The assembled palace of Samosata: object vibrancy in 1st C. BCE Commagene

Kruijer, L.W.

Chapter 9. Case study 2: The glocal genealogy of the crenellation motif

9.1. Introduction

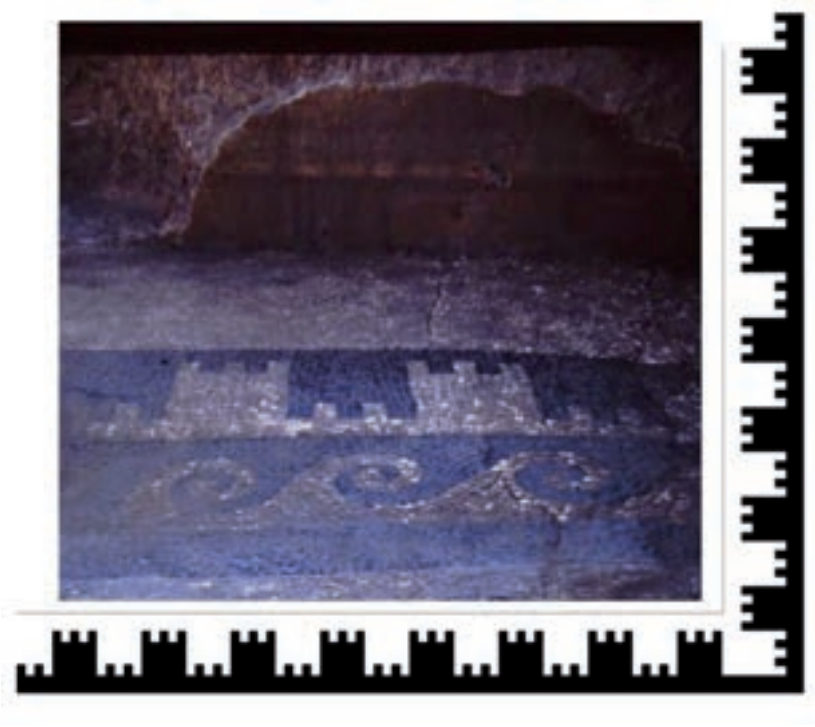


Fig. 9.1 The crenellation motif in tessellated mosaic floor F8 in room XV. Sources: centre: Wagner Archive. Reproduced with permission of Forschungsstelle Asia Minor, Münster), and a schematic reconstruction (bottom and right, by L. Kruijer and J.F. Porck).

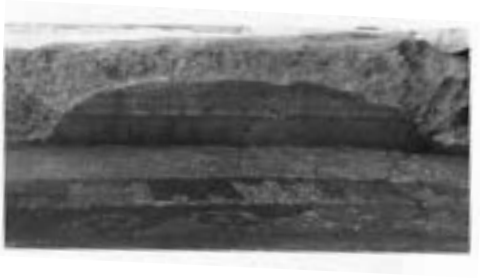
This chapter investigates the glocal genealogy of the so-called crenellation motif, a geometric decorative element that occurs in multiple tessellated mosaics with concentric border decoration throughout the palace of Samosata. The crenellation motif consists of 'turrets' with three merlons on top and two crenels between them, alternated in a dark and a lighter version (fig. 9.1).

As the previous case study, this chapter investigates the role of this genealogy in terms of its relational capacities in Samosata. To understand what travelled with the crenellation motif, this chapter starts out with an analysis of its glocal genealogy (section 9.2), drawing on a large catalogue of Eurasian contexts containing the motif (appendices E and F).[1128] In section 9.3, this glocal genealogy is subsequently contextualized in Samosata, where its more-than-representational capacities are differentiated between relations on the local (9.3.1), the global

[1128] This catalogue derives almost completely from Zschätzsch 2009.

(9.3.2) and the regional scale (9.3.3). The final section of this chapter (9.4) is an exploration of the conceptual networks and potential meanings of the crenellation motif in Samosata. In the remainder of this introduction, a concise description of the crenellations in Samosata is provided as well as a short historiographic overview of the decorative motif, introducing some of the analytical challenges that recur in the chapter's analysis.

9.1.1 Description of the crenellations in Samosata

a.  b. 

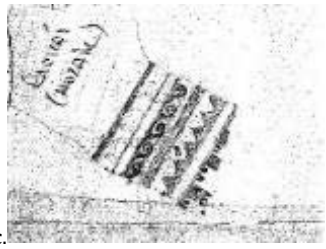
c. 

Fig. 9.2a-c. Three mosaics containing the crenellation motif in Samosata: room VIII (a), room XV (b) and sector s/11 (c; no pictures are available). Sources: Özgüç Archive.

Fig. 9.3 Schematic drawing of the corner with 'overlapping' crenellated borders in room VIII. Source: Bingöl 2013, 71 res. 105.

Decorative borders consisting of the crenellation motif are present in the mosaics of rooms VIII, XV of the palatial complex and sector s/11 of the *höyük* (fig. 9.2a-c). In all cases, these crenellated borders only appear in the outer band of its concentric decorative design. The size of the individual 'turrets' is ca. 20,0 cm. x 28,0 cm., while the width of the complete frieze is 36,0 cm. On average, each 'turret' contains approximately 225 tesserae with tesserae that are approximately 2,4 cm^2 in size. They are executed solely in white and dark grey tesserae. Room VIII has 12 white

turrets and 13 dark turrets on the long side, and 11 white turrets and 12 dark turrets on the shorter side. For the mosaic fragment in sector s /11, this cannot be reconstructed because of the small fragment of preserved mosaic. In room XV, all sides have 17 white 'turrets' and 18 dark turrets. The use of crenellation in rooms VIII and XV is exactly the same; the outer border is decorated with the motif and the crenellations that are oriented outward (away from the centre) are white, while those oriented inward are dark grey. This is reversed in the mosaic of sector s/11, where the outward oriented crenellations are dark and the inward crenellations are white. In the mosaics of rooms VIII and XV, the corners of the crenellated borders are irregular as one of the borders 'overlaps' another (see fig. 9.3). The mosaics of rooms VIII and XV are located in close proximity to one another in the southern area of the excavated part of the palatial complex. These rooms are only separated by corridor A. The mosaic of sector s/11 is located much further away from these rooms (ca. 60 m. to the east-north-east).

