The rendering of a high-resolution photo does not replace the experience of studying a mosaic by observing it *in situ* with one's own eyes. The perception of some aspects like colours, the quality of the material, and even the execution of the mosaic can be altered by at least two main factors. The first one is the type of camera used for the photograph; the light condition and the angle at which the photograph was taken can cast unwanted shadows and distort the motif. The second factor is the reproduction of the photographs; whether printed on paper or viewed on a high-resolution monitor, the result can vary considerably. Furthermore, several of these mosaics have been detached from their location and are currently kept in museums for conservation reasons, making it more challenging to understand their relation and purpose within the original spatial context.

2. Background

This chapter, divided into two sections, provides a framework for the analysis. The first section gives a brief historical and cultural context of the Roman province of Africa, spanning the 2nd and 4th centuries AD. This was the fertile ground where the fishing Eroses motif took shape. The area of ancient Carthage and nearby locations in North Africa was not only the cradle for a particular style of mosaics but also the stage for a series of political and religious events that shaped the late part of the empire's history.

The second section focuses on the figure of Eros by summarising the origin of his myth and how his multiplication has given birth to the figures of Eroses. Halfway between the human and the divine, these figures populate Roman art with their industriousness in various activities.

³² A note regarding the sites of the Sicilian villa of Piazza Armerina and the House of Menander in Antioch: these two locations host several mosaics with scenes of fishing Eroses, respectively, three in Piazza Armerina and five in Antioch.

2.1 The development of the North African province

Following its establishment in 146 BC, after the conclusion of the Punic Wars, the Roman province of Africa underwent a series of significant changes and expansions. Initially, it included the city of Carthage and its environs, but it gradually extended to modern Tunisia and parts of Algeria and Libya. Some of the mosaics included in the study come from relevant locations in these territories, like Utica, Cirta, Dougga, and Lepcis Magna. Under Roman rule, the inhabitants of this region, coming from diverse cultures, languages, and religious beliefs, underwent a process of cultural fusion. Gradually, they developed a hybrid culture, assimilating Roman customs and, at times, incorporating them into their original traditions.³³ For Carthage, the 2nd century AD marked a period of economic wealth. Under the rule of the emperors Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, and Marcus Aurelius, a series of ambitious building programs transformed the city centre, enriching the social and cultural life of the city.³⁴ As previously highlighted in the introductory chapter of this thesis, the 2nd century AD saw the development of polychrome mosaics, especially by workshops established in the coastal area around Carthage.³⁵

The spreading of the "Second Sophistic" intellectual movement across the Empire was also embraced in the African province. The Second Sophistic aimed to revive the artistic, cultural, and literary skills typical of Classical Greece. Roman Africans highly appreciated these values, which led to the creation of high-education centres where these principles were taught. These schools produced a new class of intellectuals who, thanks to their education, saw their status and social position improve. With the ascendance of Septimius Severus as emperor in 193 AD, the relevance of Roman Africa became even more prominent. Septimius, who was of African origin and born in Lepcis Magna, facilitated the rise, both directly and indirectly, of African people to higher ranks within Roman society.³⁶

It is also worth mentioning that at the same time, there were religious tensions between pagans and Christians. Though Roman religion and local cults could live side by side and even blend, some boundaries could not be crossed. For the followers of the relatively new Christian religion, the refusal to obey Roman rules eventually led to their martyrdom.³⁷

³³ Gold 2018, 67.

³⁴ Ibid. 2018, 69-70.

³⁵ Dunbabin 1999, 103.

³⁶ Wilhite 2017, 16.

³⁷ See Gold 2018, 77-80 for the story of the martyr Perpetua from Carthago.

With the death of Septimius Severus and later of his son Caracalla, the end of the Severan era opened a period of internal conflict for the Empire. Emperors and co-emperors were appointed, only to fall shortly afterwards. It was a period of turmoil and civil war that left a mark in the African province.³⁸ The fourth century saw the rise of Constantine, who was traditionally regarded as the first Christian Roman Emperor. In the African province, things were far from settled; a conflict between two Christian bishops in Carthage, later on, led to a schism and another civil war outburst when the Carthaginian Roman legion failed to protect the nearby region from the attack of the hords coming from the South.³⁹

Despite the uncertainty of the time, it was during the fourth century that the most remarkable mosaic artworks were commissioned by wealthy patrons and created by the skilful hands of the North African craftsmen.

2.2 Eros and Erotes in mythology

This study analyzes and compares images depicting mythological figures, and tracing their origin is a valuable help in understanding their iconography and how it has evolved through time. However, it is also essential to keep in mind that the Roman Empire of the third and fourth centuries AD was a melting pot of many different cultures. The *Interpretatio Romana* associated Roman archaic deities with their Greek counterparts and created a pantheon of gods and goddesses whose worship gradually expanded at the same pace as the Empire.⁴⁰ In some cases, the original stories from Greek mythology had been transformed and adapted to more local traditions. In the provinces of North Africa, for instance, around the area of Carthage, local deities eventually found a way to live side by side, or in some cases even merge, with the adopted Roman culture.⁴¹

When one thinks about Eros, one is likely to associate it with the god of love in its physical and romantic form. Depictions of Eros in this particular role are numerous during Classical and Hellenistic periods and can be found in various artworks, from pottery to sculpture to wall paintings.⁴² However, the earliest mention of Eros can be traced back to the 8th -7th century BC with Hesiod's *Theogony*, and the description given in the poem is slightly different.

³⁸ Wilhite 2017, 18.

³⁹ Ibid. 2017, 19.

⁴⁰ Gold 2018, 67.

⁴¹ Ibid 2018, 77.

⁴² Kovaleva 2005,135.

According to Hesiod, Eros is a primordial god, together with Chaos and Gaia, and his role is to embody the latent energy from the primordial darkness that brings life to the world.⁴³ It was this form of personification of Eros, not as a god of love but as a force of creation, that was worshipped in Athens during the 6th century BC. This Eros cult, established by Peisistratus, became an integral part of the Panathenaea festival, where special rituals were performed.⁴⁴ Eventually, the cult of Eros spread and began to appear in dedicated sanctuaries, one of the most important of which was in the city of Thespieae, in Boeotia.⁴⁵

So far, the account has been about Eros as one god, but it is in the plural form of Erotes that they are found in the motives of this study. A paper by Rosenmeyer, although from 1951, has given an exhaustive and plausible interpretation of how Eros multiplied and how eventually the Erotes became self-standing figures. In his deep analysis, Rosenmeyer considers the work of other scholars who have tried to get to the bottom of the Erotes question through philological studies or by analyzing when and how Eros, in his plural form, made the entrance into Greek art.⁴⁶ According to Rosenmeyer, though, it is in the literature of 6th-century BC that one has to turn to find a clue to the question, particularly in Pindar's *Nemean Odes*. To summarize, in his study, Rosenmeyer shows that Pindar's usage of the plural form of the noun Eros, Erotes, overweighs its singular form.⁴⁷ He then points out that Pindar writes about physical love, enhancing the feelings of desire, with the Erotes being portrayed as a group of young spectators overlooking the amorous activities of the Greek gods.⁴⁸ The attribute of the Erotes is to have wings, and there are countless examples of depictions of winged children and adolescents in ancient art. There is also mention of this attribute in ancient sources, like in *Fragment 194* from the poet Sappho or in *Halieutica*, a Greek poem from the Cilician author Oppian.⁴⁹

The extent of the influence of the ancient authors on the iconography of Greek and Roman art in the centuries following their work is hard to determine. What is clear, as this study has revealed, is that the introduction of these ephebic winged figures into the pantheon of divinities did, to some degree, impact the mosaic art of the late Roman empire.

⁴³ Hes. *Th.*, 104 -115.

⁴⁴ More about ancient references and the Eros cult in Athen in Kovaleva 2005, 135-137.

⁴⁵ Paus. 9.27; Brunet 2021, 24.

⁴⁶ Rosenmeyer 1951, 11-16.

⁴⁷ Pin. N.3.30; 8.5; 11.48.

⁴⁸ Rosenmeyer 1951, 17-18.

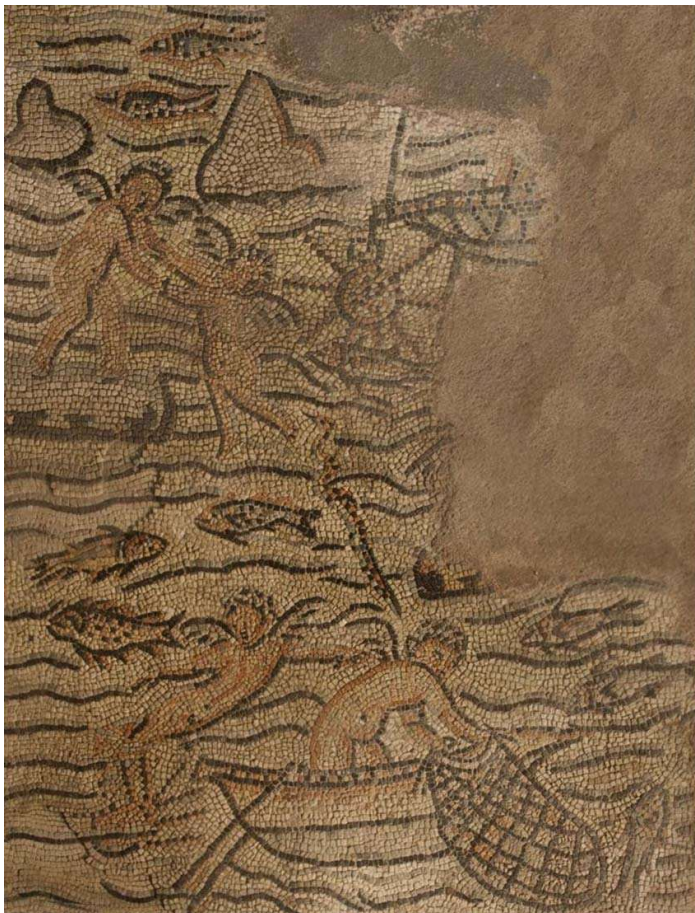
⁴⁹ Sap. *Frag.* 194; Op. *Hal.* 4, 25-30. Cilicia was an ancient district in southern Anatolia, present-day Turkey.

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Cilicia>

3. Catalogue

The present catalogue includes 15 mosaics listed on the spreadsheets in Appendix A, of which 13 are fully or almost complete. The remaining two are fragmented mosaics for which limited information is available. Each mosaic is accompanied by a photo and a list of entries divided into categories for a better summary. Technical information, such as measurements and materials, comes from data provided by archaeological excavations and previous studies. All measurements reported in the catalogue are expressed in meters and length/width. When data are not available, the related entry is left blank. The description of the scenes comes from the present author's observations and, when available, is accompanied by additional information found in the reference material. The mosaics are numbered to facilitate the referencing in the analysis chapter.

Cat. no.1 Domus di Via Olmetto, Milano



*Cat.no.1 Floor mosaic via Olmetto, Milano.
Photo: Daniela Massara. License CC 4.0*

Date: 4th century AD.

Location: Milano, Italy. Discovered in 1971. Currently in an underground facility, Milano.

Measurements: the mosaic is 5,10 m x 3,90 m. Found in a room of 23 m x 6,60 m in size.

Material: stone. Medium-size *tesserae* of cm 1,25.

Previous publications: David 1996, 59; Caporusso 2014, 191; Massara & Ruffa 2015, 106.

Description: central panel within a geometric floor mosaic, belonging to a building divided into several distinct spaces. The excavations have shown that the building went through several expanding phases dating from the 1st to the 5th century AD. The purpose of the building is still uncertain, and scholars debate the possibility of it being a cult place.⁵⁰ In this mosaic, there are four visible Eroses.⁵¹ One is standing on a boat fishing with the net while two others appear attacked by an octopus and a moray eel. The fourth tries to help one of the unfortunate companions escape the attack. The top right side of the panel is missing; however, part of a boat and fishing line to which an octopus is hooked are still visible. The scene has a palette with a limited range of colours, and all the elements are depicted in a minimalistic style, with few details and defined by a black outline. The water is rendered with wiggly lines in two-tone colours, black and grey-green.⁵² The species of marine fauna, except for the octopus and moray eel, are not easily recognizable. Although the representation is somewhat stylized, the scene is dynamic and captivating.

Cat. no.2 Basilica of Aquileia. Scene from the Book of Jonah



Cat. no.2 "The Book of Jonah". Overview. Photo: Chescargot. Wikimedia Commons Public Domain.

⁵⁰ More can be read in Mirabella Roberti 1984 and David 1996.

⁵¹ David, Caporusso and Massara & Ruffa. These scholars refer to the figures as "amorini" (Italian for cupids).

⁵² Massara & Ruffa 2015, 108.

No copyright

Cat. no.2. Drawing of the whole mosaic panel with "The Book of Jonah". From: Forlati Tamaro et al. 1980

Date: 4th century AD.

Location: Basilica di Aquileia, Italy. Fourth span, southern hall. Discovered in 1893. *In situ.*

Measurements: the hall measures a total of 37 m x 20 m. The size of the mosaic is unknown.

Material: stone and vitreous materials.

Previous publications: Forlati Tamaro et al. 1980, 185, 189,199.

Description: the scene represents the story of the prophet Jonah. There are various moments, from when Jonah is thrown from the boat and then swallowed by the whale to when he is regurgitated and lands on an island. Jonah's depictions are arranged within the same marine environment, sharing the waters with 12 Erotes who are busy fishing.⁵³ Nine are naked, two are fully clothed, and one is undetermined. Nine Erotes are on five richly decorated boats; some use fishing nets or rods, while others row. The remaining three are standing on rocks, also with a fishing rod.⁵⁴ The surrounding sea is populated by numerous types of fish, molluscs, and even birds; many species are recognizable. The waves are made with straight lines in two-tone colours, black and green. All the elements in this mosaic are depicted in detail. The broad chromatic scale enhances the realistic rendering, with gradient colours to highlight the muscle definition of the anthropomorphic figures or render the shimmer in the fish scales. Almost at the centre of the mosaic is a medallion with a Latin inscription commemorating the deeds of the Roman bishop Theodore Felix.⁵⁵

⁵³ Forlati Tamaro et al., 1980, call them "amorini", while Iacumin, 2002 calls them "angeli" (angels), 130.

⁵⁴ Forlati Tamaro et al. 1980, 217-218.

⁵⁵ Forlati Tamaro et al. 1980, 217-219.

Cat. no.3 Villa di Desenzano del Garda



*Cat. no.3. Villa di Desenzano del Garda. The panel is to the east, and the view is from the peristyle.
Photo: Laurens Dragstra, with permission of the author.*

Date: 4th century AD.

Location: the floor of a double-apsed hall in a private villa in Desenzano del Garda, Italy.

Discovered in 1923. *In situ.*

Measurements: the mosaic is 7,50 m x 4,70 m. The room is 11,15 m x 4,70 m in size.

Material: stone and vitreous material.