9.1.2 Earlier scholarship on the crenellation motif

The crenellation motif is known under various names: '*Zinnenband*', *'Zinnenmuster'* or *'Zinnenornament'* in German, '*turreted border'* or '*crenellation*' in English, '*tours crénelées*' and '*merlons'* in French and '*mura merlate'* in Italian. The motif has received only modest attention in discussions of Hellenistic mosaics and painting. Already in the early 20th century, Mikhaïl Rostovtzeff shortly commented on its appearance on the ceiling of a tomb on mount Vasjurin (Crimea) and described it as a carpet imitation.[1129] In the 1950s, Klaus Parlasca and Blanche R. Brown both shortly remarked on the crenellation motif in mosaic in relation to its occurrence in painting and furthermore provided a short list of parallels throughout Eurasia.[1130] For the painted versions especially, both followed Rostovtzeff's ideas about a connection to tapestry.[1131] In his chapter on the mosaics of Arsameia on the Nymphaios, Irving Lavin drew attention to the motif as a dating tool for the 'Mosaic Rooms'.[1132] Lavin argued that crenellations only occurred during a very narrow time-frame, namely the 2nd c. BCE, but he relied solely on the limited lists of crenellations compiled by Brown and Parlasca.[1133] Lavin did not consider the concentric mosaics with crenellations to have any relation to tapestry and instead argued that the later 1st c. BCE,

[1129] Rostovtzeff 2004 (French translation and new edition of 1913-1914 publication), 62 and plate XV. See also Rostovtzeff 1955, 297.
[1130] Brown 1957; Parlasca 1959, 129 ff.
[1131] Brown 1957, 71; Parlasca 1959, 129 ff. For the same argument, see also Daszewski 1977, 60; and Ovadiah 1980, 107.
[1132] Lavin 1963, 193-194. See 9.3.1 of this dissertation for a discussion of the use of crenellations in Arsameia on the Nymphaios.
[1133] *Idem*, 193: '*Of the decorative motifs in the borders the "crenellation" is most useful for this purpose, since it is relatively uncommon and seems to occur within a fairly limited period of time*'.

'Roman' mosaics were in fact more carpet-like.[1134] Salzmann followed the narrow 2nd c. BCE chronology for the crenellation motif, but argued strongly against any connection of mosaics with textile, instead arguing for a direct relation to the Greek painting tradition.[1135] Most recent scholarly work however maintains the connection to textile, something most notably developed in the work of Bernard Andreae.[1136]

Recently, the list of contexts containing crenellations was updated by Anemone Zschätzsch in her article on the mosaics of Grumentum (Italy). She compiled a catalogue of 56 entries of mosaics with crenellations, also including those from Samosata.[1137] Zschätzsch's catalogue shows that the motif occurred in many more mosaics than previously thought, many of them dating also to the 1st c. BCE, the 1st c CE and the 2nd c. CE (see section 9.2 and appendix E). Zschätzsch however excluded the painted crenellations from her catalogue and, moreover, did not in any way provide an analysis of her catalogue or a contextualization of it in Grumentum. Also, she does not use the large amount of newly available evidence to explore the relation with textiles, something which she takes for granted.[1138] In a chapter discussing the relations between Samosata and Pergamon from 2014, Eric Moormann is the first to shortly discuss the crenellations from Samosata, however without consulting the catalogue by Zschätzsch.[1139] His observations largely follow the ideas of Andreae, but he suggests that the crenellations in Samosata had in fact lost their connection to tapestry and instead represented actual turrets.

In summary, scholarly attention to the crenellation motif has remained relatively marginal, featuring mostly as a mere footnote to descriptions of specific wall paintings and mosaics or of more general, mostly art-historical overviews. Unlike the scholarly interpretations of the mask mosaic in the previous chapter, this element of the palace has not received any proper attention in scholarship on Samosata, and thus was not reduced explicitly to similar external cultural concepts like Greekness. It is probable that the widespread appearance of this seemingly unremarkable motif as well as its designation as mere geometric decoration made scholars refrain from investigating its capacities and impact so far. The general ignoring of the crenellation motif however does not do justice to the wealth of analytical possibilities it offers, precisely because of

[1134] Lavin 1963, 194 n.19.
[1135] Salzmann 1982, 66. On the relation with textile, see Salzmann 1982, 55-58.
[1136] E.g. Andreae 2003; 2012, 33, 36. See also Steingräber 2006, 288; Martin 2017, 63, 78 n.43; Baggio and Salvadori 2017, 298, 300 n. 39. Note that the debate about the conceptual link between the crenellation motif and textile is closely linked to (and often confused with) the debate on a textile origin for all pebble mosaics already in the 5th c. BCE, something first suggested by Von Lorentz 1937, 165-222 and further developed by Bruneau 1976, 20. For a nuanced view, see Dunbabin 1999, 9-10. In paragraph 9.2.4.2, I will explore to what extent we can still consider certain mosaics (especially those with crenellations) to have evoked textiles even if their actual *origins* might have been more diverse and complex.
[1137] Zschätzsch 2009, 339-360.
[1138] Zschätzsch 2009.
[1139] Moormann 2014, 611. Scholarly work on the mosaics of Samosata has remained limited to Bingöl 2013 and, to a lesser extent, Bingöl 1997. In both publications, the crenellation motif is not discussed.

its very specific but widespread occurrence. What for instance lacks so far is an investigation of the specific relational capacities of crenellations in different localities. In tandem with this deficiency comes the rather superficial understanding of the motif's relation to textile. As we have seen, several authors have pointed to the similarities between textile on the one hand and mosaics and textiles containing crenellation, but an in-depth analysis of this relation has not yet been undertaken. The analysis and explorations provided in sections 9.2, 9.3 and 9.4 attempt to make up for this interpretative lacuna and exploit the enormous analytical potential offered by the glocal genealogy of the crenellation motif.

9.2 The glocal genealogy of the crenellation motif

In this section, I will discuss the glocal genealogy of the crenellation motif, first in mosaics (paragraph 9.2.1) and then in painting (paragraph 9.2.2). It must be emphasized that no examples of crenellation are known in other media other than mosaics, painted (tomb) ceilings and painted sarcophagi, an important fact to which I will come back later in this chapter. Through a focus on larger patterns deriving from quantitative data it is attempted to illustrate the general geographical development and widespread occurrence of the motif.

9.2.1 The glocal genealogy of mosaics with crenellation

As mentioned in the historiographic overview, the catalogue by Anemone Zschätzsch has provided the most up to date overview of mosaics containing crenellation.[1140] Whereas in previous accounts only a handful of examples were known, Zschätzch provided 56 examples. In appendix E, her catalogue is largely taken over completely, however with some alterations and new additions.[1141] Most importantly, the results of recent excavations were added, especially in France and Spain, which allow us to extend the catalogue to 61 entrances.

[1140] Zschätzsch 2009.

[1141] Appendix E is largely based on the catalogue by Zschätzsch, with some adaptions. If needed, I have added more bibliography and possible datings. An important alteration was made for the case of Samosata, where the mosaic from sector s/11 was not included. The room-numbers have also been altered as Zschätzsch refers to rooms 1, 4 and 6, which should be VIII, XV and sector s/11.

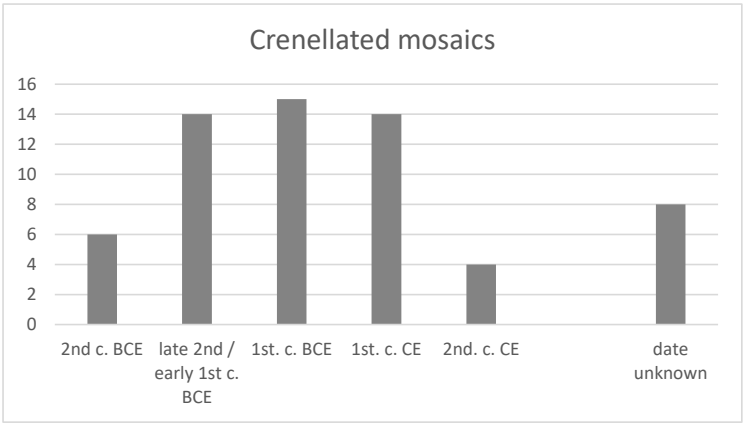


Fig. 9.4 Histogram with the quantitative chronological development of mosaics with crenellation, based on the catalogue in appendix E. By the author.

Fig. 9.4 is a histogram that shows the quantitative chronological development of mosaics containing the crenellation motif. This and the following graphs only provide an idea of the approximate production date of the mosaics and do not take into consideration the longevity of each mosaic, i.e. the period within which it remained visible. Resembling a typical battleship curve, here we see the rise in frequency of the motif, its period of maximum popularity and its quantitative decline. The earliest examples of mosaics containing the crenellation motif appear in the early 2nd c. BCE (6 mosaics), while the latest are dated to the 2nd c. CE (4 mosaics). The peak of frequency starts in the late 2nd c. BCE (14 mosaics), continues into the 1st c. BCE (15 mosaics) and lasts into the 1st c. CE. (14 mosaics), after which it seems to rapidly decline.

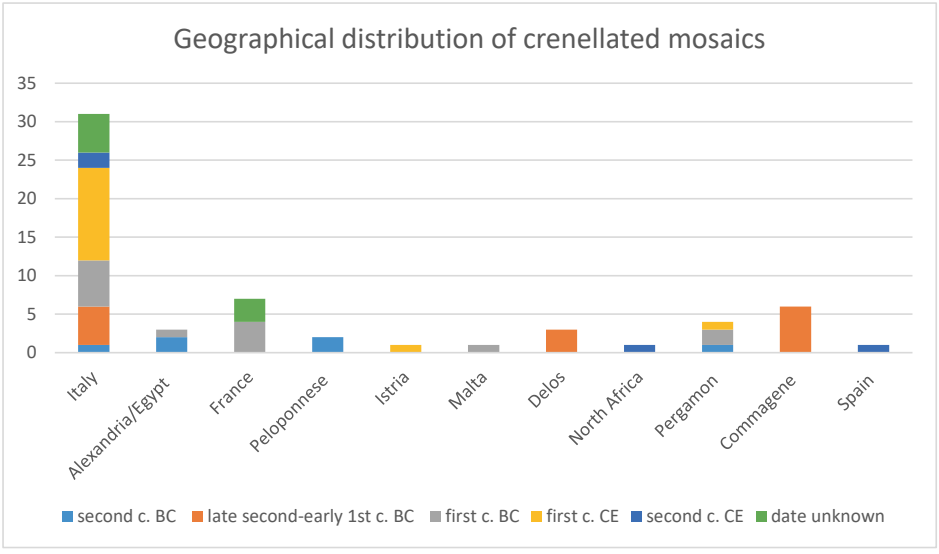


Fig. 9.5 Graph showing the geographical distribution of crenellated mosaics, based on the catalogue in appendix E. By the author.

In fig. 9.5, an overview is provided of the geographical distribution of the crenellation motif in mosaics. The regions where mosaics with crenellation are found are Italy, Alexandria/Egypt, France, the Peloponnese, Istria, Malta, Delos, North Africa, Pergamon, Commagene and Spain. Commagene is by far the most eastern region where the crenellation motif occurs and also the region most detached from the Mediterranean – Samosata is located ca. 300 km away from the coast. By far most mosaics with crenellation are found in Italy (31). France and Commagene follow with 7 and 6 mosaics respectively. All other regions contain between 1 and 4 examples. The graph also shows the chronological distribution per region. Most strikingly, in Italy, Egypt and Pergamon, the motif remains in use over a large period of time, containing examples from the 2nd c. BCE, the 1st c. BCE (safe for Egypt) and the 1st c. CE (and in Italy several examples dating to the 2nd c. CE are known as well). In the other regions, the mosaics with crenellation only date to one specific period, although the low quantity in these regions should make us cautious in deriving too many conclusions from this fact.

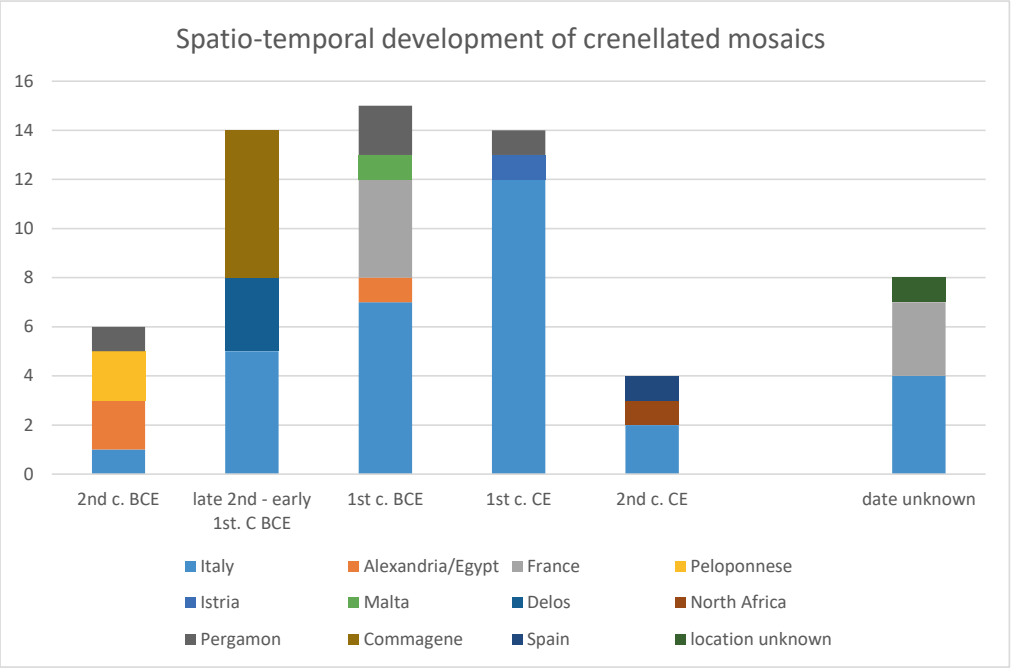


Fig. 9.6 Graph showing the spatio-temporal development of mosaics with crenellation, based on the catalogue in appendix E. By the author.

When we look at the spatial distribution of the mosaics with crenellation per chronological phase (fig. 9.6), we can make some cautious observations. The earliest examples, dating to the 2nd c. BCE, derive from multiple regions: Italy (1), Alexandria (2), the Peloponnese (2) and Pergamon (1). This wide spatial distribution suggests that we cannot pinpoint a clear geographical origin of the crenellation motif in mosaics; rather suddenly, it seems, the motif appears throughout the Meditteranean. In the later 2nd century and early 1st century BCE, the motif is confined to three regions, Italy (5), Delos (3) and Commagene (6). In the latter two regions, the motif seems to appear for the first time. In the 1st c. BCE, the amount of mosaics with crenellation rises again in Italy (7), and is suddenly adopted in relatively high frequency in France (4). In the 1st century CE, the motif has become a largely Italian phenomenon (12 and 1 in Istria), although it continues to be produced in Pergamon as well (1). The last examples of the 2nd c. CE appear in Italy (2, in Pisa and Bovino), North-Africa (1 in Utica, Tunisia) and Spain (1 in Itálica, Spain), suggesting a gradual shift of the geographical distribution of the motif towards the western Mediterranean.