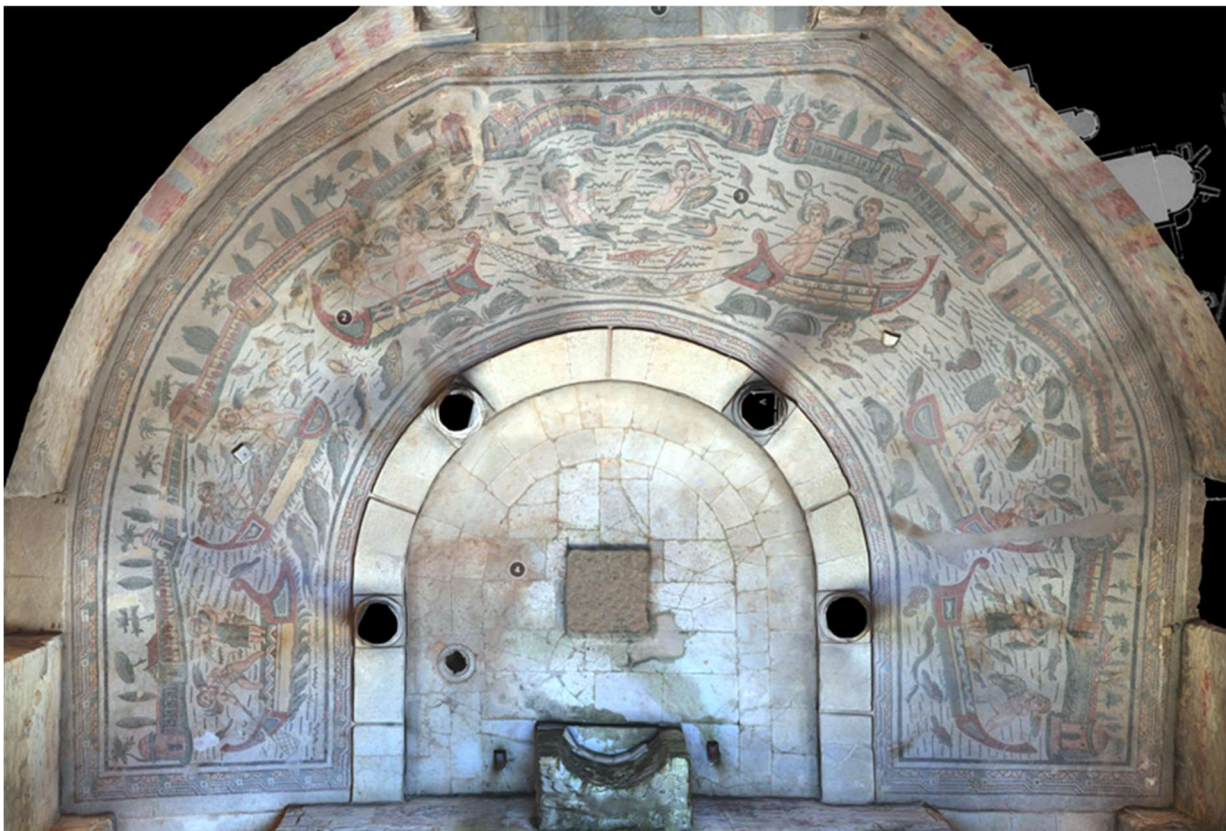
Previous publications: Massara 2012, scheda TESS 12347.

Description: the motif is divided into four distinct panels by a border composed of a black line and a network of red and orange garlands. A four-colour braid motif on a black background borders the perimeter of the whole mosaic. Of the four panels, only one is better preserved and described here. The motif is oriented towards the East and is visible to spectators from the peristyle.⁵⁶ There are four visible Erotes and two partially preserved. Four of them sit in pairs

⁵⁶ Massara 2012, scheda TESS 12347. Massara calls the figures “amorini”.

on their fully decorated boats; one is rowing, and the other is fishing with a rod. The remaining two Erotes also fish with a rod while standing on rocks. All of them are naked; the bodies appear somewhat three-dimensional, achieved with gradient colours to create volumes and shadows. There is an attempt to create movement in the oars by rendering the water whirls; the waves are a mix of short zig-zags and longer, straight black lines. The whole scene is set on a white background. There is little variety in the marine fauna, with fish sharing a similar shape; the colours range from red and orange to black and grey. Heavy restorations made during the early years since the discovery have unfortunately compromised the original appearance of this motif.⁵⁷

Cat. no.4 Villa del Casale, Piazza Armerina



Cat. no.4. Villa del Casale. Atrium with nymphaeum. 3D model by Global Digital Heritage. License CC 4.0

⁵⁷ Scagliarini Corlàita 1992, 44.



*Cat. no.4. Villa del Casale. Detail of Atrium with nymphaeum.
Photo credit: José Luiz Bernardes Ribeiro / License CCBY-SA 4.0*

Date: 4th century AD.

Location: atrium in private quarters, Villa del Casale, Italy. Discovered in the 1950s. *In situ*.

Measurements: the total area covered by mosaics is 3,000 m². No size is available for the atrium.

Material: stone and other materials.

Previous publications: Cantamessa and Cremona 2012, 1-10.

Description: the mosaic develops around a semicircular atrium at which centre there is a *nymphaeum*. The scene is populated by 14 Erotes engaged in fishing with various equipment.⁵⁸ Twelve are standing on six boats, while the remaining two are swimming. Like the two other mosaics with the same motif found in the villa, even this scene stands out for the meticulous execution and the richness of details.⁵⁹ Many of these figures are naked; some are clothed in colourful, draped tunics, and all wear several pieces of jewellery. The boats are also full of details and follow a similar colour scheme. The waves are depicted with broken lines and zig-zags in two-tone black and blue-grey on a white background. A wide variety of marine fauna is represented in a realistic style, thanks to a highly ranged colour palette. In the scene's

⁵⁸ Cantamessa, Cremona, and Pensabene call the figures “amorini”; Dunbabin uses the term “Erotes”. Dunbabin 1999, 135.

⁵⁹ For the location of the mosaics, see Pensabene P. 2009.

background is a landscape with architectural structures, possibly villas, and trees of different species.⁶⁰

Cat. no.5 Casa de Hippolytus, Complutum



Cat. no.5. The panel with a fishing scene. Photo by PePeEfe, License CC 4.0

Date: 3rd to 4th century AD.

Location: Southeast corner of a passage hall, Casa de Hippolytus, Spain. *In situ.*

Measurements: the hall is 7,50 m x 8,70 m. No size is available for the figurative panel.

Material: stone and vitreous material.

Previous publications: Rascón Marqués et al. 1995.

Description: as part of a large geometric mosaic, this figurative panel stands out for its unusual position. Located in the Southeast corner of the hall, instead of the conventional central part of

⁶⁰ Dunbabin 1999, 139–140.

the room, it leads towards the cold-water pool. A boat with orange, red, and ochre decorations is at the scene's centre. On board stand three non-winged Erotes, all actively pulling up a fish net.⁶¹ Their bodies are less detailed than other mosaics with similar motifs, but the contouring with a darker shade provides some definition. Waves depicted in the conventional mix of two-tone zig-zags and broken lines, as well as black and light brown for the fishing net, enhance the illusion of water. The background is white even in this case, like in many similar mosaics. A big dolphin is in the bottom corner, near the net, and several other marine species are recognizable. The panel is framed by a series of geometrical borders, on top of which is a Latin inscription. Scholars have suggested that it could be the author's signature that created the artwork.⁶²

Cat. no.6 Mosaic of Neptune and Amphitrite, Cirta



Cat. no.6. Neptune and Amphitrite, detail. Photo Hervé Lewandowski. Musée du Louvre.

⁶¹ In Rascón Marqués, they are referred to as “Erotes”.

⁶² Rascón Marqués et al. 1995, 46,61.



Cat. no.6. Neptune and Amphitrite, overview. Photo Hervé Lewandowski, Musée du Louvre.

Date: 1st quarter 4th century AD.

Location: from a site in Cirta, Algeria. Discovered in 1842. Louvre Museum. Inv.no. Ma1880.

Measurements: floor 8,36 m x 7,14 m, figurative panel 3,21 m x 2.01m (with metal frame).

Material: marble, limestone, vitreous material.

Previous publications: Giroire and Marque 2017; collections.louvre.fr, 2022.

Description: the panel depicts the god Neptune and his spouse Amphitrite standing on a chariot pulled by four sea horses. Eight Erotes surround them; two are winged and hold a sail above the two gods' heads. The remaining six Erotes are non-winged, four are on sailboats, and two are riding dolphins and luring fish.⁶³ Of the figures on boats, one fishes with a rod and another with a trident, while the other two sit looking at the activities. All Erotes are naked, while the gods are barely covering their nudity with a drape of fabric. Amphitrite and the six figures at sea wear jewellery, but not Neptune or the winged figures. The composition is symmetrical and

⁶³ Giroire and Marque 2017 call the winged figures "cupids" and the other six "Putti".

crowded; the colour palette is rich, and chiaroscuro enhances volumes and movements.⁶⁴ The motif has a white background, and the water is rendered with short two-tone lines in black and grey. The marine fauna is rendered in a realistic manner; the same cannot be said about the dolphins.

Cat. no.7 Thermal baths, Oudhna



Cat. no.7. The thermal baths, overview. Photo: Mabrouk Haoues, with permission of the author.



Cat. no.7. The thermal baths, detail of the wall mosaic. Photo: Mabrouk Haoues, with permission of the author.

⁶⁴ In art, the term chiaroscuro refers to the treatment of light and shadows to create contrasts.

Date: 2nd century AD.

Location: thermal bath of “the fishing Cupids” in ancient Oudhna, Tunisia.

Measurements: unknown.

Material: stone.

Previous publications: Ben Hassen, 2001.

Description: this wall mosaic decorates an apse of small thermal baths in the ancient Oudhna. There is a total of eight Erotes, and all are winged and naked.⁶⁵ Six of them are on boats, fishing with various types of equipment, and the remaining two are in the water, riding dolphins while fishing. Overall, this scene is more stylized than in similar motifs; the white background is interrupted by short, two-tone broken lines to represent waves, leaving more space in between. The chromatic scale is relatively limited, and the execution of the work is a bit primitive.⁶⁶ Still, all the elements in the scene maintain a certain level of detail, enough to distinguish several species of fish or the decorations on the boats.

Cat. no.8 Mosaic at the House of the Waterfall, Utica



Cat.no.8. Basin floor. House of the Waterfall. Photo: from Ben Abed, A. 2006, 34.

⁶⁵ Ben Hassen 2001. He calls the figures “amours pêcheurs”.

⁶⁶ Ben Hassen 2001, 236.

Date: early 2nd century AD

Location: House of the Waterfall, Utica, Tunisia. *In situ.*

Measurements: unknown.

Material: stone, vitreous material.

Previous publications: Yacoub 1995; Abed, A.B. 2006.

Description: unlike many other scenes with similar motifs, this mosaic is populated only by one Eros. He is naked, winged, fishing with a rod while on a boat. This floor covers one of the many basins at the House of the Waterfall; chronologically, it is one of the earliest examples. The execution is less accurate; the rendering of the water appears bulky even if it was done with short, wiggly, and broken lines. Furthermore, the waves point in all directions, compromising the effect of moving water. The figure is also less detailed than those in similar examples. Colourful fish and molluscs crowd the space, filling the whole floor.

Cat. no.9 Dionysus against the Tyrrhenian Pirates, Dougga



Cat. no.9. Nautic scene with Dionysus Photo: Jan van Vliet, License CC BY 4.0

Date: 3rd century AD.

Location: floor from a peristyle of a villa in Dougga, Tunisia. Now, at the Bardo Museum.

Measurements: unknown. Inv.no.28846.

Material: stone.

Previous publications: Yacoub 1995, 73-74; Romizzi 2003.

Description: the motif with two winged, naked Erotes on a boat is part of a large composition depicting a scene with Dionysus against the pirates of the Tyrrhenian Sea.⁶⁷ One of the figures is pulling on board some fish traps attached to a rope. The other is steering the boat, a large, richly decorated vessel. The boat is to the left side of the composition, behind Dionysus' ship, which stands in the middle. To the right side of the composition, there is another ship with a group of men intent on fishing.⁶⁸ The entire composition is meticulously depicted, and the sea is rendered in two different ways. At the bottom part of the panel, the sea is made of long, continuous lines in several shades of colours, giving the impression of calm waters. Above the two vessels with fishing activities is the conventional white background with short, zig-zag lines made black and green, among which various fish swim. The entire composition is made with a wide range of colours; the figurative scene is framed by a geometric border made with some of the colours visible within the scene.

Cat. no.10 Villa of the Nile, Leptis Magna



Cat. no.10. Villa of the Nile Mosaic, overview. Photo: Jona Lendering | (c) Livius.org

Date: late 2nd or early 3rd century AD.

Location: Excavated in the 1st quarter of the 20th century. National Museum, Tripoli, Libya.

Measurements: unknown.

Material: stone.

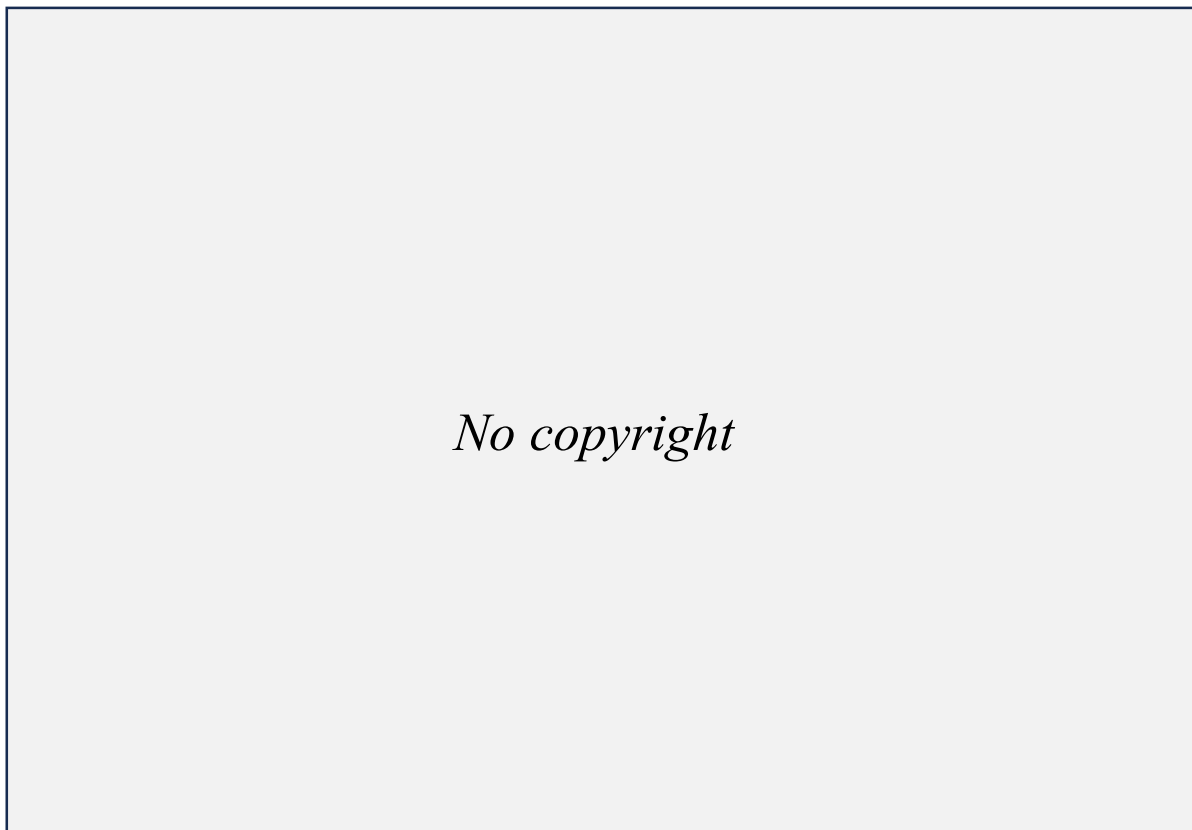
Previous publications: Kenrick 2009, 29, 87-91, 130.

⁶⁷ Yacub calls the two Erotes “winged spirits”.

⁶⁸ According to Yacub, the second boat with the fishermen is not part of Dionysus' fleet, while Romizzi suggests that it is the Pirates' boat depicted in a different moment of the story.

Description: this panel is one of several from the ancient Lepcis Magna. Eleven winged Erotes crowd the scene, at which centre there is a big sailboat coming from the sea and approaching what looks like a harbour. On board the vessel are two figures bringing what appears to be the result of a successful fishing trip. The other nine are busy with some activity; two are riding dolphins, and one is sailing on an amphora. One gives the back to the viewer; he is sitting, perhaps on a rock. The rest are fishing with rods or carrying baskets with the catch. The background colour for the composition is white; the sea is rendered with long, continuous lines in blue and green, with little whirls around the boat. The figures are naked, and their bodies are depicted with gradient colours to enhance the shapes with chiaroscuro. A geometric border with a multicolour guilloche frames the panel.

Cat. no.11 Port Landscape, Rastan



Cat. no.11. Port landscape. From Balty 1995,334.

Date: probably end of 2nd century AD.

Location: Rastan, Syria.

Measurements: unknown.

Material: stone, vitreous material.

Previous publications: Balty 1995.

Description: this mosaic attempts to render a perspective view of a port landscape. In the foreground, there is a boat with four winged Erotes.⁶⁹ Three of them are on board, while the fourth looks to be on the way to fall, and a companion pulls him up. The boat, which carries a fish trap or basket, is on a river or canal that points towards the direction of the sea. A large structure, flanked by two towers and a bridge, stands in the scene's background. The little boat is at the mercy of the stream, trying to reach one of the banks. There, looking at the scene, sits what has been identified as the “river god”.⁷⁰ The description of the colour palette, given by Balty, is the only information available about this mosaic. She writes about the rich polychrome stone tesserae and the gradient colours accentuating the details.⁷¹

Cat. no.12 House of Menander, Antioch



Cat. no.12 Floor Mosaic with Erotes Fishing. Photo: © Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection.

⁶⁹ Balty refers to them as Cupids.

⁷⁰ Balty 1995, 67.

⁷¹ Balty 1995, 68.

Date: 2nd to 3rd century AD.

Location: Courtyard of the House of Menander, Antioch, Turkey. Now, at Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Byzantine Collection, Washington, D.C. Inv.no BZ.1940.64

Measurements: 1,68 m x 2,65 m.

Material: stone.

Previous publications: Neuenfeldt 2009; museum.doaks.org

Description: this fishing scene shows three winged figures, two naked and the third wearing a short tunic. In the scene's background, one of the figures sits in a boat, observing his companions who stand on rocks, busy fishing with a net and rod.⁷² The peculiarity of this scene is that there is almost no depiction of water except for the light-grey shadow under the boat. The background is solid white, and the fish and dolphin are scattered around the composition in an unnatural floating effect. The chromatic scale is not very wide; the figures and marine fauna are rendered more impressionistic but retain many details. A wide geometric border in the same colours as the scene frames the panel.

Cat. no.13 Marine Mosaic, Philippopolis



Cat. no.13. Marine scene, detail. Philippopolis. Photo: Pillinger et al. 2016. License CC4.0

⁷² Neuenfeldt 2009, 65.

Date: 4th century AD.

Location: A possible reception hall for a domus. Philippopolis, Bulgaria.

Measurements: unknown.

Material: stone, vitreous material.

Previous publications: Topalilov 2023.

Description: a figurative panel incorporated into a larger geometric composition. One Eros is sitting in a sailboat at the southeast corner of the panel. Another one is partially destroyed; however, it is still possible to distinguish his head, back and one wing, and according to Topalilov, he is most likely riding a dolphin.⁷³ The rest of the scene is overcrowded by marine life, with several recognizable species. The colour palette is broad, and all the elements in the scene are depicted in detail. While there is no depiction of waves, the scene's background is made of a deep blue-green stone to render the depth of the sea and enhance the colourful fish swimming around the Erotes.⁷⁴

Cat. no.14 Fragment of Gallo-Roman mosaic



Cat. no.14. Fragment of mosaic with Eros on dolphin. Photo: musee-moyenage.fr

⁷³ Topalilov 2023, 370. He calls the figures “Putti”.

⁷⁴ Topalilov 2022, 266; Topalilov 2023, 370.

Date: possibly 2nd century AD.

Location: discovered near the Lutèce thermal baths, France. Now at Musée de Cluny, Paris

Inv.no. CI.12523

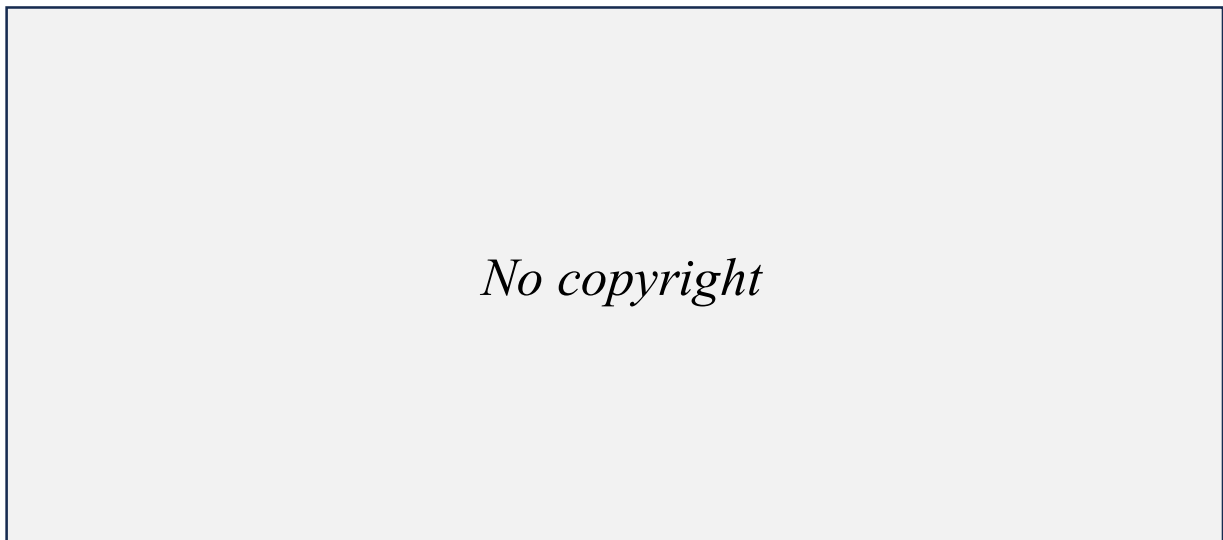
Measurements: 0,48 m x 0,43 m.

Material: stone.

Previous publications: Musée de Cluny, musee-moyenage.fr

Description: a winged, naked Eros riding a dolphin and holding a tablet. Parts of two short, wiggly, grey lines depicting water are still visible.

Cat. no.15 Fragment from Thmuis



Cat. no.15. Fragment of marine mosaic from Thmuis. Photo: Guimier-Sorbets 2021, 119.

Date: possibly 3rd century AD.

Location: from Thmuis, Egypt. Now, at the Greco-Roman Museum in Alexandria.

Measurements: unknown.

Material: stone.

Previous publications: Guimier-Sorbets 2021, 118-121. *Description:* two Erotes, one riding a dolphin, depicted on a mosaic fragment. This scene is part of a shipment delivered to the museum in 1922, at the same time as a Nilotic mosaic with a banquet scene.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Guimier-Sorbets 2021, 118.

4. Analysis

This chapter analyzes and compares the mosaics presented in the catalogue. The analysis is divided into eight main sections according to topics to facilitate the reading and focus on the motif's various aspects. Further details about the motif are provided in the subdivisions within a section. The mosaics are referred to in the text and footnotes in accordance with their catalogue number. The additional illustrations found in the text serve as support for the analysis.

4.1 Erotes

The total number of Erotes calculated in the catalogue amounts to 80 visible figures, and they are analyzed based on the criteria of appearance and type of activity carried out within the scene.⁷⁶ While the Erotes share similar characteristics at first glance, there are some variations in their physical appearance.

4.1.1 *Physical appearance*

a) Body

The majority of the Erotes appear to belong to the same biological sex; out of the total number of figures, 69 are naked males, and eight are clothed but share the same appearance as the naked ones for the rest. Four are undetermined.⁷⁷ The Erotes' facial details are generally created with relatively few tiles, making facial expressions less accurate and with a limited range of variation. Occasionally, the same face is repeated within a scene, resulting in uniformity and anonymization of the figures. Except for the two Erotes in Cat. no.15, who look more playful, none of the other Erotes in the catalogue show signs of happiness or anger, and their mouths are closed. They either look neutral or focused. Their gaze is usually directed towards the other Erotes and what is happening in the scene. There are a few exceptions where the Erotes seem to look at

⁷⁶ In Cat. no.2, a portion of the mosaic is missing; however, there is a visible line with a hooked fish. Therefore, scholars counted a total of 12 Erotes in the scene. See Forlati Tamaro et al. 1980, 219.

⁷⁷ There are naked Erotes in each mosaic. In Cat. nos 2, 4, 12, some of them wear clothes. In Cat. no.3, there is a trace of an Eros in the mortar, who is likely to be naked and resemble the other figures in the panel. The fragment in Cat. no.15 shows only the upper bodies of two Erotes; whether they are males cannot be determined.

the viewer, and it is in these cases that the agency factor plays an important role.⁷⁸ To those observing the scene, their gaze seems more questioning than inviting; one almost feels like an intruder, distracting the Erotes from their activities. The mosaic in Cat. no.4 stands out for the attention paid to making each Eros unique. Here, the Erotes have slightly oversized eyes, with a black line to mark the contour. A couple of them even show puffy eyes, which makes the whole face look less youthful.

The Erotes' bodies are generally those of adolescent boys; in some cases, they could look more like young men than boys.⁷⁹ They tend to be depicted as relatively slender, even with hints of muscular definition. However, there are some examples in the catalogue where the bodies exhibit specific features, like the plumpness of a toddler or visible muscles gained from heavy activity like fishing.⁸⁰ In the mosaics where the Erotes' feet are visible, they are all barefoot.

b) Hairstyle and headgear

Overall, the hairstyles of the Erotes are very similar; they all have short, curly, or slightly wavy hair and the majority range from light brown to dark blonde; only two have dark brown hair.⁸¹ While most of the Erotes are bareheaded, there are examples of different styles of headdresses. In Cat. no.6, the two Erotes riding dolphins in the water wear what could look like a tiara. The headgear is produced with vertical stripes of tesserae in gradient colours ranging from red to pink and white, perhaps hinting that it could be made of coral. One Eros in Cat. no.15 wears another kind of headgear. The shape of his head and the Egyptian provenience of the mosaic fragment could indicate that he is wearing a dark-haired wig held on the head by a white wreath. The only example of a hat is in Cat. no.12, where the clothed Eros is wearing a grey narrow-brimmed hat, possibly a *pilos* (Fig. 1).⁸²

⁷⁸ In Cat. no.4, one of the two Erotes is in the water with body and head turned to the viewer. Similarly, in Cat. no.6, one of the flying Erotes looks straight in front and in Cat. no.10, one Eros sitting in the boat is gazing towards the spectator.

⁷⁹ See Cat. nos 2, 5, 10 and Cat. no.12. In all these mosaics, at least one Eros looks older than the others.

⁸⁰ In Cat. no.6, the two Erotes flying near the deities have bodies resembling toddlers, while the one standing on the bottom right boat shows some accentuated leg muscles. See also Mitchell 2018, 148.

⁸¹ See Cat. nos 4 and 9 for blonde hair. In Cat. no.15, the Erotes have dark brown hair. Erotes in Cat. no.1 have grey-blue hair; Cat. no.11 has a b/w photo; however, looking at the shades, the Erotes are likely to have brown hair.

⁸² A type of Greek hat worn by men and women alike. See Tortora 2015, 68.



Fig.1 Peasant wearing a pilos and exomis. Terracotta figurine from Myrina, 1st century BC. Louvre Museum. Photo: Marie-Lan Nguyen. License CC 2.5.

c) Wings

Most Erotas featured in the catalogue are winged, 67 versus 13 without wings. The wings' shape and colour palette are similar throughout the current corpus. There are no folded wings, only extended and sprouting from the shoulder blades, except in Cat. no.2, where they start from the neck's base. The shape resembles that of the swan, although smaller in size. In almost all mosaics, wings are rendered with gradient colours using the chiaroscuro to enhance curvature and tridimensionality. The colours range from light golden yellow for the upper ridge of the wing to light blue and dark blue-grey for the rest of it, which, together with the *andamento* of the tesserae, creates the effect of the feathers.⁸³ Two mosaics diverge from this type of depiction; the first is Cat. no.1, where

⁸³ *Andamento* refers to the visual flow and direction of the *tesserae* in a mosaic.

the wings are flat with no gradient colours, only a uniform pale grey. A black outline defines the shape, and short stripes mark the feathers. The second mosaic is Cat. no.12, where the wings are more stylized than the others in the catalogue, and although they have different shades, the overall depiction is more uniform.

d) Tattoos

The mosaic in Cat. no.4 uniquely presents a peculiar detail on some Erotes' foreheads: a tattoo. It is the only mosaic in the catalogue showing this feature. Six figures show a mark in the shape of a "v", while two have a semi-circle, perhaps representing a crescent moon. These marks, made with black or dark brown tesserae, are also visible on Erotes in the mosaics of the frigidarium and reception room on the same site. The colour difference could be accidental or intentional, suggesting a permanent black ink tattoo and a brown henna tattoo. There are very few known examples of tattooed Erotes, and they all are in mosaics from North Africa. These marks are usually on fishing or vintaging Erotes, ascribed to a limited period between the end of the 3rd and middle of the 4th century AD. Regarding tattoos, it is also worth mentioning a mosaic on a site nearby in Sicily where a figure has a similar mark (*Fig.2*).⁸⁴



Fig.2 Hunting mosaic, Villa del Tellaro. Detail. Photo: courtesy of Roger Wilson 2016.

⁸⁴ Salomonson 1965, 22-24. The question of whether they are tattoos has been brought up before by scholars. While Salomonson identifies them as tattoos, for Dunbabin, 1999, they are workshop signatures, and Beckmann, 2021, argues that the mark is a stigma usually applied to criminals and enslaved people. The author of the present study supports Salomonson's hypothesis of the marks being tattoos, given that there is evidence of this practice, especially among women and children in Roman North Africa, see Bini 2021, 29-32.

e) Clothes

While nudity is predominant when depicting the Erotes, there is no shortage of examples of clothing. The eight clothed figures in the catalogue wear garments consistent with the chronology of the mosaics to which they belong. In Cat. no.2, two Erotes wear a below-knee tunic with long sleeves, typical of the 4th century AD.⁸⁵ One of them wears a white tunic with a decoration of two roundels on the upper shoulders, two stripes running on the length of the tunic, and two parallel stripes at the wrists; all these decorations are in black. The figure holds his arm in front of his waist. Therefore, it cannot be determined if he wears a belt. The second Eros wears a light blue tunic with a richer decoration; he has black roundels with a white geometric motif on the upper shoulders and close to the tunic's hem. Parallel black stripes run along the tunic's length from the shoulders to the bottom. The sleeves are decorated by the wrists with a stripe with a geometric motif in black and white. The figure is seated, and the tunic bulges at the level of his waist, but it is unclear if he wears a belt.

The five Erotes in Cat. no.4 wear short-sleeved tunics from which they have freed one arm to have a better range of movement during their activities. The style of their garments is like that in Cat. no.2 but with fewer decorations. Three Erotes wear green-blue tunics, and one wears a white one; all have two parallel stripes running from the shoulders to the hem in black or dark brown. The fifth Eros has a plain dark orange tunic with no decorations. The three Erotes standing on the boats have no belts at the waist; the fabric seems to be pulled below the level of the hips to leave the knees exposed.⁸⁶

The final example of clothing is in Cat. no.12, where the Eros, wearing a hat mentioned above “b) hairstyle and headgear” of this subsection, also wears a garment. This item is made from a cloth wrapped around his body and fastened over his left shoulder. The fabric is yellow beige, possibly its undyed natural colour, without decorations, and there are no folds, which gives the impression of a sturdy material. The overall shape resembles the *exomis*, the Greek garment worn by lower-class men throughout antiquity (*Fig.1*).⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Croom 2010, 43-44.

⁸⁶ Croom says an above-knee tunic was uncommon in the 4th century AD. However, there are examples of such attires for special activities like hunting. See Croom 2010, 43-44.

⁸⁷ Tortora 2015, 73.

f) Jewellery

There are two scenes in the present corpus where Erotes are adorned with various jewellery pieces.⁸⁸ The first scene is Cat. no.4, where each of the 14 figures wears bracelets, two at the upper arms and two at the wrists. Three of them also wear anklets, one for each leg; the ankles and feet of the other eight Erotes are not visible. The jewellery is depicted like rings in yellow and dark orange, and there is an outline of black tesserae, which is likely to render the thickness and tridimensionality of the metal. The colour would suggest that the bracelets and anklets are made in gold or bronze. All Erotes wear a necklace; for nine of them, it is a golden yellow ring like their bracelets; two have a golden yellow collar with a large green-grey pendant with a golden edge that could be either a stone or the shiny reflection of the metal. The pendant resembles a Roman *bull*a rather than a slave collar with a tag (*Fig.3*).⁸⁹



*Fig.3 Left: Roman bulla. Augustan period. Photo: Daderot. Wikimedia Commons CC1.0
Right: The Zoninus Collar; 4th century AD. Photo: Lalupa. Wikimedia Commons CC4.0*

One Eros is depicted wearing a necklace with a small pendant made with a thin line of dark blue tesserae. A similar jewel can be seen in a few mosaics from Tunisia, often worn by Nereids.⁹⁰ Finally, the two Erotes in the water wear a collar with an extended middle string reaching the navel. The necklace is rendered with a thin double line of white and dark brown tesserae that could remind of a string of pearls.

⁸⁸ Jewellery is also worn by vintaging Erotes. See Eckersley 1995, 30.

⁸⁹ Trimble 2016, 447-448.

⁹⁰ See in Abed Ben 2006, 46.