Most of the 61 crenelated mosaics occur in domestic contexts (27)[1142]; some occur in (semi-)palatial contexts (9)[1143]; another group belongs to bath houses (9)[1144]; and a last group belongs to temples or sanctuaries (4)[1145]. Already the earliest 2nd c. BCE examples occur in this variety of contexts: domestic contexts (appendix E: cat. A37, the Casa del Trittolemo in Pompeii), palatial contexts (app. E: cat. A31, palace V in Pergamon), and temples/sanctuaries (app. E: cat. A22, the temple of Lykosoura and cat. A35, the Asklepion of Pheneos). The context of the Thmuis mosaics (app. E, Cat A50) is impossible to determine, but a royal context is likely.[1146]

9.2.2 The glocal genealogy of painted crenellations

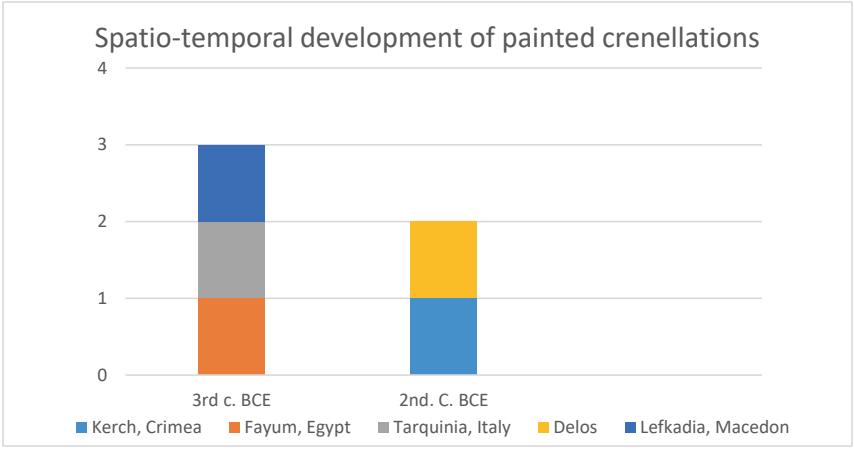


Fig. 9.7 Spatio-temporal development of painted crenellations, based on the catalogue of appendix F. By the author.

In appendix F, I have provided a catalogue of *painted* crenellations, largely based on the work by Stephan Steingräber, with some important alterations (see below).[1147] When we take into consideration the few examples of painted crenellations (fig. 9.7), it can be observed that some of these predate the mosaics with crenellation, with three out of five dating to the 3rd c. BCE.[1148] Like the early mosaic crenellations, their spatial distribution is again very wide, ranging from Kerch in

[1142] Appendix E: cat. A10-16, 19-21, 23, 26, 30, 32-33, 37-38, 40, 48-49, 54-60.
[1143] Appendix E: cat. A4-6, 31, 44-46, 52-53.
[1144] Appendix E: cat. A2-3, 9, 25, 28, 39, 41, 42, 43.
[1145] Appendix E: cat. A22, 34-35, 47.
[1146] The central panel most probably depicts a Ptolemaic queen, identified by Daszewski as Berenike II in the guise of the personification of Alexandria. See Daszewski 1985. For more scepticism, see Dunbabin 1999, who however does agree with the interpretation of the panel as a Ptolemaic queen. See also paragraph 9.2.2.
[1147] Steingräber 2006.
[1148] Obviously, this small number cannot be considered statistically representative in itself. However, most conclusions derived from these data in this chapter concern the combined evidence of appendix E and F.

Crimea (app. F: cat. B1) to the Fayum in Egypt (app. F: cat. B3) and Tarquinia in Italy (app. F: cat. B2).

In the 2nd c. BCE, an example of painted crenellation occurs in Delos, in the House of the Seals (app. F: cat. B4) and in the tomb of Lyson and Kallikles (app. F: cat. B5). No examples are known that post-date these examples. It must be noted that many authors also refer to painted crenellations in Alexandria, in the Anfouchy and Mustapha Pasha tombs.[1149] None of the published or otherwise available evidence however suggests that these paintings contain crenellations; in all cases we seem to be dealing with stepped pyramid motifs. I will however discuss some of these examples in the section on painted tomb ceilings with textile imitation. In four out of five examples of painted crenellations, the paintings are located on a ceiling (Kerch, Tarquinia and Delos), and in one case it concerns a painted sarcophagus (Fayum). In all three 3rd c. BCE paintings as well as in the early 2nd c. BCE tomb of Lefkadia, the crenellation occurs in a funerary context, whereas the later 2nd c. BCE example on Delos concerns a domestic context.

Zooming out from the glocal genealogy presented above, we can make some general first conclusions. First of all, it seems clear that, in the glocal genealogy of the crenellation motif, the painted phase (3rd. c. BCE – 2nd c. BCE) largely precedes the mosaic phase (2nd c. BCE-2nd c. CE), only overlapping in the 2nd c. BCE. This was already suggested by many scholars, but the large amount of new evidence still supports this claim.[1150] Even if we would include the possible Alexandrian tombs with painted crenellation, the shift from painting to mosaics would still be placed in the 2nd c. BCE.

This transition from one medium to another might be explained in terms of a direct translation from painted (tomb) ceilings to floor mosaics. If we follow this hypothesis, the presented data provide some hints regarding the location of this shift. Egypt would be a logical possibility, as here we have painted crenellations in the 3rd c. BCE in the Fayum sarcophagus (and perhaps in painted tomb ceilings as well, see 8.1.2) and mosaic crenellations in the 2nd c. BCE in Thmuis (Alexandria). Delos is a second possibility, as here we see the first occurrence of the crenellation motif in a non-funerary context (the ceiling of the Maison des Sceaux) and some relatively early (2nd c. BCE)

[1149] Reference is made by several authors to the following tombs: Mustafa Kamel (Pasha) Tomb II, Alexandria (3rd-2nd c BCE); Mustafa Kamel (Pasha) Tomb III, Alexandria (3rd-2nd c BCE); Anfouchy Tomb V, 5, loculus ceiling painting (2nd c. BCE); Anfouchy Tomb V, 2, ceiling painting (2nd c. BCE); Anfouchy Tomb III, Alexandria – 2nd c. BCE; Fragment from a wall, Alexandria (date unknown). See Adriani 1952, 1966, who talks about a *'motif à dents'*. See also Parlasca 1959, 129 ff.; Guimier-Sorbets 2012a.