The second scene is Cat. no.6, where the Erotes in the bottom part of the panel all wear jewellery. The two figures standing on the boats and fishing wear the same pearl necklace as in Cat. no.4, the necklace is different for the two figures in the water and the two seated on the boats. One of the seated also wears bracelets on the upper arms and wrists. All these pieces are rendered with dark orange tesserae, contrasting with the gold bracelets worn by Amphitrite in the top part of the panel. This difference could indicate that the Erotes wear bronze jewellery, but it is difficult to establish. The style of the necklaces varies; one figure wears only a simple collar and the other three wear pendants like those in Cat. no.4, but square in shape. A similar pendant can be seen in the Venus mosaic from Bulla Regia (*Fig.4*).



*Fig.4 Triumph of Venus, Bulla Regia. 3rd century AD. Detail.
Photo: Bibi Saint-Pol. Wikimedia Commons License CC2.5*

g) Orientation

Regarding the Erotes' body orientation, throughout the catalogue, they can be found in profile, three-quarters view, front, and back.⁹¹ Among the 80 Erotes, a significant number of 51 are depicted in three-quarters, forming a clear majority. The rest is shared with 16 standing in profile, ten full frontals, and only three showing their back to the viewer. The prevalence of the three-quarter position is not surprising; it is an effective

⁹¹ In three-quarters view the subject is depicted slightly facing away from the viewer.

ploy for creating a sense of depth in composition, even in the absence of perspective. Moreover, it helps in rendering the sense of a body in movement. The three-quarters orientation is present in almost all mosaics in the catalogue except for three, where the Erotes are only in profile.⁹² As previously mentioned, in three mosaics, one Eros is oriented with the back towards the observer.⁹³

The positioning of the Erotes is generally towards the central part of the mosaic as a focal point, but they can also fill much of the space within the composition. Only in two mosaics of the catalogue are the Erotes in a more peripheral position than the rest of the composition.⁹⁴

4.1.2 *Activities*

a) Fishing

Fishing is the predominant activity among the Erotes in the catalogue, with 45 occupied in this task aided by various types of equipment. However, there is also a significant number of Erotes engaging in other activities. Actively fishing appears in nearly all mosaics except for three.⁹⁵ There is an evident prevalence of Erotes depicted fishing on boats, but only five while riding a dolphin.⁹⁶ A mere nine are fishing, standing on rocks or dry land. In equal measure, the fishing rod and the net are the two most represented types of gear. Tridents are depicted in five mosaics, and only two mosaics have an Eros fishing with traps.⁹⁷ Two mosaics depict rods, nets, and tridents used together.⁹⁸ A net full of fish is visible only in four mosaics out of the seven with this type of gear; in the remaining three mosaics, the net is either in the water, ready to be pulled, or in the hands of an Eros, prepared to throw it in the sea.⁹⁹ Seventeen Erotes are not actively fishing but are still involved in other phases connected to it. Thirteen Erotes, distributed on eight mosaics, steer the fishing boats, and two carry baskets filled with the catch. Two Erotes

⁹² Cat. nos 5, 8, 13.

⁹³ Cat. nos 2, 10, 11.

⁹⁴ Cat. nos 9, 13.

⁹⁵ Cat. nos 13, 14, 15. The missing parts in these motifs make it hard to determine whether the scene contained more Erotes engaging in fishing activities.

⁹⁶ Cat. nos 7 and 10.

⁹⁷ Cat. nos 4 and 9.

⁹⁸ Cat. nos 4 and 7 show three different types of fishing gear.

⁹⁹ Cat. nos 4 and 12, have an Eros holding the net on his arm.

sit on a boat with their arms in and not steering, possibly waiting for the fish to take the bait.¹⁰⁰

b) Other activities

As for the remaining eleven Erotes, there are some noteworthy situations, such as in Cat. no. 1. In this scene, two Erotes are attacked by sea creatures. An octopus, partially emerging from the waves, stretches its tentacles and reaches for the legs of one Eros flying above the water. This happens while another Eros on a boat is fishing, unaware of the dramatic scene behind his shoulders. The second Eros is attacked by a moray eel aiming for the feet. In this case, the Eros is rescued by another figure, who pulls him up to safety.¹⁰¹ A similar situation is presented in Cat. no.11, where one Eros has fallen from the boat and is saved by another companion. In this case, there are no visible dangers in the water, and previous scholars interpreted the situation as playful.¹⁰² Further peculiar activities include an Eros hunting a duck from a boat in Cat. no.2, a similar hunt on land, can be seen in a mosaic from Carthage (*Fig. 5*) and one Eros sailing on an amphora in Cat. no.10. Eros sailing on an amphora is a recurrent motif; see an example from the end of the 2nd - beginning of the 3rd century AD (*Fig. 6*).



*Fig.5 Mosaïque de chevaux. Detail.
End of 3rd, begin 4th century AD.
Photo: Bertrand Bouret. License CC BY-SA 3.0*



*Fig.6 Eros sailing on amphora, Lucera, Italy.
End of 2nd, begin 3rd century AD. Photo: Giuseppina Lucignani.*

¹⁰⁰ Cat. no.10.

¹⁰¹ David 1996, 39. David interprets the rescuing Eros as standing on a rock, although it has a geometric shape. It could be a platform or a particular vessel different from the other boat in the scene.

¹⁰² Balty 1995, 67.

4.2 Deities and other figures

The motif with fishing Erotes appears as a standalone piece or as part of a more intricate scene like, for example, a marine *thiasos*. In the catalogue, only three mosaics feature the Erotes within a larger context. One of these mosaics even includes a biblical reference, while the other two carry depictions of ancient deities and scenes from myths.

a) Biblical figures

In Cat. no.2, fishing occurs within a depiction from the Old Testament, specifically the episode of the prophet Jonah at sea. The story of Jonah unfolds, from left to right, in the upper register of this floor mosaic, showing in the first scene the prophet wearing a white tunic and praying on a boat. Two fishermen are seen on the same vessel, one of whom throws Jonah into the sea, who is promptly swallowed by a sea monster. This is a narrative scene with episodes: Jonah being asked by the fishermen to pray to God to calm down the storm and the action of casting him off the boat. The second scene in the same register shows the marine monster that regurgitates Jonah to dry land, which is depicted as a platform in the mosaic.¹⁰³ The third and final scene to the far right of the register shows Jonah resting under a pergola of oblong fruits; according to previous interpretations, they are squash.¹⁰⁴ The central and lower registers of the mosaic are filled with a sea full of all sorts of marine creatures. As described in section 4.1, the sea is populated by 12 figures busy fishing, only eleven of which are visible.

b) Ancient deities

The second mosaic with Erotes in context is Cat. no.6. Here, the theme is marine *thiasos* with the wedding procession of Neptune and Amphitrite.¹⁰⁵ Two-thirds of the mosaic is occupied by a depiction of the two deities looking at each other while standing on a chariot pulled by four sea horses. The chariot is made with several shades of yellow tesserae that simulate the shiny reflection of metal. The sea horses are grey with darker shades along the manes; the bridles and harnesses are red with golden details. The

¹⁰³ Jonah 1:1–17, 2:1–10.

¹⁰⁴ Forlati Tamaro et al. 1980, 219.

¹⁰⁵ <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010303132>

horses have serpentine tails that partially emerge from the water. In the lower part of the mosaic, the six unwinged Erotes are fishing without paying attention to the surroundings.

Amphitrite

Amphitrite's hair is light brown and slightly wavy, tied back, and she wears a golden tiara from which three green thorns emerge. She wears green earrings and two golden bracelets on her upper arms, like the Erotes. A red and blue cloth, perhaps a cloak, lowered to the hips reveals Amphitrite's naked body. Her left hand clutches Neptune's left shoulder, while her right hand rests on his right upper arm.

Neptune

Neptune's hair and beard are blue. He has a white band on his head to keep the hair back. Like his spouse, he is also naked but has a cloak wrapped around his left arm; he holds a trident with his left hand. Around the deities' heads is a white and light grey halo. Two winged erotes fly alongside Amphitrite and Neptune while holding a red veil above the heads of the two deities.¹⁰⁶

Dionysus

The third mosaic, Cat. no.9 depicts the moment in the myth where Dionysus transforms the Tyrrhenian pirates into dolphins.¹⁰⁷ At the centre of the panel stands a ship steered by Silenus, a maenad dressed in a green tunic, and a naked satyr flank Dionysus, dressed in a richly decorated tunic. The god's head is not preserved and cannot be described; he holds a thyrsus or spear with his right hand to cast it towards two pirates turned into dolphins from the waist down. In front of Dionysus, a big cat, perhaps a leopard, leans over the ship's railing and grasps the leg of a pirate morphing into a dolphin while touching the water. To the right of Dionysus' ship, there is another large vessel with three men fishing.¹⁰⁸ One of them stands at the bow; he wears a loincloth and holds a spear, ready to cast it towards a giant octopus. The other two men, dressed in tunics, are pulling up a net full of fish. The boat with two winged Erotes

¹⁰⁶ The red fabric is described as "voile", French for veil, in <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010303132>

¹⁰⁷ Hom. *Hymns* 7, 1-45. Romizzi 2003.

¹⁰⁸ Phil. Eld. *Im.* I, 19. Philostratus describes a painting in which a second ship belonging to the pirates is present. Romizzi argues that such a depiction could suggest two moments of the same story. Romizzi 2003, 355.

stands to the left of Dionysus's ship, fishing and manoeuvring the vessel while observing the situation from a slightly distant position.

4.3 Boats and ships

Boats and ships frequently recur in mosaics with Nilotic scenes or marine seascapes, and through their depictions, scholars have identified some classes of vessels. In her book “*Ship iconography in Mosaics. An aid to understanding ancient ships and their construction*”, Zaraza Friedman analyzes mosaics and identifies ancient ships and the associated iconography. Some of her observations have helped identify, if not with a name, at least the type of boats depicted in the mosaics included in the study. An additional source of comparison comes from the Althiburus mosaic, dating to the 3rd century AD.¹⁰⁹ It illustrates 25 different types of vessels with the corresponding names written below them, some of which are also mentioned in ancient sources (Fig. 7).¹¹⁰



Fig. 7 Althiburus Mosaic, 3rd century AD. Bardo Museum. Photo: Wikimedia Commons Public Domain.

¹⁰⁹ Friedman 2011, 154-155.

¹¹⁰ Gell. *Att.* X, XXVI, 286-287.

Often, depictions are simplified and adjusted to suit the mosaic technique, for which it can be challenging to understand how realistic they are. Although stylized, they can still provide information such as the vessel's shape and the type of gear used for steering and propelling it. These elements indicate if a ship was built for open sea or coastal fishing; also, in some cases, the vessels depicted in the scenes share the same chronology as the mosaics they are in.¹¹¹

The current corpus includes 26 vessels with one or more in each scene apart from Cat. nos 14 and 15 fragments, where there are none. The majority are small rowing boats, and only four are ships equipped with masts and full sails.¹¹² All boats are depicted in profile, giving an overview of the vessel's shape; however, they do not always scale with the figures onboard.

a) Rowing boats

The rowing boats in the corpus share similar characteristics, and based on the assessment made by Friedman about the boats in what is here labelled as Cat. no.4, it is reasonable to assume that their sailing environment was the harbour or coastal fishing.¹¹³ The hull of the boats has a similar colour scheme, with a red, yellow, and green prevalence; the upper plank on the vessel's side is often decorated and can have stripes, geometric patterns, or even a floral motif. Another common element among these vessels is the presence of an ornamental volute at the terminus of the stempost. The mooring lines are visible only in three mosaics.¹¹⁴

Of the six boats in Cat. no.4, only two have a rounded post with a fishtail tip at the front of the boat and a semi-circular transom board at the back. Friedman describes them in detail, and accordingly, this type of vessel is rarely depicted.¹¹⁵ The boats in Cat. no.4 are decorated in details compared to the rest. Three carry a white dolphin in the frame on the stern, and one boat has Oceanus's head on the transom.¹¹⁶ The vessel in Cat. no.1 diverges substantially from the rest of the boats. As previously described, all elements in this scene are depicted in a minimalistic style, and the boat is no exception. A black outline defines the boat's shape, and the only sign of decoration is a few rows of orange and blue tesserae separated by a black horizontal line in the middle

¹¹¹ Friedman 2011 189.

¹¹² Cat. nos 6, 10 and 13.

¹¹³ Friedman 2011, 189.

¹¹⁴ Cat. nos 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9; Cat. nos 2, 4, and 8.

¹¹⁵ Friedman 2011, 191.

¹¹⁶ Friedman 2011, 146.

of the hull. It does not resemble any of the other vessels in the corpus. The water ripples do not touch the keel, giving the impression that the boat is above the water.

Scholars have possibly identified the type of vessels depicted in three mosaics in the catalogue: three *cymbae* and two *scaphae* are depicted in Cat. no.2, two *cymbae* are in Cat. no.3, and, in Cat. no.5 there is a *vegeiia* or a *placida*.¹¹⁷

b) Ships

As mentioned above, there are three mosaics depicting ships in the catalogue. The vessel in Cat. no.10 is similar to a Hellenistic warship depicted in the Nile Mosaic of Palestrina, which is dated around the end of the 2nd century BC (*Fig.8*). Both ships have a light brown hull that gets darker at the bottom, a way to mark that the hull is coated with bitumen.



Fig.8 Nile Mosaic of Palestrina. Detail. End 2nd century BC. Photo: Camelia.boban. Wikimedia Commons License CC 3.0

¹¹⁷ Iacumin 2022, 129; Massara 2012, scheda TESS 12347; Rascón Marquès et al. 1995, 48.

They also share a concave stem with a pointed cutwater and a raised stempost on the back with an inward-turned round tip. A long row of oars is depicted in two-tone light and dark brown. An additional element about the class of the vessel is the *Ophthalmos*, the painted eyes on the starboard and the port bow.¹¹⁸ The ship in Cat. no.10 is depicted with full sails, and the one in Palestrina is without.¹¹⁹ In Cat. no.9, Dionysus' vessel is more prominent in size compared to the Erotes' and pirates' boats. Its shape is rounder than in Cat. no.10; however, the two ships have some common elements, including the stem, the raised stempost and the oars. The hull of Cat. no.9 is fully decorated; the upper plank on the side is striped with black zig-zag on green and red, a dolphin and a triton are depicted on the bow, while a Victory is placed at the stern.¹²⁰ This ship, as well as the Erotes' boat, has a visible helm. The two ships in Cat. no.6 are almost identical, except for a slight colour variation, resembling the one in Cat. no.13. All three ships have square sails made with gradient white and light grey tesserae to render the impression of being unfurled. The hull in Cat. no.6 is decorated in the same style as the boats in Cat. no.4, while Cat. no.13 is rendered with a simple light yellow and dark orange. Some parts of this mosaic are missing, and the ship is not completely visible. Except for the pirates' boat in Cat. no.9, all the sails depicted in the catalogue are unfurled. According to Friedman, this should be a conventional sign that refers to merchantmen.¹²¹

4.4 Fishing gear

As seen in section “4.1.2. *Activities*”, fishing is the predominant activity depicted in the corpus, requiring various gear to be performed. As the analysis demonstrated, it emerged that Erotes mainly fish from a boat, using a rod or nets of different kinds, and just a few are standing on rocks. The rendering of the types of equipment is often simplified and adjusted for the mosaic technique, though some details are found to correspond with ancient sources.¹²² The archaeological evidence of fishing gear that has survived to the present day is mainly made of metal, like hooks and lead weights. There are, however, scanty examples of nets, traps, and

¹¹⁸ Friedman 2011, 76.

¹¹⁹ Friedman 2011 70, 76, 193.

¹²⁰ Romizzi 2003, 357.

¹²¹ Friedman 2011, 189.

¹²² The ancient authors Aelian and Oppian have both written about fishing techniques.

lines which were made from perishable materials like plant fibres, reeds, or horsehair.¹²³ Scholars of ancient fishing techniques still have to rely on ancient sources and iconographical material, such as mosaics and wall paintings, to help them with their research.¹²⁴

a) Fishing rods

Rods are well-represented in the catalogue, and the Erotes that fish from the boats use the same type. It is long and curved, rendered with two tones of brown tesserae to which a line is attached, made with black or beige *tesserae*. Its appearance matches Roman author Aelian's description of fishermen using cornel wood for a rod and a line made of flax or horsehair.¹²⁵ In Cat. no.10, the rods are short, dark in colour and have a beige or light grey line. López Monteagudo sees a similarity between this mosaic and others, also from Lepcis Magna, where a wood stick replaces the fishing rod.¹²⁶ According to Aelian, fishing with a rod was "the most accomplished form and the most suitable for free men."¹²⁷

b) Nets

Various types of nets are depicted in the catalogue, and they seem to match the description given by another ancient author, Oppian. His description of a casting net corresponds to the long net made with light brown tesserae that stretches between two boats in Cat. no.4.¹²⁸ This type of gear was, according to López Monteagudo, used solely for coastal fishing, and there are several examples of this technique depicted in mosaics.¹²⁹

A similar net to Cat. no.4, but handled from one boat, can be seen in three more scenes.¹³⁰ Smaller and rounder black nets, such as bag nets, are instead used in three other depictions in the catalogue.¹³¹

¹²³ Ael. *N.A.*12.43; Vargas Girón 2021, 57-58; Alfaro Giner 2007, 72.

¹²⁴ López Monteagudo 2007.

¹²⁵ Cat. nos 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, and 12; Ael. *N.A.* 12.43; López Monteagudo, 2007,164.

¹²⁶ López Monteagudo, 2007,164.

¹²⁷ Ael. *N.A.*12.43

¹²⁸ Op. *Hal.* 3, 80-84.

¹²⁹ López Monteagudo, 2007,164.

¹³⁰ Cat. nos 5, 7, and 9.

¹³¹ Cat. nos 1, 2, and 11.

c) Other equipments

It is worth mentioning that other kinds of gear appear in the catalogue, such as a few tridents, a harpoon, a hand casting net, and a few fish and lobster traps. All these types of equipment find correspondence in the description given in the books by Aelian and Oppian.¹³² The only notable difference can be observed in the depiction of the tridents between Cat. nos 6 and 7. The three-pronged weapon wielded by Neptune in Cat. no.6 has a more elaborate manufacture and ends with three arrow-shaped points, while the one wielded by Eros in the Cat. no.7 is a simple trifurcated trident.

4.5 Marine fauna

Studies of the dietary habits of coastal populations around the ancient Mediterranean show a correspondence between ancient sources, archaeological evidence and the iconography in mosaics. In a 2018 paper, scholars analyzed the waste deposit of the Cardo V sewer in Herculaneum. Their findings presented a consumption pattern of a wide variety of fish and molluscs, with a prevalence of certain species, many of which were likely caught near the coast.¹³³ Some of those same species are mentioned in *Haliutica*, Oppian's book about fishing techniques.¹³⁴ A correspondence in iconography can be found in a marine scene from the House of Faun in Pompeii, where scholars identified 22 types of fish and molluscs, many of which are the same species discussed in the 2018 paper (*Fig.9*).

The marine mosaics, including those in this study, produced across the Empire long after Pompeii and Herculaneum ceased to exist, continued to depict the same type of aquatic fauna.

In general, the marine animals in the catalogue are not rendered in a naturalistic way; this makes it particularly challenging to identify all species; however, no matter how stylized, a few of them are recognizable by their characteristic shape. The amount of fauna depicted in the scenes varies; in Cat. no.10, the presence of fish can be understood from the context and the baskets with heaps of colourful, undistinguished sorts. In Cat. no.11, the river is empty of fish, but the Eros pulling up a net seems to make an effort, hinting at a successful catch. Conversely, some scenes present a more densely populated sea, as in Cat. nos 2, 4, 5, 8, and 13, and the same type of fish can appear in several parts within the composition.

¹³² Ael. *N.A.*12.43; Op. *Hal.* 3, 80-84.

¹³³ Nicholson et al. 2018.

¹³⁴ Op. *Hal.* 4, 125-185.



Fig.9 Marine mosaic House of the Faun Pompeii. Photo: Sailko. Wikimedia Commons License CC 3.0

a) Fish

Sea basses, grey and red mullets, seabreams, wrasses, and moray eels represent the most frequently recurring marine species, appearing in more than half of the scenes. Cat. nos 1 and 2 are more challenging to interpret due to the rendering style; however, the fins' position and colour scheme may indicate that the fish belongs to the abovementioned species. Other recognizable species include flatfish, which appears in three mosaics, and garfish, which is visible in two mosaics.¹³⁵ In the catalogue, the fish are mostly portrayed underwater, actively grazing or swimming near the boats, but some seem to dart among the waves. The moray eel in Cat. no.1 gives the only example of a fish with an aggressive attitude, which is portrayed while trying to attack an Eros.

¹³⁵ Flatfish in Cat. nos 2, 4, 5, garfish in Cat. nos 2 and 5. All these mosaics are from Italy and Spain.

b) Molluses

Octopuses and cuttlefish recur in several scenes, in six and seven mosaics, respectively.¹³⁶ Cat. no.9 depicts two giant octopuses surrounding the boat of the men fishing to the right of Dionysus' ship. One man stands at the bow, wields a harpoon, and tries to hit an octopus emerging from the water; the other octopus appears near the net pulled up by the other men onboard. Given their size, they can be interpreted as a threat to the men on the boat. Another aggressive behaviour from an octopus is portrayed in Cat. no.1, where a smaller octopus is grabbing the Eros' feet, which is depicted in the lower part of the mosaic.

c) Dolphins

There is a long tradition of tales and myths about dolphins, some describing their qualities as animals and others about their relationship with humans.¹³⁷ In ancient art, dolphins were represented in sculptures, pottery, wall paintings, and mosaics as self-standing motifs or with sea deities. Often, they are associated with Erotes riding them. In this study, though, the dolphins are analyzed as part of the scenes without delving into their myth but referring to Pliny's description of dolphins helping fishermen.¹³⁸ Throughout the corpus, dolphins appear frequently, and often, there is more than one exemplar within a scene. Scenes without dolphins include Cat. nos 1, 3, 8 and 11.

From a stylistic point of view, most of the dolphins are similarly depicted in a way that diverges considerably from reality. While the bodies are grey or grey-blue, as they should be, the rostrum is often orange or pale red, like a bird's beak. Instead of the short central dorsal fin, they have a long dorsal fin along their back, either red or grey. A small fin found near the eye is another detail that does not match reality but is often found in the depictions. Finally, when visible, the tail can be more similar to a fish's tail than an aquatic mammal. The only depiction of dolphins that is more naturalistic is in Cat. no.10. It is impossible to know whether the unrealistic depiction of dolphins was due to not having seen them in person or whether it was a conventional depiction.

¹³⁶ Octopuses appear in Cat. nos 1, 2, 5, 6, 8 and 9; Cuttlefish are in Cat. nos 2, 4, 5, 6, 8,9 and 12.

¹³⁷ See for example Plin. *NH*, 9.8.

¹³⁸ Plin. *NH*, 9.9.

Dolphins are primarily portrayed in the act of blocking the way for the fish, which are trapped between them and the boats, facilitating the fishing activity, as described by Pliny.¹³⁹ Alternatively, they can be found helping Eros attract fish or being ridden by an Eros while he fishes with a rod.

d) Other

Fish of all sorts, molluscs and mammals are not the only creatures populating the seascapes. Scattered among the compositions are sea urchins, scallops, and even some purple murex. This shell, with its recognizable shape, was used to produce the purple dye used in the manufacturing of clothes worn by the elite class. Owning purple clothing was a visual sign to mark one's social status.¹⁴⁰ Lobsters and prawns are rare; the lobster, like the shrimp, appears as only a specimen in two mosaics. A few ducks can be found floating around the boats in Cat. nos 2 and 4, two birds, which could be seagulls or pigeons, stand on the shore in Cat. no.10.

4.6 Landscape and features

Four mosaics, Cat. nos 2, 4, 10 and 11 depict land and/or architectural structures. The remaining scenes include no geographical references. The compositions focus on the elements above and under the waterline without perspective, and the white background does not help tie them together. Scholars have interpreted these architectural structures differently, even though they share some similarities.

a) Architecture

Scenes in Cat. nos 4 and 10 occur in a bay with buildings in the background. Cat. no.4, presents architectural structures dislocated along the bay. These are made up of collonnaded porticoes interspersed with circular and rectangular buildings. The columns are white, and the porticoes and buildings are roofed with red tiles. The bottom of the

¹³⁹ Ibid. *NH*, 9.9.

¹⁴⁰ Olson 2018, 112. Purple murex appear in Cat. no.6

structures rests on a grey base that could be stone. Pensabene has interpreted the buildings as seaside villas.¹⁴¹ However, the buildings are not located along the shore but emerge from the water, which opens the possibility that the structures could belong to a port and not private buildings.

The second mosaic with the depiction of features is Cat. no.10. In the scene, the Erotes on board the ship are approaching a harbour on the right side of the panel. The structure of the port shows similarities to Cat. no.4, long white collonaded porticoes with red roof. A grey pier stretches from the gate of a large building towards the bay. Another vessel is anchored behind one side of the portico, but only its sails are visible. The mosaic in Cat. no.10 is from Lepcis Magna in Libya. Scholars have interpreted these architectural structures differently; some, like Rosamilia, have debated whether the harbour depicted in the scene is an actual reference to the ancient city harbour or just the fruit of the artist's imagination.¹⁴² Others, like Kenrick, have described the features as porticoed piers of a private villa by the sea.¹⁴³ Among the archaeological remains of Lepcis Magna, features in its ancient harbour are similar to those depicted in the scene. This evidence could weigh in favour of the port interpretation rather than the private residence (*Fig.10*).



Fig.10 Lepcis Magna. Port, East Pier. Photo: Jona Lendering, Marco Prins. License CC 4.0

¹⁴¹ Pensabene 2009, 80.

¹⁴² Rosamilia 2019, 268.

¹⁴³ Kenrick 2009, 29.

The scene in Cat. no.11 differs slightly from the two described above. Balty has interpreted the structure in the background as two battlement towers connected by a suspended bridge. Along the river banks, still in the background of the scene, are some lower buildings.¹⁴⁴ The overall impression is of a massive structure with no colonnades or quays. Since the only available picture of this mosaic is in black and white, it is impossible to understand which colour the towers and surrounding buildings are.

b) Land vegetation and waves

Natural landscapes, besides marine ones, are few and not always easy to interpret. In Catalogue no. 2, in the upper register illustrating the story of Jonah, the depiction of dry land takes the unusual form of a square platform. In addition to its geometrical shape, the land is surrounded by a black, white, blue and grey striped border. It resembles a raft rather than a sandy island or beach. Cat. nos 4 and 10 have a hint of green, suggesting the type of vegetation found in a coastal area. In Cat. no.4, the trees are depicted at a certain distance from each other, making it possible to distinguish species like the cypress and sea pine. In Cat. no.10, dense vegetation peeks out from behind the buildings, and curved branches give the impression of the wind blowing, but no specific type of tree is visible.

Waves have been described throughout the catalogue as short and wiggly or straight, broken lines. Often, the only attempt to render a more realistic effect is given by the small whirls around the boats, suggesting the idea of motion. There are two scenes, though, where the element of the sea is treated in a more naturalistic way.¹⁴⁵

c) Inscriptions

The first inscription is presented in Cat. no.2, encircled by a medallion placed at the centre of the sea as part of the story of Jonah. The inscription is surmounted by the Christian monogram of Constantine X P , which is made by crossing the Greek letters X and P. The text reads as follows: “THEODORE FELI (X) / (A)DIUVANTE DEO / OMNIPOTENTE ET / POEMNIO CAELITUS TIBI / (TRA) DITUM OMNIA /

¹⁴⁴ Balty 1995, 67.

¹⁴⁵ Cat. nos 9 and 10 depict the sea with long, continuous lines, suggesting calmer waters.

(B)AEATE FECISTI ET/ GLORIOSE DEDICAS / TI”. “O Teodoro Felice, con l’aiuto di Dio onnipotente e del gregge affidato a te dal Cielo, hai fatto tutte le cose sontuosamente e le hai gloriosamente dedicate.”¹⁴⁶ Scholars have debated whether the inscription was inserted into the mosaic at a later time, but the investigations confirmed the contemporaneity of the various elements.¹⁴⁷

The second inscription is included in Cat. no.5 and is placed in the periphery of the panel. The text is depicted inside a *tabula ansata*, also in mosaic, measuring 244 x 28 cm.¹⁴⁸ The text reads: “ANNIORVM HIPPOLYTUS TESSELLAV[IT]”, “Hipólito, que pertenece a los Anios, ha teselado este Mosaico.”¹⁴⁹ Rascón Marqués et al. have analyzed the phrase from a grammatical perspective and compared it with similar and contemporary epigraphical sources. This inscription is regarded as a unique example of its kind for Roman Spain. In their conclusion, scholars have considered that Hippolytus was either an enslaved man or a freedman of the Annia family and that he materially made the mosaic.¹⁵⁰

4.7 Spatial positioning in context

The connection between the marine motifs and their placement in the proximities of water is a recurring element of the spatial position of Roman mosaics in both public and private buildings. Among the mosaics featured in the corpus, the scenes can be categorized into two main groups: those near water features or located in buildings close to water, and those not close or with an unknown relationship to water. For the latter group, as the scenes are preserved today, there is no archaeological evidence in support of ancient water features; this does not exclude that they may have been present once.

Notably, out of the 15 mosaics in the catalogue, a significant nine were strategically placed in contexts with a direct connection to water.¹⁵¹ However, only Cat. no.8 covered the bottom of a basin as part of a system of waterfalls in a private house in Utica.¹⁵² In the remaining seven

¹⁴⁶ Loosely translated as: “O Theodore Felix, with the help of the Almighty God and the flock Heaven entrusted you with, you did all this blessedly and gloriously dedicated them.”

¹⁴⁷ Forlati Tamaro et al. 1980, 219.

¹⁴⁸ A *tabula ansata* is a tablet with dovetail handles.

¹⁴⁹ Loosely translated as: “Hippolytus, who belongs to the Annia, has tessellated this mosaic.”

¹⁵⁰ Rascón Marqués et al. 1995, 55-61.

¹⁵¹ Cat. nos 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12 and 14.

¹⁵² Abed 2006, 34.

mosaics, three scenes are placed in a context where water is not present, and four for which it was not possible to determine their placement.

In scenes connected with water features, some are placed around pools or fountains in the peristyle of a house, such as Cat. nos 9 and 12.¹⁵³ Two scenes are located in rooms that lead towards water features: Cat. no.5, with the mosaic placed off-centre, marks the access to a pool; and Cat. no.4, which is situated in a semicircular atrium with a small *nymphaeum* at its centre.¹⁵⁴ Cat. no.7 entirely decorates the walls of the *frigidarium* of a public bath in Oudhna called “Bath of the Fishing Erotes”. The fragment of the Gallo-Roman mosaic in Cat. no.14 was found near the Roman bath at Lutèce.¹⁵⁵ There are two scenes in private residences located by the water: Cat. no.3 is placed on the floor of a large passage room of a villa near the Garda Lake; Cat. no.10 was found, together with other mosaics sharing similar marine motifs, in a seaside villa by the beach of Lepcis Magna.¹⁵⁶

The mosaics not connected to water include three scenes, two in Italy and one in Bulgaria. Cat. no.1 is a scene placed in a large room's central part. The room itself is part of a sizeable building divided into several rooms. Whether it was a private residence or a public building, its function is still not entirely understood. The building is in the city of Milan, therefore not directly close to the sea or a lake; even the location of the building within the city walls does not suggest the proximity to water.¹⁵⁷

The second scene, Cat. no.2 is located inside the Basilica in Aquileia, about 5 km from the coast. The mosaic floor with the story of Jonah was part of the paleochristian building erected by bishop Theodore Felix.¹⁵⁸ Finally, for the marine scene in Philippopolis, Cat. no.13, the information about the spatial position of this mosaic tells that it was possibly the floor of a reception room inside a *domus* located on the city's outskirts.¹⁵⁹

For Cat. nos 6, 11 and 15, there is no information about their spatial location in context nor if the scenes were connected to water somehow.

¹⁵³ Cat. no.9, see Yacub 1995, 171; Romizzi 2003, 357. Cat. no.12, see Neuenfeldt 2009, 65.

¹⁵⁴ Cat. no.5, see Rascón Marqués et al. 1995, 43. Cat. no.4, Cantamessa and Cremona 2012, 8.

¹⁵⁵ Cat. no. 7, see Ben Hassen Hassine 2001, 236. Cat. no.14 see musee-moyenage.fr

¹⁵⁶ Cat. no.3, see Massara 2012, scheda TESS 12347. Cat. no.10, see Kenrick 2009, 29.

¹⁵⁷ David 1996, 59.

¹⁵⁸ Cat. no.2, see Forlati Tamaro et al. 1980, 185,189,199.

¹⁵⁹ Cat. no.13, see Topalilov 2023, 369.