[1150] See for example Steingräber 2006, 288: '*We often find crenellated friezes (…) in painting on tomb ceilings. In effect they form a kind of baldachin above a burial spot. Such tapestry-like designs, (…) adorn the ceilings of chamber tombs mainly from the third century (…) In Greek mosaics, however, we only find crenellated designs beginning in the later third century and especially the second century.'*

mosaics as well. It seems logical that an intermediate step in the transformation of media would be the shift from funerary contexts to domestic contexts. A less direct translation should also be considered; it might be that both painted crenellations and mosaic crenellations derive from textile crenellations. Instead of an analysis that explores the actual origins of mosaic crenellations in Samosata, I will explore the relation between crenellated mosaics and textile on a more conceptual level in 8.2.4.2, asking to what extent these Commagenean crenellations had the capacity to evoke textile. Another general observation we can make on the basis of the presented data, is that, already in the 3rd c. BCE, the crenellated motif had a widespread universalizing character, appearing in contexts across the Mediterranean and into southern Russia. This is the case both in painted and in mosaic form. Its global genealogy comprised of a shift from a pan-Mediterranean phenomenon in the 3rd c. BCE to a largely Italian phenomenon in the 1st c. CE. Lastly, it is remarkable to observe that the global genealogy of the crenellation motif – its wide distribution and long lifespan – did not turn it into a completely generic and malleable motif. Unlike the wave-crest, the meander, the stepped pyramid and the guilloches, the crenellation motif did not become a ubiquitous decorative element that appeared in any type of context on any type of medium[1151]; its use remained restricted to painting and mosaics. These genealogical object type demands will be explored more in 8.2.2, when we look at the degree to which the Commagenean mosaics adhered to the glocal object type.

9.3 More-than-representational capacities of the crenellation motif on three scales

In this section, I will contextualize the crenellation motif's glocal genealogy in the palatial complex of Samosata. I am specifically interested how the glocal genealogy afforded the crenellations in Samosata with specific relational capacities on different geographical scales, namely on a local, a global and a regional scale. This section will demonstrate how the glocal genealogy of the crenellation motif could actively contribute to 1) achieving visual coherence on a local scale (9.3.1); 2) joining *a* global network of motifs and concepts (9.3.2); and 3) achieving distinctiveness on a regional scale (9.3.3).

9.3.1 Achieving visual coherence on a local scale

In this paragraph, the glocal genealogy of the crenellation motif is investigated to understand how the crenellations of Samosata acquired relational capacities in the context of the local Commagenean royal visual program. It will focus on what the implications were of the very

[1151] For the generic use of these motifs, see Dunbabin 1999, Ling 1998 and Andreae 2003.

structural and uniform manner in which the motif was repeatedly applied in Commagene. I will explore in what sense this search for uniformity and repetition fits and adds to the wider context of Commagenean royal visual strategies.

Three other mosaics containing the crenellation motif (app. E: cat. A4, A5 and A6) are known from Commagene, all located in the so-called 'Mosaic Rooms' I, II and III of Arsameia on the Nymphaios, the *hierothesion* for Mithridates I Kallinikos.[1152] As discussed already in chapter 4, there are numerous similarities between the Samosata mosaics and those from Arsameia on the Nymphaios.[1153] The three tessellated mosaics belonging to the 'Mosaic Rooms' of Arsameia on the Nymphaios all contain outer decorative bands adorned with a crenellation motif. Their tesserae are identical to those in Samosata in terms of size (ca. 2,5 $cm^{2)}$ and colour (white and dark grey). In all cases, the outward-pointing crenellations are executed in white tesserae and the inward-pointing crenellations executed in dark grey tesserae. The corners, like in Samosata, are created by 'overlapping' borders. Besides the crenellated borders, other similarities between the mosaics from Samosata and Arsameia on the Nymphaios are multiple. The size of the mosaics, for instance, is comparable to those of Samosata; pavement 1 measures 10,76 x 9,22 m. and pavement 2 measures 13,85 x 11,30 m. This means pavement 1 is slightly smaller than Samosata's room XV (11,00 x 11,00 m.) but larger than Samosata's room VIII (6,00 x 5,50). Pavement 2 is slightly larger than Samosata's room XV. Like in Samosata, the mosaics cover the complete surface of the rooms, and employ a relatively high amount of decorative concentric borders (at least ten, excluding the *emblemata*). The motifs employed in these decorative borders are the wave crest, stepped pyramid, meander and the crenellation motif. Furthermore, the only figurative emblem preserved (pavement I), showing symmetrically placed dolphin-like sea creatures on either side of an amphora, is almost identical to the one in room I in Samosata. A minor difference between both contexts is that in Samosata crenellations only appear in square mosaics[1154], while the crenellated mosaics in Arsameia on the Nymphaios are all rectangular.

We could argue that, through its re-occurrence in a very similar way in Samosata and Arsameia on the Nymphaios, the crenellation motif actively contributed to the creation of a certain degree of visual coherence in these two royal Commagenean contexts. This phenomenon is perhaps not surprising when we contextualize it in the royal Commagenean visual strategy in general. Versluys has for instance characterized the Antiochan visual program as an attempt at 'canon building'. He states: *'Introducing the concept of canon seems the only way to understand the rigidity that*

[1152] Lavin 1963, 191-6. For a comparison between room XIV and the Mosaic Rooms of Arsameia on the Nymphaios, see paragraph 4.3.4 in this dissertation. For a discussion about their chronology, see paragraph 4.3.4. For a discussion about the role of these Mosaic Rooms in the Antiochan ruler cult, see 10.5.1.
[1153] Bingöl 2013; Zoroğlu 2012, Özgüç 2009.
[1154] For the mosaic fragment in sector s/11, the shape of the mosaic nor the room can be established.

characterizes the Antiochan project, with its uniform texts and stereotypical visual material culture. This behaviour is very much in line with one of the main characteristics of the canon; namely, that nothing can be added, removed or changed. Coherence and repetition are therefore of prime importance to the functioning of a canon, like they were to the Antiochan project.'[1155] Many aspects of the Antiochan ruler cult indeed appear multiple times and in very similar ways. Hilltop sanctuaries are found at Nemrut Dağı, Arsameia on the Nymphaios, Arsameia on the Euphrates[1156]; tumuli-shaped tombs appear in Nemrut Dağı and Karakuş; colossal statues of gods and the king occur (twice) in Nemrut Dağı and Arsameia on the Nymphaios; the great cult inscription (including the *nomos*-inscription) appears almost in identical versions in Nemrut Dağı (again twice), Arsameia on the Nymphaios and on the back of several *dexiosis* reliefs; these *dexiosis* reliefs themselves appear in very identical fashion throughout Commagene (e.g. Nemrut Dağı, Arsameia on the Nymphaios, Zeugma, Doliche, Samosata); and ancestor galleries occurred in Nemrut Dağı, probably in Arsameia on the Nymphaios and probably in Samosata.[1157]

Through the repeated use of the crenellation motif on this local, Commagenean scale, the decorative element acquired a very particular relational capacity, namely to create visual coherence in context of a royal program of canon building. As Versluys and others have shown, this canon building itself served as a way to produce structures of power and identity within Commagene.[1158] In a way, we might say that the crenellation motif was suitable for such canon building strategies as repetition lay at its very core. In the mosaic itself, the crenellation motifs were already functioning as a collective, acquiring their strength through repetition. In a way, the motif demands multiplicity as its negative image produces again the same motif; it always exists in plural.