4.8 Chronology

Chronologically, the current corpus spans from the 2nd to the 4th century AD. However, the chronology provided by archaeological reports and other scholarly papers is not always absolute. Further studies may provide new evidence that allows closer dating of a site or a specific building. Four mosaics in the catalogue are the earliest examples dating back to the 2nd century AD, while two are placed between the 2nd and the 3rd century AD.¹⁶⁰ Two scenes are ascribed to the 3rd century AD, and one, Cat. no.5 is ascribed 3rd to 4th century AD.¹⁶¹ The remaining six mosaics are later examples of scenes with fishing Erotes, and they are ascribed to the 4th century AD.¹⁶²

5. Discussion

The application of the semiotics model in the analysis of the fishing Erotes motifs has highlighted several notable elements that could answer the research questions, which will be discussed in the present chapter. The chapter is divided into three sections, one for each question, to present the discussion more efficiently and facilitate reading.

5.1 The identity of the figures

The main research question delved into identifying the figures depicted in the motifs. As previously presented in section “2.2 Eros and Erotes in mythology”, wings are an attribute of Eros and Erotes, attested in ancient art and literature. An essential element that emerged from the analysis is that most fishing figures in the scenes have wings, while some do not. This first distinction can mark the difference between Erotes, the winged figures, and humans, the figures without wings.

Considering that the humans in the scenes are engaged in fishing activities from boats or land, it seems plausible to identify them as fishermen. This perspective opens up the possibility of reevaluating the figures in scenes like Cat. nos 5 and 6. As presented in Chapter 3, in Cat. no.5,

¹⁶⁰ Cat. nos 7, 8, 11 and 14; Cat. nos 10 and 12.

¹⁶¹ Cat. nos 9 and 15.

¹⁶² Cat. nos 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 13.

the figures have been identified as Eroses by scholars. Though, the absence of wings could indicate that they are indeed humans, specifically fishermen.

Similarly, in Cat. no.6, scholars have defined the two winged figures in the scene as Cupids and the remaining six with no wings as Putti. However, the physical appearance of the four figures on the boats, such as their muscular build and more mature facial features, appears to be that of young men rather than of toddlers or boys, as the word Putti suggests. The two remaining figures riding dolphins in the water wear a particular headgear that does not appear in any other scene in the corpus. While they do not have wings, they do not conform to the fishermen's look either. Their identity remains, therefore, undetermined. In the scenes where the two categories of winged and non-winged figures are depicted together, it may be beneficial for scholars to specify the identity of the figures and avoid defining all as Eroses.

If attributes such as wings and young age are essential to identifying the figures as Eroses, there may be yet another element that could explain their identity and association with fishing activity. Artists and patrons from North Africa may have drawn inspiration from a literary source dating back to the 2nd century AD. This source contains significant elements that have parallels in these artistic representations, whose first appearances correspond to the period in which this work was written.

The work in question is *Halieutica* by Oppian, previously mentioned in several sections of this study. In his five-books didactic poem, the author writes about the sea and the fish and describes several fishing techniques.¹⁶³ In a passage from Book 4, Oppian calls on Eros, stating that the god could be either the primordial deity born from Chaos or the winged god, son of Aphrodite. He then asks Eros to come among humans and bring good weather and says that men would not refuse his actions. Oppian refers to Eros' force to awaken the lust in fish, pushing them to mate by clustering them together.¹⁶⁴ This image of Eros descending among humans could explain the presence of the god in his form as Eroses, alone or alongside fishermen, in the scenes where fishing is the main activity. What Oppian vividly describes, using mythological references and depicting the fish as almost anthropomorphic, with human feelings and behaviours, could refer to the fishing technique employed during the spawning season of certain marine species.¹⁶⁵

Surprisingly, iconographical studies have not stressed enough the connection between the passage from Oppian's book and the mosaics featuring fishing Eroses. Instead, one needs to

¹⁶³ Kneebone 2020, 5.

¹⁶⁴ *Op. Hal.* 4, 5-15.

¹⁶⁵ *Op. Hal.* 4.

turn the attention to scholars of ancient Greek literature like Emily Kneebone to find this reference. In her book *Oppian's Halieutica Charting a Didactic Epic* (2020), she draws compelling parallels between the winged Erotes acting as fishermen in Roman mosaics and the Eros described by the poet in Book 4.¹⁶⁶

As presented in the section “4.5 Fish”, the archaeological records provide evidence of high fish consumption in antiquity. Notably, some species identified in these records, such as the grey mullet, align remarkably with Oppian's descriptions. This correlation is further supported by a 2010 study by marine biologists, which reveals that the spawning areas of the grey mullet coincide with the locations where this genre of scenes had gained popularity (see *Fig. 11*).¹⁶⁷ The timing of the spawning, in the summer, could also explain why the Erotes and fishermen are often depicted naked or with minimal clothing.

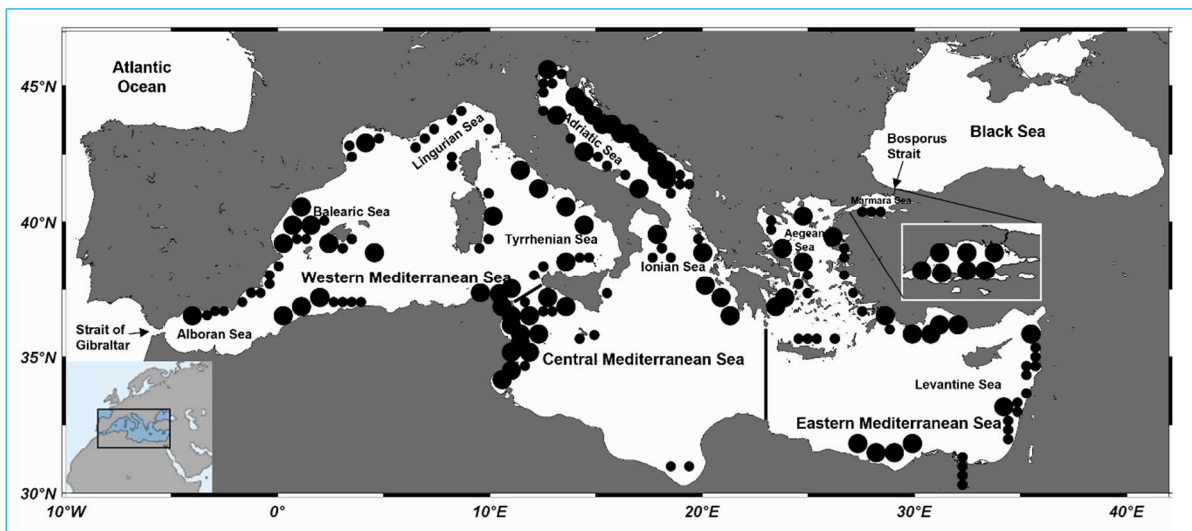


Fig. 11 Map of the Mediterranean with locations where spawning occurs. The map shows the data relative to several species of coastal fish, including the grey mullet. From Tsikliras et al. 2010, 501. With permission from the author.



Fig. 12 Map of the Mediterranean with the locations from the corpus. Map: Konstey. Wikimedia Commons License 3.0, edited by Claudia Bini.

¹⁶⁶ Kneebone 2020, 11-12.

¹⁶⁷ Tsikliras et al. 2010, 501, 521-522.

As indicated, these elements could suggest a connection between Eros in his multiple forms of Erotes and fishing activity. Within the corpus, there is variation in numbers for both Erotes and fish. The presence of Eros on the scene could be interpreted as a good omen for abundant fishing and, consequently, a symbol of abundance of food and well-being for the household.

However, it is worth pointing out one scene, Cat. no.5, where this message of wealth is conveyed without involving Erotes. The three figures, likely fishermen, as suggested here, sit in a boat in a well-populated sea and pull up a large net loaded with various fish species.

Cat. no.2 depicts Erotes and humans fishing together. While the Erotes' appearance matches the iconography described in this section, their identity has changed, and the same could be argued for the Erotes in Cat. no.1. Therefore, these two scenes will be further discussed in the section “5.3. Changes in the motif over time, how and why”.

Oppian's *Halieutica* may have served as an initial inspiration and then reinterpreted by artists according to a patron's request, bearing in mind that decoration of public and private spaces was for Romans not only a way to embellish but also to affirm their role within society.¹⁶⁸ In this regard, by showing an artwork inspired by a poem by a Greco-Roman author, the North African elite could have marked their cultural level and affirmed their right to be an integral part of Roman society.

5.2 The distinctive elements and variations in depiction and spatial context

The analysis has brought to light a significant finding in the current corpus. While the scenes do exhibit a commonality of distinctive elements, they also maintain a certain degree of variation and customization within the same subject. This observation challenges the past scholarly argument that these are merely stock images, as suggested, for instance, by Dunbabin.¹⁶⁹

Several distinctive elements emerged from the analysis, and in this section, are presented the ones that are most evident and recur more frequently throughout the corpus.

The Erotes' physical appearance is undoubtedly the most essential element, as the analysis has shown. These figures share similar youthly bodily features, and the age is, on average, that of adolescent boys, with the exemption of Cat. no.6, where two Erotes can be classified as toddlers. The wings are another feature profusely present throughout the catalogue and they

¹⁶⁸ Hales 2003, 3.

¹⁶⁹ Dunbabin 1978, 206.

show striking similarities with each other. An additional consideration for what concerns the Erotes' figures is the orientation of their bodies, the majority of which are depicted in a three-quarter stand. Finally, nudity is a common characteristic for Erotes and other figures, which surpasses the number of those in the scenes who wear a form of clothing.

The marine fauna may vary in number; however, the species depicted all belong to the Mediterranean environment, as discussed in the previous section. An additional detail is that the fish and molluscs depicted in the scenes are species widely used for human consumption.

Dolphins are another common element, which is also highly present in the corpus. While fish, though stylized, are still comparable to their natural counterparts, dolphins are not. As seen in the analysis, except for Cat. no.10, with its naturalistic depiction of nature, all the other dolphins are more fantasy creatures, with improbable colours and details that do not belong to the actual mammal.

Boats and ships may not be considered common elements that emerged from the analysis, as the presence of at least a boat was one of the criteria for selecting the material, as stated in the section "1.5 Material and limitations". However, among the vessels in the catalogue, the rowing boats are the majority. Finally, the depiction of the waves is remarkably similar throughout the corpus, with an unrealistic rendering of primarily short and wiggly lines.

For what pertains to the spatial context, there is an evident connection between mosaics with a marine motif and their placement in proximity to water features. Even within the current corpus, the number of mosaics that are, or were, placed near water features outweighs those that are not by nine out of fifteen.

The list of similarities presented so far could play in favour of the "stock image" suggestion; however, while it is true that the motif can be regarded as being the same, the comparison brings out the variations.

The motif can be found as a stand-alone or as part of a larger composition; it can have a neutral, flat background, a slightly naturalistic landscape, or something in between, like Cat. no.3 where Erotes are placed in an abstract seascape, some standing on rocks and others seated in boats.

The skill of craftsmanship and the practical execution of the mosaics, meaning how the tesserae were cut and laid, also varies in the current catalogue. Similarly, the choice of the source material, natural stone or vitreous paste, affects the chromatic scale in a colour palette and the reflection of light. There are variations in the proportion of the various elements; some vessels are unrealistically small compared to the Erotes onboard. In other scenes, the proportions between Erotes and boats, or Erotes and fish, are more up to scale.

Signs of customization can be found in the style and colour of clothing, as well as the level of accuracy in the depiction of details, whether they are the figures, the fauna, or the boats. Furthermore, the introduction of elements like jewellery, tattoos, warships, and even the purple-dye sea shell would suggest being a specific request of the patron. Cat. no.10, found in Lepcis Magna, includes a landscape with a harbour that matches the archaeological remains of the ancient port of the same city. This detail could indicate the patron's desire to customize the motif according to the surrounding landscape.

5.3 Changes in the motif over time, how and why.

This study of the fishing Eroses motif has allowed to trace its stylistic evolution over the span of three centuries, from its introduction to its peak and eventual decline. This aesthetic evolution was the consequence of political and cultural changes that affected the late Roman Empire. As presented in section "2.1 The development of the North African province", the 2nd century AD is characterized by the revival of Greek classicism brought by the Second Sophistic movement.¹⁷⁰ This movement best reflects the artistic and cultural trends of the Antonine period and will continue to exist into the early Severian era. The renewed interest in Greek culture and literature spread from Rome to the rest of the Empire, where traces can still be seen in architecture, portraiture and mosaic.

Cat. no.12 is one example of the earliest motifs inspired by Hellenistic art. The composition is balanced, with the slender figures of the three Eroses depicted in a triangular formation that hints at a rudimentary form of perspective; the two Eroses in the foreground are slightly larger than the one seated in the boat. The scene is very harmonious even though the colour palette is limited in range, and there is no use of strong chiaroscuro. The wise use of the same shades for both the composition and the surrounding frame, with a simple ribbon, enhances the softness of the scene. A similar approach is evident even in Cat. no.10, where the frame and figurative panel share the same colour palette. In this scene, a nod to the Greek past is the ship inspired by the Hellenistic warships, as mentioned in section "4.3 Boats and ships".

The transition from the 2nd to the 3rd century AD slowly brings a change in mosaic art with the development of a new style of floors begun in the African province. The figurative panels become increasingly more prominent until, in some cases, only one occupies the floor area of

¹⁷⁰ Wilhite 2017, 16.

a room; the composition often follows one orientation; figurative elements can be found arranged into registers or scattered around the floor area.¹⁷¹

Cat. no.5 is the only example of a 3rd-century mosaic still in situ, where these changes described above are presented slightly differently. The panel featuring three fishermen on a boat is inserted off-centre in a floor where a geometric motif makes the rest of the composition of eight alternated rows of octagonal and circular medallions.¹⁷² According to scholars, this could be an example of collaboration between different schools of mosaic artists, the Hispanic one for the geometric part and the North African one for the figurative panel.¹⁷³

Scholars have long debated the influence of the North African workshops, especially in cases like Cat. no.4, the mosaics of Piazza Armerina in Sicily.¹⁷⁴ Today, it still needs to be determined whether specialized craftsmanship migrated from North Africa towards other parts of the Empire or if local artists somehow took inspiration from them. This question will probably never be solved unless new archaeological evidence or written sources are uncovered. The only evidence of a contract for a work assignment is a papyrus from Hellenistic Egypt, dated 3rd century BC.¹⁷⁵ Though, one thing, does not exclude another, and it is possible for ideas to travel and reach people from almost any corner. This is, of course, speculation, but the Roman practice of *xenia*, where people of affluent social status travelled around to visit each other, could have helped spread input elsewhere, even for new trends in decoration.

Finally, this part of the discussion is dedicated to three scenes of the present catalogue, all from Italy and all ascribed to the 4th century AD. The scenes in question are Cat. nos 1 and 2, mentioned in section “5.1. The identity of the figures”, and Cat. no.4, for its particular style.

Cat. no.4 is the location that has a closer geographical connection to Carthage’s workshops, which undeniably has affected the decorative program of the Villa del Casale at Piazza Armerina. The atrium with fishing Erotes has already been discussed in the analysis chapter; however, it is worth reiterating their particular physical appearance, with slightly bigger eyes, jewellery, and, on some of them, even tattoos. The boats are richly decorated, and the sea is particularly full of fauna, carefully depicted. The comparison of this scene with that in Cat. no. 2 highlights the differences between the two mosaics, which are evident. The winged figures in Cat. no.2 share similar elements of iconography: the nudity, the wings, the sea full of fish and even the type of boats, though the stylistic execution and range of colours are different.

¹⁷¹ Dunbabin 1999, 112.

¹⁷² Rascón et al. 1995, 45.

¹⁷³ Ibid 1995, 61.

¹⁷⁴ Wilson 1982.

¹⁷⁵ Dunbabin 1999, 278.

Moreover, the figures in Cat. no.2, have taken on a new identity; they are angels. The reason for this is that the Basilica of Aquileia was, from the beginning, a space meant for the Christian cult; it was built by Bishop Theodore Felix around 314 AD. The decorative program of the floors of the early Basilica was all centred around Christian motifs, and the mosaic with the story of Jonah and fishing angels was one of them.¹⁷⁶

While Cat. no.2 clearly connects with the early Christian cult, for Cat. no.1, the interpretation is more uncertain. This scene is undoubtedly the most divergent from the rest of the corpus. As already described in the catalogue chapter, it is uncertain if the building where this mosaic was found was a cult space. Given the scene dynamic, where the sense of danger overpasses the ideal of abundant fishing, should not be ruled out the possibility of being a depiction with an early Christian significance.

Pagan motifs continued to exist alongside the early Christian ones before these eventually took over. A paper by Duran Kremer from 2023 synthesized how this process may have occurred. The reuse of certain elements typical of pagan tradition into the decorative program of early Christian iconography facilitated the process of customization of the viewers to the new religion. By looking at familiar images that conveyed messages understood by the viewers as part of their cultural memory, those same images could be interpreted differently in light of the new customs, cultural traditions and even new religion.¹⁷⁷

Kremer exemplifies the motif of the *kantharos*, the vase traditionally connected to convivial situations like banqueting and Dionysus, depicted on countless wall paintings and mosaics. In the Early Christian context, the same vase assumed the symbol of the carrier of the water that purifies the soul.¹⁷⁸ With this in mind, it is plausible that the motif of the fishing Erotes may have started to become a symbol connected to Christianity towards the end of the period of its maximum spread. In this regard, the Angeli of Aquileia could be the first ones depicted in a Christian church.

¹⁷⁶ Forlati Tamaro et al. 1980, 185, 218.

¹⁷⁷ Duran Kremer 2022, 132-133.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. 2023, 134-135.

6. Conclusion and further research

This thesis aimed to comprehensively study the fishing Eroses motif in Roman mosaics. This particular type of scene has not undergone an extensive investigation before. A selection of mosaics from across the Mediterranean area has been analyzed using the semiotics model as a theoretical framework. The study addressed three research questions for which the results are the following:

The identity of the figures

Although all appear male, the figures depicted in the scenes are not homogeneous but can have different identities. Within the corpus, three groups have emerged. The first and more prominent group can be identified as fishing Eroses, winged figures of young boys or adolescent males. The identification as “fishing Eroses” could relate to a 2nd-century AD poem about fishing techniques, referencing Eros fishing. In the second group are non-winged figures, identified as humans, specifically fishermen, in the same age range as the Eroses or slightly older. The third and last group includes several winged figures that share the iconography of the Eroses but for which the identity has become that of the angels. For the scenes where two or more of these groups appear together, clarifying the figures' identities without using the term Eroses indiscriminately would be beneficial.

Distinctive elements and variation in depiction and spatial context

Many distinctive elements are present throughout the catalogue; for the Eroses figures, these traits are the physical appearance and wings. Within the scene, other recurrent elements are the type of marine fauna, the dolphins and the rowing boats. The proximity to water features is another detail many scenes share. Although the motif may contain the same elements, there is a notable variation in the practical execution, choice of materials, and the proportion of the various elements, with some being to scale and others not. Customization is another detail that has emerged, contributing to the scenes' variation.

Changing of the motif over time, how and why

The motif has undergone a stylistic development following the socio-cultural transformations of Roman society that occurred from the 2nd to the 4th century AD. Although not distorted in its iconography, the scenes with fishing Erotes have slowly gone from being a pagan motif to a Christian one.

Further research

This study has included only a small selection of mosaics with fishing Erotes scenes. Further research is needed to gain and process additional data for a more comprehensive picture of the motif iconography. The research could be extended to other locations in Roman Africa and include parts of the Empire that were not in the present study.

7. Bibliography

Ancient sources

'The Book of Jonah'. Translated by Povis Smith, J.M., 1931. In: Povis Smith, J.M. (ed.) *The Bible. An American translation*. Chicago. Downloaded from Archive.org:

<https://archive.org/details/bibleamericantra0000unse/page/1556/mode/2up>

Aelian *On animals*, Vol.III, Book 12. Translated by Scholfield, A.F., 1959. Harvard. Downloaded from Loeb:
https://www-loebclassics-com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/view/aelian-characteristics_animals/1958/pb_LCL449.65.xml

Aulus Gellius *Attic Nights*, Vol. 2, Book 10. Translated by Rolfe, J.C., 1927, Harvard. Downloaded from Loeb:
https://www-loebclassics-com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/view/gellius-attic_nights/1927/pb_LCL200.287.xml

Hesiod, *Theogony*. In: *Theogony. Work and Days. Testimonia*. Translated by Most, G.W., 2018. Downloaded from Loeb:
https://www-loebclassics-com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/view/hesiod-theogony/2018/pb_LCL057.11.xml

Homer *Homeric Hymns*, VII, To Dionysus. Translated by West, M., 2003, Harvard. Downloaded from Loeb:
https://www-loebclassics-com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/view/homeric_hymns_7_dionysus/2003/pb_LCL496.185.xml?result=13&rskey=11F8Lk

Oppian *Halieutica*, Book 3. Translated by Mair, A.W., 1928, Harvard. Downloaded from Loeb:
https://www-loebclassics-com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/view/oppian-halieutica_fishing/1928/pb_LCL219.207.xml

Oppian *Halieutica*, Book 4. Translated by Mair, A.W., 1928, Harvard. Downloaded from Loeb:
https://www-loebclassics-com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/view/oppian-halieutica_fishing/1928/pb_LCL219.403.xml

Pausania *Description of Greece*. Book 9.27. Translated by Jones, W.H.S., 1935. Downloaded from Loeb
https://www-loebclassics-com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/view/pausanias-description_greece/1918/pb_LCL297.285.xml

Philostratus the Elder, *Imagines* I, 19. Translated by Fairbanks, A., 1931, Harvard. Downloaded from Loeb:
https://www-loebclassics-com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/view/philostratus_elder-imagines_book_i_19_tyrrhenian_pirates/1931/pb_LCL256.75.xml?result=19&rskey=5tvXqh

Pindar *Nemean Odes*, 3. 30, 11.48, 8.5. Translated by Race, W.H., 1997. Harvard. Downloaded from Loeb:
https://www-loebclassics-com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/view/pindar-nemean_odes/1997/pb_LCL485.27.xml
https://www-loebclassics-com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/view/pindar-nemean_odes/1997/pb_LCL485.131.xml
https://www-loebclassics-com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/view/pindar-nemean_odes/1997/pb_LCL485.89.xml

Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, Vol. 3, Book 9. Translated by Rackham, H. 1940, Harvard. Downloaded from Loeb:
https://www-loebclassics-com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/view/pliny_elder-natural_history/1938/pb_LCL353.179.xml

Sappho, 'Fragment 194 - Himerius Orations'. In: *Greek Lyrics*, Volume 1, Sappho. Alcaeus. Translated by Campbell, D.A. (ed.) 1982. Harvard. Downloaded from Loeb:
https://www-loebclassics-com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/view/sappho-fragments/1982/pb_LCL142.183.xml

Modern sources

- Abed, A.B. ed. 2006. *Stories in Stone. Conserving Mosaics of Roman Africa*, Los Angeles.
- Alfaro Giner, C. 2010. 'Fishing Nets in the Ancient World: the Historical and Archaeological Evidence', in *Ancient Nets and Fishing Gear: Proceedings of the International Workshop on "Nets and Fishing Gear in Classical Antiquity: A First Approach"*, Cádiz; November 15-17, 2007, eds. T. Bekker-Nielsen & D. Bernal Casasola, Aarhus, 55-81.
- Balty, J. 1995. *Mosaïques antiques du Proche-Orient: chronologie, iconographie, interprétation*. Besançon (Annales littéraires de l'Université de Besançon, 551), 67. <https://doi.org/10.3406/ista.1995.2582>
- Barrett, C. 2013. 'Nilotic Scenes, Egyptian Religion, And Roman Perceptions'. *JAE*, Vol.5:4, 3-5.
- Beckmann, M. 2021. 'Stigmata and the Cupids of Piazza Armerina', *AJA* 125 (3), 461-469. DOI:[10.3764/aja.125.3.0461](https://doi.org/10.3764/aja.125.3.0461)
- Ben Hassen Hassine, H. 2001. 'Le parc archéologique d'Oudhna, antique Uthina (Tunisie)'. *Bulletin de la Société Nationale des Antiquaires de France*, 225–238. <https://doi.org/10.3406/bsnaf.2006.10547>
- Bini, C. 2022 (unpublished). *Jakt-mosaiken i Villa del Tellaro. En ikonografisk analys*. BA thesis, Lund University. <https://lup.lub.lu.se/student-papers/search/publication/9075311>
- Blanc, N. & F. Gury 1986. 'Eros'. *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*. Vol. III (1), Zürich; München & Düsseldorf.
- Bracker, J. ed. 2020. 'Introduction: Archaeology and Image Studies', in *Homo Pictor Image Studies and Archaeology in Dialogue*. Heidelberg, 1-5.
- Brunet, C. 2021. *L'image d'Éros en Égypte de l'époque ptolémaïque à l'antiquité tardive (323 av. J-C. – VIIe s. apr. J.-C.) : iconographie et acculturation*. Ph.D. thesis, Art et histoire de l'art. Université de Nanterre.
- Cantamessa G. & I. Cremona 2012. *Guida Introduttiva – versione digitale*. Regione Siciliana. Assessorato dei Beni Culturali e della Identità Siciliana.
- Caporusso, D., M.T. Donati, S. Masseroli & T. Tibiletti 2014. *Immagini di Mediolanum. Archeologia e storia di Milano dal V secolo a.C. al V secolo d.C.*, Milano, 191-198.
- Croom, A. 2010. *Roman Clothing and Fashion*, Stroud.
- D'Alleva, A. & M. Cothren 2021. *Methods and Theories of Art History*. 3rd ed., London.
- David, M. 1996. 'I Pavimenti Decorati Di Milano Antica I secolo a.C.- VI secolo d.C.'. Rassegna Di Studi Del Civico Museo Archeologico e Civico Gabinetto Numismatico Di Milano, in *RASMI, Suppl. XVI, 1996, vol. I*, Milano.
- Duran Kremer, M.d.J. 2023. 'Looking Beyond the Obvious: Rereading the Message of the Mosaics', *Journal of Mosaic Research* (16), 131-144. <https://doi.org/10.26658/jmr.1376760>
- Dunbabin, K.M.D. 1978. *The mosaics of Roman North Africa: studies in iconography and patronage*, (Oxford monographs on classical archaeology), Oxford.
- Dunbabin, K.M.D. 1999. *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World*, Cambridge.
- Eckersley T.E. 1995. (unpublished). *Iconography of the vintage in the mosaics of Roman Spain and North Africa*. MA Thesis, McMaster University.
- Friedman, Z. 2011. *Ship iconography in Mosaics. An aid to understanding ancient ships and their construction*. (BAR International Series 2202), Oxford. <https://doi.org/10.30861/9781407307589>
- Forlati Tamaro, B., L. Bertacchi, L. Beschi, M.C. Calvi, L. Bosio, G. Rosada, G. Cuscito & G. Gorini 1980. *Da Aquileia a Venezia. Una mediazione tra l'Europa e l'Oriente dal II secolo a.C. al VI secolo d. C.*, Milano.
- Giroire, C. & M. Marque 2020. 'An Outstanding 19th Century restoration: the Mosaic Pavement of Neptune and Amphitrite from Constantine, Algeria (Louvre Museum)', in *What comes to mind when you hear mosaic? Conserving mosaics from ancient to modern. The 13th conference of the International Committee for the Conservation of Mosaics. Barcelone 15-20 octobre 2017*, eds. R. Nardi & M. Pugès i Dorca, Barcelone, 311-322.
- Gold, B. K. 2018. *Perpetua: Athlete of God (Women in Antiquity)*, New York.

- Guimier- Sorbets, A. 2021. *The Mosaics of Alexandria. Pavements of Greek and Roman Egypt*, Cairo.
- Hales, S. 2003. *The Roman House and Social Identity*, Cambridge.
- Hölscher, T. 2015. 'Semiotics to Agency', in *The Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Art and Architecture*, Oxford, 662-686.
- Iacumin, R. 2022. *Le Porte della Salvezza. Gnosticismo alessandrino e GrandeChiesa nei mosaici delle prime comunità Cristiane. Guida ai mosaici della Basilica di Aquileia*, Udine.
- Kenrick, P. 2009. *Libya Archaeological Guides: TRIPOLITANIA*, London.
- Kneebone, E. 2020. *Oppian's Halieutica. Charting a Didactic Epic*, Cambridge. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108892728>
- Kovaleva, I. 2005. 'Eros at the Panathenaea: personification of what?', in *Personification in the Greek World: From Antiquity to Byzantium*, eds. E. Stafford & J. Herrin (Centre For Hellenic Studies King's College London, Publications 7), Aldershot.
- Lattimore, S. 1976. *The Marine Thiasos in Greek Sculpture*, (Monumenta Archaeologica Vol.3, Monograph No.9 of the Archaeological Institute of America), Los Angeles.
- Liepe, L. 2022. 'What is the difference between iconography and semiotics?', in *Iconographisk Post. Nordisk tidskrift för bildtolkning, Nordic review of iconography*, nr. 3/4, 39-55.
- López Monteagudo, G. 2007. 'Nets and Fishing Gear in Roman Mosaics from Spain', in *Ancient Nets and Fishing Gear. Proceedings of the International Workshop on "Nets and Fishing Gear in Classical Antiquity: A First Approach"*, Cádiz; November 15-17, 2007, eds. T. Bekker-Nielsen & D. Bernal Casasola, Aarhus, 161-203.
- Massara, D. 2012. 'Villa di Desenzano, aula biabsidata 3, tessellato con amorini pescatori', in *TESS – scheda 12347*. <https://tess.beniculturali.unipd.it/web/scheda/?recid=12347>
- Massara, D. & M. Ruffa 2015. 'La domus tardoantica di Via Olmetto/Vicolo S.Fermo a Milano: una revisione dei dati d'archivio e nuove considerazioni sul tessellato con amorini pescatori', in *Atti del XXI Colloquio dell'Associazione Italiana per lo Studio e la Conservazione del Mosaico, Reggio Emilia, 18-21 Marzo 2015*, eds. C. Angelelli, D. Massara & F. Sposito, Tivoli, pp. 105-116.
- Mirabella Roberti, M. 1984. *Milano Romana*, Milano.
- Mitchell, E. 2018. *The Other Classical Body: Cupids as Mediators in Roman Visual Culture*. Ph. D. thesis, Harvard University, <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:41121259>
- Neuenfeldt, L. 2009 (unpublished). *Eros and Erotes in the Late Antique Mosaics of Antioch*. MA thesis, Florida State University.
- Nicholson, R., J. Robinson, M. Robinson & E. Rowan 2018. 'From the Waters to the Plate to the Latrine: Fish and Seafood from the Cardo V Sewer, Herculaneum', in *Journal of Maritime Archaeology (2018) 13*, 263-284. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11457-018-9218-y>
- Nilsson, M. 2010. *The Crown of Arsinoë II. The Creation and Development of an Imagery of Authority*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Gothenburg.
- Olson, K. 2018. 'Status', in *A Cultural History of Dress and Fashion in Antiquity*, ed. M. Harlow, London, New York, 112.
- Pensabene, P. 2009. 'I mosaici della villa romana del Casale: distribuzione, programmi iconografici, maestranze', in *Mosaici Mediterranei*, ed. M.C. Lentini, Caltanissetta, 87-116.
- Ramage, N.H. & A. Ramage 1995. *Roman Art*, 2nd ed., London.
- Rascón Marqués, S., J. Polo López, J. Gómez Pallarés & A. Méndez Madariaga 1995 'Hippolytus: estudio de un nuevo mosaico del género de pesca y con inscripción procedente de Complutum Alcalá de Henares, Madrid', in *LUCENTUM. XIV-XVI, 1995-97. Anales de la Universidad de Alicante. Prehistoria, arqueología e historia antigua*, 39-62.
- Romizzi, L. 2003 'Il mito di Dioniso e I Pirati Tirreni in epoca romana', in *Latomus, AVRIL-JUIN 2003, T.62, Fasc. 2*, 352-361.
- Rosamilia, E. 2019 'Quando una città non parla del suo porto: Leptis Magna', in *Il Mediterraneo e la Storia, III, Documentando città portuali - documenting port cities, Atti del convegno internazionale, Capri 9-11 maggio 2019*, (Acta Instituti Romani Finlandiae, 48, Institutum Romanum Finlandiae), eds. L. Chioffi, M. Kajava & S. Örmä, Roma, 268.

Rosenmeyer, T. G. 1951. 'Eros: Erotes'. *Phoenix*, 5 (1), 11–22.

Salomonson, J.W. 1965. *La mosaïque aux chevaux de l'antiquarium de Carthage* (Archeologische studiën van het Nederlands historisch instituut te Rome, 1), La Haye.

Scagliarini Corlaita, D., M. Albini, C. Bertolotti & F. Rossi 1992. *Villa Romana Desenzano*, Roma.