9.3.2 Joining a global network of motifs and concepts

How did the glocal genealogy of the crenellation motif play a role in Samosata when we consider the global scale? In this paragraph, we will assess the place of Samosata within this global network by comparing its mosaics to earlier and more or less contemporary mosaics with crenellation. To asses this question, I will chronologically discuss a set of global (i.e. non-local and non-regional) particularizations of the crenellation motif from the 2nd c. BCE-early 1st c. BCE. By comparing these

[1155] Versluys 2017a, 170.
[1156] Naturally, there are enormous differences between these sites. I am here solely referring to the fact that these are three *hierothesia* located on hilltops.
[1157] Versluys 2017a, 130-135. For the possibility of an ancestor gallery in Samosata, see section 6.2 of this dissertation.
[1158] *Idem*, 170.

phases of the glocal genealogy to Samosata, we can discern the latter's adherence to or deviation from the demands of the developing object type.

Fig. 9.8 The so-called Sophilos Mosaic from Thmuis (Tell Timai, Egypt), ca. 200 BCE. Source: Alexandria, Graeco- Roman Museum inv. no. 21739.

One of the earliest examples of the crenellated motif stems from a mosaic in *opus vermiculatum* found in Tell Timai, ancient Thmuis, in the Nile Delta, and dated to ca. 200 BCE (fig. 9.8; app. E: cat. A50).[1159] The mosaic shows the bust of a woman wearing an elaborate costume that includes headgear in the form of a ship's prow. Daszewski has convincingly interpreted this figure (and an almost identical figure on another mosaic of Thmuis) as a Ptolemaic queen, possibly Berenike II, in the guise of a *thea synnaos*, representing various aspects of Ptolemaic power on land and sea.[1160] Although the mosaic was found somewhat removed from the Ptolemaic royal capital itself, the connection to Ptolemaic royalty seems undeniable through the extremely high quality *opus vermiculatum* as well as the figure represented. The crenellation motif appears in a double border on the outer edge of a sequence of several decorated borders, including an elaborate polychrome and three-dimensional meander as well as a polychrome three-dimensional guilloche. In contrast to these complex borders, the crenellated border is exceptionally plain, black-and-white and two-

[1159] Alexandria, Graeco- Roman Museum inv. no. 21739. Brown 1957, 67-68, cat. no. 48, pl. 38; Parlasca 1959, 130; Lavin 1963, 193 n.13; Daszewski 1977, 61; Ovadiah 1980, 59, no. 42; Daszweski 1985, 142-158, cat. no. 38, fig. 5, pl. 32; Donderer 1989, 79, cat. A39, pl. 25; Grimm 1998, fig. 81a; Dunbabin 1999, 24-26, fig. 25; Andreae 2003, 27-38.
[1160] Daszewski 1996, 143.

dimensional.[1161] The mosaic is one of the few signed mosaics of the Hellenistic period, stating *Sophilos epoiei* ('Sophilos made [me]').[1162]

Fig. 9.9 The so-called Hephaistion Mosaic from Pergamon's 'Palace V', ca. 200-150 BCE. Source: Berlin, Pergamonmuseum Nr. Inv. 70.

In the so-called Hephaistion mosaic (app. E: cat. A31) in Pergamon's 'Palace V', the use of the crenellation in many ways is very similar to that of Thmuis (fig. 9.9).[1163] The mosaic is located in room K in the NW-corner of the palace. The mosaic and the palace are generally dated to the first half of the 2nd century BCE, coinciding with the reign of Eumenes II (197-159 BCE).[1164] Much of the mosaic was destroyed but the remaining parts allow a reconstruction of a large square mosaic

[1161] An observation already made by Martin 2017, 63: *'Surely the play of paradoxes between depth/ surface and naturalism/ artifice was part of mosaic's appeal, as attested by the growing complexity of various border devices in Hellenistic floors: some emphatically flattened, some highly three dimensional, and some framing pictorial central scenes with life- like content. Sophilos's signed floor in Thmuis is a clear example of this visual duality. A flattened tassel device derived from textiles (so- called "crenellation") frames a perspective meander and other plain and double guilloche borders.'*

[1162] Martin 2017, 56.

[1163] Berlin, Pergamonmuseum No. Inv. 70. Kawerau and Wiegand 1930, 58-63, pls. V, XII-XV, text plate XXVI; Rostovtzeff 1955, pl. 74; Brown 1957, 72-74, pl. 39, 1; Parlasca 1959, 129; Lavin 1963, 193 n.13; Börker 1973, 299; Daszewski 1977, 60; Ovadiah 1980, 47-48, no. 27, 1; Salzmann 1991, 433-456, fig. 1; Salzmann 1995, 101-112, pl. 6-21, app. 1-2; Bingöl 1997, 83-84, fig. 57; Radt 1988, 73, fig. 22; Kriseleit 2000, 17-23, figs. 8-15; Andreae 2003, 44-47.

[1164] Salzmann 1991, 436-437. For alternative, later datings, see Andreae 2003, 44-47 (ca. 150 BCE); Börker 1973, 299 (mid-1st c. BCE); and Kriseleit 2000, 17-23 (mid-2nd c. BCE).

with at least seven concentric borders around a central field. The entire mosaic covers almost the complete surface of the room. The central field originally included three panels at the top, with a wide panel below it containing a floral design. In the centre of this floral design a piece of parchment – seemingly bowing away - was depicted containing the signature of the artist Hephaistion (*'Hephaistion epoiei').* From the inside out, the concentric borders consist of a perspective meander, dogtooth pattern, a scroll against a black background and a chain guilloche. The outer edge of the mosaic is decorated with a double border of crenellations in black and white, similar to the double border in Thmuis. Here too, the crenellated borders stand in stark contrast to the complex, three-dimensional and polychrome character of the other borders. It seems that the three-dimensionality and illusionism here really seem to increase towards the centre, leading from the plain and simple crenellation to the relatively flat scroll containing a very naturalistic grasshopper, all the way to the fully three-dimensional meander, ending in the playful illusionistic depiction of a piece of parchment that is on the verge of being blown away.

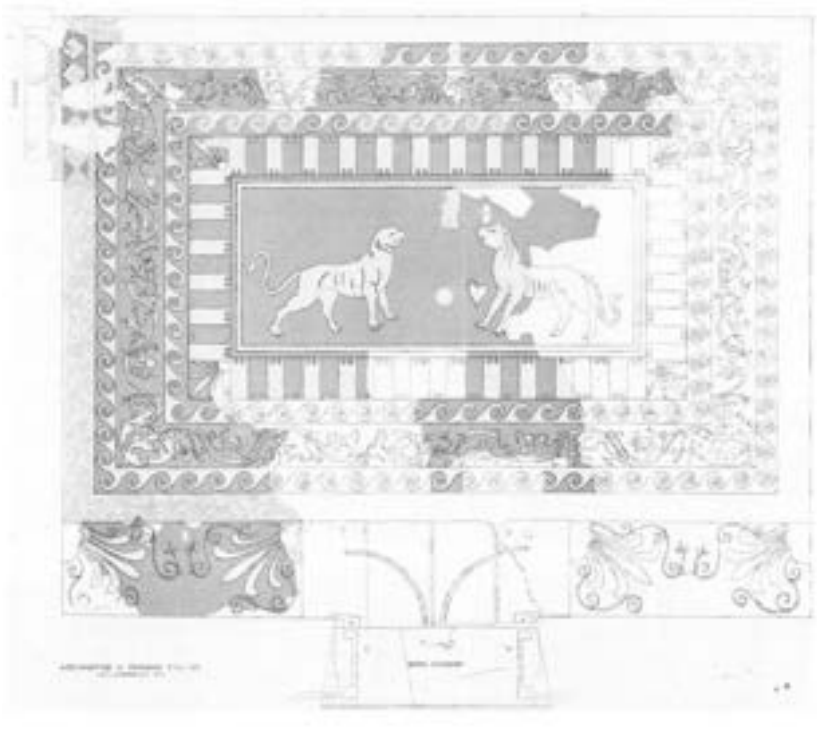


Fig. 9.10. The mosaic from the cella of the temple of Despoina at Lykosoura in Arkadia, early 2nd c. BCE. Source: Dunbabin 1979, 271, pl. 38 fig.10.

The cella of the Temple of Despoina at Lykosoura in Arkadia contains a mosaic with an elaborate concentric border design with a crenellated border (fig. 9.10; app. E: cat. A22).[1165] The dating of the structure and its mosaic floor remains a matter of debate but an early 2nd c. BCE construction date seems likely.[1166] The tesserae, in red, yellow and white, are very irregular, with a relatively large size of 2-3 cm. The central *emblema* contains a depiction of two symmetrically placed lions. From the inside out, the concentric borders are a crenellation motif with palmettes in the corners, a wave crest, a floral scroll, and a wave crest. Left and right from the entrance, two smaller panels are connected to the concentric border design, containing palmettes with thin '*Blütenranken*'. The mosaic fills almost the entire surface of the cella, leaving only a very narrow band of white tesserae around it. The use of the crenellation on the inner border is exceptional and does not occur in any of the other mosaics from the catalogue (appendix E). The other borders contain relatively flat and bi-chrome decorative motifs, so the crenellation does not contrast to more three-dimensional elements like in Pergamon and Thmuis.

Fig. 9.11 Mosaic from the peristyle courtyard of the House of the Dolphins on Delos, late 2nd c.-early 1st c. BCE. Source: Dunbabin 1999, 33, fig. 34.

[1165] Kavvadias 1889, 159-160; 1893, 7-8; Leonardos 1907 with references to earlier reports; Dickins 1905/1906, 112-115; Pernice 1938, 141; Brown 1957, 72; Parlasca 1959, 129-130; Lavin 1963, 195; Lehmann 1964b, 190-197; Levy 1967, 518; Bruneau 1969, 324-325, fig. 19; Daszewski 1977, 60; Dunbabin 1979, 271, pl. 38 fig.10; Ovadiah 1980, 38, no. 15; Salzmann 1982, 65-66, 123, no. 162, pl. 80.

[1166] Construction dates have been proposed between the 4th c. BCE and the 2nd c. CE. It is clear that the structure has had several (re)construction phases. The cult statues of the temple are generally accepted as dating from a renovation in the first half of the 2nd century BCE. The mosaic too is likely to have been a replacement for an earlier flagstone covering, but this need not have been contemporaneous with the cult statue. See Lehmann 1964b, 196; Marcadé 1972, 986; Dunbabin 1979, 271 sticks with an early 2nd c. BCE dating, which is followed in this dissertation.

The crenellation motif also occurs in a mosaic in the courtyard of the peristyle of the House of the Dolphins (fig. 9.11; app. E: cat. A10).[1167] The mosaic and house are generally dated to the late 2nd c.-early 1st century BCE, approximately contemporary to the palatial complex of Samosata.[1168] This is one of the most elaborate concentric designs found on Delos, with at least seven circular borders within a square outer frame. Like in Thmuis and Pergamon, the crenellation motif occurs in the outer (square) border. The darker crenellations are facing outward, while the light red crenellations face inward. Like in Lykosoura, the four corners of the crenelated border are filled with a palmette. The other borders consist of relatively 'flat' motifs, with, from the inside out, a bead-and-reel border, a polychrome chain guilloche, a scroll with griffin heads, a wave crest, a meander in perspective and a wave crest. Each of the four corners of the square frame contains two dolphin-like sea creatures with small winged figures riding on top of them. The central medallion contained a rosette surrounded by floral garlands. The mosaic is signed by Asclepiades of Arados ([*ΑΣΚΛΕ]ΠΙΑΔΕΣ ΑΡΑΔΙΟ[Σ] ΕΠΟΙΕΙ*), and this Phoenician connection is furthermore enforced by the presence of a symbol for the Punic-Phoenician goddess Tanit in the mosaic at the entrance of the house.[1169]

From these earlier phases of the glocal genealogy of crenellations, some general observations can be made regarding the selection, integration and contextualization of the crenellation motif, shared throughout the genealogy. We can compare these general characteristics of the object type to the particularization of the crenellated motif in Samosata.

1) In all phases of the glocal genealogy, the crenellation motif occurs within an *elaborate concentric border design*, consisting of a sequence of many decorated borders around a central *emblema*. These mosaics contain at least 4 or 5 concentric borders. Almost all concentric border designs are rectangular or square; in the rare case of a circular concentric design (e.g. the House of the Dolphins, app. E: cat. A10), the crenellated border is still only used in the square border around the circular sequence. This is also the case in room XV of Samosata, where a medallion with some concentric borders is framed with a square concentric design. The Commagenean mosaics are by far the most elaborate compared to the others from the catalogue, with 7 (Samosata room VIII) and 10 (Samosata room XV; Arsameia on the Nymphaios 'Mosaic Room I') decorated borders. This elaborate design also means that the mosaic generally fills a large surface, sometimes even covering

[1167] Bulard 1908, 193-198, pl. 12-13; Chamonard 1922-24, 136-139, pl. 53; Pernice 1938, 30; Brown 1957, 72; Parlasca 1959, 130; Lavin 1963, 193, n. 13; Bruneau 1972, 51, 235-239, no. 210, figs. 168-175, pl. B, 1-2; Daszewski 1977, 61; Ovadiah 1980, 34-35, no. 10, 2; Pinkwart and Stammnitz 1984, 99; Donderer 1989, 56, no. cat. A 6, 1; Dunbabin 1999, 33, figs. 34-36.
[1168] Bruneau 1972, 95-99. Bruneau dates the houses and their mosaic decoration to the period between 130 and 88 BCE, a date that is generally followed. For alternative datings, see Chamonard ('Late-Hellenistic'), Parlasca (early 1st c. BCE), Pinkwart – Stamnitz (1st c. BCE).
[1169] Dunbabin 1999, 33.

the complete room, like in Pergamon (app. E: cat. A31) and Lykosoura (app. E: cat. A22), something which is also the case in Samosata and Arsameia on the Nymphaios.