Strong, D. E. & J.M.C. Toynbee 1976. *Roman art*. (The Pelican History of Art), Harmondsworth.

Topalilov, I. 2022. 'The mosaic pavements in Philippopolis and Augusta Traiana from Constantine I till Theodosius I. A short review', *Cercetări Arheologice*. 29, 259-286. DOI:[10.46535/ca.29.1.13](https://doi.org/10.46535/ca.29.1.13)

Topalilov, I. 2023. 'The Marine Mosaics in Late Antique Thrace. Geç Antik Dönem Trakya'sında Deniz Mozaikleri', *Journal of Mosaic Research* 16, 2023, 361-375. <https://doi.org/10.26658/jmr.1376863>

Tortora, P. 2015. *Survey of Historic Costume*. Crete and Greece. 6th ed., London, 64-73.

Toynbee, J.M.C. 1965. 'The art of the Romans', in *Ancient peoples and places*, ed. Glyn, D., London.

Trimble, J. 2016. 'The Zoninus Collar and the Archaeology of Roman Slavery'. *AJA* 120(3), 447-472. <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.3764/aja.120.3.0447>

Tsikliras, A.C., E. Antonopoulou & K.I. Stergiou 2010. 'Spawning period of Mediterranean marine fishes', in *Reviews in Fish Biology and Fisheries*. December (2010) 20, 499–538 <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1007/s11160-010-9158-6>

Wilhite, D.E. 2017. *Ancient African Christianity. An Introduction to a Unique Context and Tradition*, Oxon.

Wilson, R.J.A. 1982. 'Roman Mosaics in Sicily. The African Connection.' *AJA* 86 (3), 413-428. <https://doi.org/10.2307/504430>

Yacoub, M. 1995. *Splendeurs des Mosaïques de Tunisie*, Tunis.

Online resources

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Cilicia> (downloaded 18/05/2024).

<https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010303132> (downloaded 03/02/2024).

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Peter_Paul_Rubens_-_The_Feast_of_Venus_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg (downloaded 10/05/2024).

<https://corvinus.nl/2022/06/12/the-roman-villa-of-desenzano-del-garda/> (downloaded 20/1/2024).

<https://www.doaks.org/resources/online-exhibits/ancient-art-at-dumbarton-oaks/the-classical-world-at-dumbarton-oaks/mosaic-with-erotes-fishing> (downloaded 03/02/2024).

<https://www-oxfordreference-com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/display/10.1093/acref/9780198606413.001.0001/acref-9780198606413-e-6407> (downloaded 10/05/2024).

<https://tess.beniculturali.unipd.it/web/scheda/?recid=12347> (downloaded 20/1/2024).

<https://www.villaromanadelcasale.it/> (downloaded 20/1/2024).

8. List of illustrations

Cover photo: Composite photo by Claudia Bini. Details from Aquileia, Cirta, and Antioch.

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aquileia_-_Basilica_-_Scene_pesca_ed_epigrafe_vescovo_Teodoro_\(esposizione_33\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aquileia_-_Basilica_-_Scene_pesca_ed_epigrafe_vescovo_Teodoro_(esposizione_33).jpg) License CC 3.0

<https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010303132> (downloaded 03/02/2024) © Musée du Louvre, Hervé Lewandowski.

<https://museum.doaks.org/objects-1/info/27198> (downloaded 03/02/2024) Photo Credit: © Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection. /Neil Greentree.

Links to photos in the catalogue

Cat. no.1 Milano Via Olmetto

https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Milano-via-Olmetto-vicolo-S-Fermo-ortofoto-D-Massara_fig16_307825168

License CC 4.0 (downloaded 20/1/2024).

Cat. no.2 Basilica of Aquileia

Drawing of the whole mosaic panel with “The Book of Jonah”. From: Forlati Tamaro et al. 1980

Overview of the whole mosaic panel with “The Book of Jonah”. Photo by Chescargot Public Domain.

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:StoryOfJonas2.jpg> (downloaded 20/1/2024).

Cat. no.3 Villa di Desenzano del Garda

<https://corvinus.nl/2022/06/12/the-roman-villa-of-desenzano-del-garda/> (downloaded 20/1/2024).

Photo with permission of the author, Laurens Dragstra.

Cat. no.4 Villa del Casale, Piazza Armerina

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Semicircular_atrium_-_Valle_Romana_del_Casale_-_Italy_2015_\(7\).JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Semicircular_atrium_-_Valle_Romana_del_Casale_-_Italy_2015_(7).JPG)

Photo by José Luiz Bernardes Ribeiro / License CCBY-SA 4.0 (downloaded 20/1/2024).

<https://sketchfab.com/3d-models/mosaic-room-40-villa-romana-del-casale-sicily-f9f1fcf22e45427ab908bb545beecaf87>

Global Digital Heritage. License CC 4.0 (downloaded 20/1/2024).

Cat. no.5 Casa de Hippolytus, Complutum

https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casa_de_Hippolytus#/media/Archivo:Casa_de_Hippolytus_04.JPG

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Casa_de_Hippolytus_04.JPG (downloaded 25/01).

Photo by PePeEfe, License CC 4.0

Cat. no.6 Mosaic of Neptune and Amphitrite, Cirta

<https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010303132> (downloaded 03/02/2024) © Musée du Louvre, Hervé

Lewandowski.

Cat. no.7 Thermal baths, Oudhna

<https://photography.mabrouk-haoues.com/album-Uthina-Tunisia.php#&gid=1&pid=6> (visited 30/3)

Photo with permission of the author Mabrouk Haoues. (downloaded 03/02/2024).

Cat. no.8 Mosaic at the House of the Fountain, Utica Photo: from Ben Abed, A. 2006, “Stories in Stone”, 34.

Cat. no.9 Dionysus against the Tyrrhenian Pirates, Dougga

<https://vici.org/vici/7850/> Photo by Jan van Vliet, License CC BY 4.0 (downloaded 03/02/2024)

Cat. no.10 Villa of the Nile, Lepcis Magna

https://www.livius.org/pictures/libya/villa_nile/villa-of-the-nile-mosaic-first-mosaic-1/

https://www.livius.org/pictures/libya/villa_nile/villa-of-the-nile-mosaic-first-mosaic-2/

With permission of the author Jona Lendering (c) Livius.org (downloaded 03/02/2024)

Cat. no.11 Port Landscape, Rastan

From Balty, 1995. “Mosaïques antiques du Proche-Orient: chronologie, iconographie, interpretation”, 334.

Cat. no.12 House of Menander, Antioch

<https://museum.doaks.org/objects-1/info/27198> (downloaded 03/02/2024)

Photo Credit: © Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection. /Neil Greentree.

Cat. no.13 Marine Mosaic, Philippopolis

https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-emblema-of-the-marine-mosaic-Pillinger-et-al-2016-Taf-162-Abb-418_fig6_361942473 (downloaded 03/02/2024).

Cat. no.14 Fragment of Gallo-Roman mosaic

<https://www.musee-moyenage.fr/collection/oeuvre/mosaïque-eros-dauphin.html> (downloaded 20/03/2024).

Cat. no.15 Fragment of mosaic from Egypt

From Guimier–Sorbets, 2021 “The Mosaics of Alexandria. Pavements of Greek and Roman Egypt”, 119.

Links to photos in text

Fig.1 Figurine with *pilos*. Photo by ©Marie-Lan Nguyen. Wikimedia Commons License CC2.5.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Peasant_basket_Louvre_Myr330.jpg (downloaded 10/04/2024).

Fig. 2 Detail of Villa del Tello. Courtesy of Roger Wilson 2016.

Fig. 3 Left Roman Bulla. Photo by Daderot Wikimedia Commons License 1.0

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Necklace_with_lenticular_bulla,_Ostia,_Augustan_age,_gold,_inv._13_379_-_Museo_Gregoriano_Etrusco_-_Vatican_Museums_-_DSC01141.jpg (downloaded 10/04/2024).

Fig.3 Right Zoninus collar. Photo by Lalupa. Wikimedia Commons License 4.0

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MNR_Terne_di_Diocleziano_-_collare_di_schiavo_dal_museo_Kircheriano_P1200667.jpg (downloaded 10/04/2024).

Fig.4 Venus with necklace. Photo by Bibi Saint-Pol. Wikimedia Commons License CC 2.5

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Amphitrite_Bulla_Regia.jpg (downloaded 10/04/2024).

Fig.5 Boy hunting ducks. Mosaïque de chevaux, Carthage. Photo by Bertrand Bouret. License CC BY-SA 3.0

https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mosa%C3%AFque_des_chevaux_de_Carthage#/media/Fichier:Carthage_venator.jpg (downloaded 10/04/2024).

Fig.6 Marine mosaic, Lucera. Detail of Eros sailing on amphora. Photo by Giuseppina Lucignani.

https://www.google.com.my/travel/entity/key/ChkIt9yj3-i4uZ9pGg0vZy8xMWZfcHhrYm01EAQ/photos?ei=B-wlZYOyJpixrcUPya2NmAI&sa=X&utm_campaign=sharing&utm_medium=link&utm_source=htls&ts=CAEaBAoCGgAqBAoAGgA (downloaded 18/05/2024).

<https://tess.beniculturali.unipd.it/web/scheda/?recid=18820> (downloaded 10/04/2024).

Fig.7 Althiburus mosaic. Photo from Wikimedia Commons Public Domain.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Catalogue_of_Althiburos_ships#/media/File:Catalogue_des_bateaux_d'Althiburos_Paul_Gauckler.png (downloaded 10/04/2024).

Fig.8 Nile mosaic Palestrina. Photo by Camelia.boban. Wikimedia Commons License 3.0

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nile_mosaic_in_Palestrina_detail_1.jpg (downloaded 10/04/2024)

Fig.9 Marine mosaic House of the Faun Pompeii. Photo by Sailko. Wikimedia Commons License CC3.0

https://it.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Marina_con_pesci_da_casa_del_fauno_a_pompei_9997_01.JPG (downloaded 20/04/2024).

Fig.10 Lepcis Magna. Port, East Pier. Photo by Jona Lendering, Marco Prins. License CC 4.0

<https://vici.org/image.php?id=32470> (downloaded 20/04/2024).

Fig. 11 Map of the Mediterranean with locations where spawning occurs. From Tsikliras et al. 2010, 501. With permission from the author.

Fig. 12 Map of the Mediterranean with the locations from the corpus. Map by Konstey. Wikimedia Commons License 3.0. Edited by Claudia Bini. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mediterranean-map.svg> (downloaded 03/05/2024).

9. Appendix A List of mosaics mentioned in the catalogue

	Italy			
Location	Cat. no.1 Milano, Domus Via Olmetto	Cat. no.2 Basilica of Aquileia	Cat. no.3 Villa di Desenzano del Garda	Cat. no.4 Atrium - Villa del Casale Piazza Armerina
Chronology	4th Century AD	4th Century AD	4th Century AD	4th Century AD
Total number of Erotes	4	11 visible +1 suggested	6 (5 visible; 1 outline)	14
Erotes on boat	1	9 (4 are steering)	4 (2 of them steering)	12 (2 of them steering)
Erotes in water or standing on rocks	1 on land	3 standing on rocks	2 standing on a rock	2 in water luring fish
Erotes on dolphin				
Fishing with trident				2
Fishing with rod		4 visible	4	1
Fishing with net/trap	1	2		9
Flying	2			
Other activities		1 catching duck (only lasso is visible)		
Clothing/accessories	naked	9 naked, 2 clothed, 1 n/a	naked	9 naked; 5 clothed; all with jewelry
Winged	yes	8 winged, 3 no wings, 1 n/a	yes	yes
Wave style	two-tone colours, broken lines	two-tone colours, broken lines	two-tone colours, broken lines and zig-zag	two-tone colours, broken lines and zig-zag
Number of boats and type	2 (1 visible, 1 partially visible), with oars	5 (2 of them partially visible), with oars	2, with oars	6, with oars, fishing type
Part of a scene or self-standing motif	self-standing motif	part of a scene from the Book of Jonah	self-standing motif	self-standing motif
Presence of harbour or other features	no	no	no	yes
Marine fauna				
Dolphin		5 visible		8
Garfish		1 visible		
Lobster				1
Moray/eel	1			2
Octopus	2	7 visible	2	
Ray/flatfish		4 visible		5
Sea urchin				
Squid/cuttlefish		6 (5 visible, 1 partially visible)		5
Tuna				
Other fish	8 visible	ca 67 visible, 7 clams, 3 snails	8	64 (grouper, pike, mullets, plus undetermined) 1 clam

Appendix A - List of mosaics mentioned in the catalogue

	Spain	Algeria	Tunisia			Libya
Location	Cat. no.5 Casa de Hippolytus Complutum	Cat.no.6 Neptune and Amphitrite Cirta	Cat. no.7 Thermal baths Oudhna	Cat. no.8 House of the Waterfall Utica	Cat. no.9 Private house Dougga	Cat. no.10 Villa of the Nile mosaic Leptis Magna
Chronology	3rd to 4th Century AD	4th Century AD	2nd Century AD	2nd Century AD	3th Century AD	2nd to 3d Century AD
Total number of Erotes	3	8	8	1	2	10 visible 1 partially visible
Erotes on boat	3	4	6 (1 steering)	1	2 (1 steering)	2 on the boat
Erotes in water or standing on rocks						3 on rocks,1 undetermined
Erotes on dolphins		2, luring fish	2, fishing			2, 1 fishing, 1 riding
Fishing with trident		1	2			
Fishing with rod		1	3	1		3
Fishing with net/trap	3 with net		2		1	
Flying		2, holding a sail				1, holding basket
Other activities		On boat looking at the others				1 sailing on amphora, 1 holding basket
Clothing/accessories	naked	naked but wearing jewelry	naked	naked	naked	naked
Winged	no	2 winged, 6 non-winged	yes	yes	yes	yes
Wave style	two-tone colours, broken lines, zig-zag	two-tone colours, broken lines	two-tone colours, broken lines, zig-zag	two-tone colours, mostly in zig-zag	two-tone colours, long lines, zig-zag	two-tones unbroken lines
Number of boats and type	1 with 4 oars	2, with mast and sail	2	1	1	1, with mast and sail
Part of a scene or self-standing motif	self-standing motif	scene with Neptune and Amphitrite	self-standing motif	self-standing motif	scene with Dionysus and Pirates	self-standing motif
Presence of harbour or other features	no	no	no	no	no	yes
Marine fauna						
Dolphin	1	6	2		2 visible	2
Garfish	1					
Lobster	1					
Moray/eel	3		2	1 possible eel	1	
Octopus	1	1		1	1	
Ray/flatfish	1				1	
Sea urchin	1			2	1	
Squid/cuttlefish	1	1		1	1	
Tuna	6					
Other fish	1 shrimp, 6 red mullet	5 red mullets, 5 grey mullets, 1 sea snail	23 visible fish	11	2 visible, rest undetermined	undetermined number of fish in baskets

Appendix A - List of mosaics mentioned in the catalogue

	Syria	Turkey	Bulgaria	France	Egypt
Location	Cat. no.11 Rastan	Cat.no.12 House of Menander Antioch	Cat. no.13 Private house Philippopolis	Cat.no.14 Lutèce Fragment	Cat. no.15 Thmuis Fragment
Chronology	2nd Century AD	2nd to 3rd Century AD	4th Century AD	possibly 2nd century AD	possibly 3rd century AD
Total number of Erotes	4	3	2 (1 visible, 1 partially)	1 (fragment)	2 (fragment)
Erotes on boat	4 (1 steering)	1 (steering)	1		
Erotes in water or standing on rocks		2 standing on rocks			
Erotes on dolphins			1	1	1
Fishing with trident					
Fishing with rod		1			
Fishing with net/trap	1 with net	1			
Flying					
Other activities				holding a tablet	
Clothing/accessories	naked	2 naked, 1 clothed	1 naked, 1 possibly naked	naked	possibly naked
Winged	yes	yes	1 with wing, 1 no wings	yes	yes
Wave style	no waves	1 light grey wavy shadow under the boat	no waves		
Number of boats and type	1, with oars	1, with oars	1, with oars		
Part of a scene or self-standing motif	self-standing motif	self-standing motif	self-standing motif		
Presence of harbour or other features	yes	no	no		
Marine fauna					
Dolphin		1	1 dolphin		
Garfish					
Lobster					
Moray			1		
Octopus					
Ray/flatfish					
Sea urchin			1		
Squid/cuttlefish		1			
Tuna					
Other fish		8, 1 shrimp, 1 shall, 1 sea snail	6 (pipefish, swordfish, clams, snails)		