2) In almost all genealogical phases, safe for Lykosoura (app. E: cat. A22), the crenellated border occurs in the outer border of the concentric border design. This is again also the case in all six mosaics with crenellation in Samosata and Arsameia on the Nymphaios.
3) In almost all genealogical phases, the darker crenellated 'turrets' face outward from the centre. In Samosata, this is only the case in the mosaic of sector s/11 and not in rooms VIII and XV. In 'Mosaic Room I' of Arsameia on the Nymphaios, the white 'turrets' are pointing outward, while in the other two mosaics, the darker ones are.
4) In almost all genealogical phases, the corners of the crenellated border consist of a square field that contains a palmette or a rosette (Lykosoura, app. E: cat. A22; Delos, app. E: cat. A10; Pheneos, app. E: cat. A35), a lozenge (Thmuis, app. E: cat. A50) or remains empty (Pergamon cat. A31). In Commagene, an alternative solution is selected in which one border of crenellation seemingly 'overlaps' another, creating an asymmetrical transition in the corner. This type of solution is only seen in (mostly later) Italian examples (e.g. Grumentum app. E: cat. A19; Rome, app. E: cat. A42).
5) In many genealogical phases, the crenellated motif co-occurs with much more complex, polychrome and three-dimensional decorative motifs, often executed in *opus vermiculatum*, creating a stark contrast with the two-dimensional, bi-chrome crenellation (e.g. Pergamon, app. E: cat. A31; Thmuis, app. E: cat. A50). Notable exceptions are the mosaics of Lykosoura (with mostly flat motifs, see app. E: cat. A22) and one from the Pompeian Casa del Trittolemo (with polychrome crenellations, see app. E: cat. A37). In Samosata and Arsameia on the Nymphaios, the other borders are also very bi-chrome and flat, except for a panel with illusionistic cubes in room XV. In general, it can be stated that the crenellation's capacity to evoke a *'play of paradoxes between depth/ surface and naturalism/ artifice'*[1170] was not activated in Commagene.
6) A surprisingly large amount of genealogical phases happen to be mosaics that contain a signature by its craftsman (Pergamon, app. E: cat. A31; Delos, app. E: cat. A10 and Thmuis, app. E: cat. A50).[1171] Although these three examples might not be statistically representative and the relation to the crenellation motif might be purely coincidental, it must be emphasized that the amount of signed Hellenistic mosaics is exceptionally small. Rebecca Martin recently established a corpus of only ten such signed mosaics, which, 'w*ith the exception of the pebble mosaic from Athens, all (…) are found on mosaics of exceptionally*

[1170] Martin 2017, 63.
[1171] Wootton 2012, 227 suggests that some signatures name patrons, but in these three cases the 'epoiei' really seems to indicate the craftsman.

high quality.'[1172] Together with the fact that the crenellation motif occurs mostly in very elaborate concentric designs with complex decoration, it seems safe to suggest that the crenellation motif was exceptionally suitable for very prestigious contexts and high quality mosaics. This fits well with the observation that multiple mosaics with crenellation were found in royal context (Pergamon, app. E: cat. A31; Thmuis, app. E: cat. A50), something which fits with the royal contexts of Commagene.

These trends show that, by the time the crenellation motif appeared in Samosata, the motif was not a completely generic decorative element that could be applied everywhere in any manner. It could for instance not appear in mosaic designs with only one or two borders, *nor* in circular concentric designs, *nor* could it be rendered in a three-dimensional manner, *nor* was it applicable to any other medium than (tomb) painting and mosaics. Although there are exceptions, it seems that it also strongly demanded to be placed in the outer border of an elaborate concentric design and to be rendered in a bi-chrome palette. This all means that, despite its global occurrence, the crenellation was not a motif that was endlessly *malleable*; it could not be experimented with without specific limitations. Apparently, through its glocal genealogy, the motif had acquired a set of (decorative) demands. It is important to emphasize that, as we have seen, these genealogical demands were also largely adhered to in Samosata and Arsameia on the Nymphaios.

By adhering to these object type demands, the crenellations in Samosata thus implied a tight relation to the glocal genealogy of the object type. Slight deviations from those norms and concepts are witnessed in Commagene especially in terms of the solution for the corners and the combination of almost only bi-chrome and 'flat' motifs. These deviations were however not unique – e.g. the use of flat motifs in Lykosoura - and were minimal in relation to the overall adherence to the genealogical demands. Interestingly, it should be added that the repeated local particularization of the motif on the local, Commagenean scale (dealt with in paragraph 9.2.1), is witnessed in none of the other genealogical phases. The fact that the crenellation motif occurred on a wide geographic scale does not imply that the specific nodes of that network (Delos, Pergamon, Alexandria) were represented by the mosaics in Samosata; rather, its adherence to a glocal genealogy suggests that the widely available object type had an impact on its particularization in Samosata.

[1172] Martin 2017, 56.

9.3.3. Achieving distinctiveness on a regional scale

The wide availability of crenellation motif stands in stark contrast to its scarcity in Syria, Asia Minor and the Levant. The overview of section 9.2 shows that, in fact, the crenellations of Commagene are almost unique in the wider region. The most nearby examples are Pergamon (app. E: cat. A31) in the far west of Asia Minor and Alexandria (app. E: cat. A50). The absence of further crenellations in Asia Minor, the Levant, Armenia, Judea and further east can probably not be merely explained by a lack of archaeological data. The occurrence of the motif in Samosata is therefore remarkable. It could be argued that the Commagenean visual strategy of canon building was furthermore enforced by the selection of visual elements that were exceptionally rare in the wider region, i.e. Syria, central and eastern Asia Minor, the Levant and further east. From this perspective, a visual element like the crenellation motif might have acquired a specific kind of relational capacity by means of its regional distribution pattern as well. Its *rareness* made it a very suitable element to create 'distinctiveness on a regional scale'. To illustrate this point, I will first consider the evidence for mosaics without crenellation in the wider region around Commagene to see what alternative selections of visual elements occur in these mosaics (section 9.3.3.1). Subsequently, I will consider several (semi-)palatial contexts in the wider region without evidence for mosaics despite other similarities with the palace of Samosata (section 9.3.3.2). Lastly, I will explore how the capacity to achieve regional distinctiveness was also at play in other object types of 1st c. BCE Commagene (9.3.3.3).

9.3.3.1 Hellenistic floor mosaics in Asia Minor and the Near East: different selections on a regional level

I will now briefly consider the evidence for mosaics in the wider region around Commagene (Asia Minor and Syria). None of these specimen contain the crenellation motif, which provides a context for the motif in Commagene. To understand the selection of the crenellation in Commagene better, it is important to assess which decorative elements were selected instead. First, the mosaics of Asia Minor will be discussed and then those occurring in Syria and the Levant.

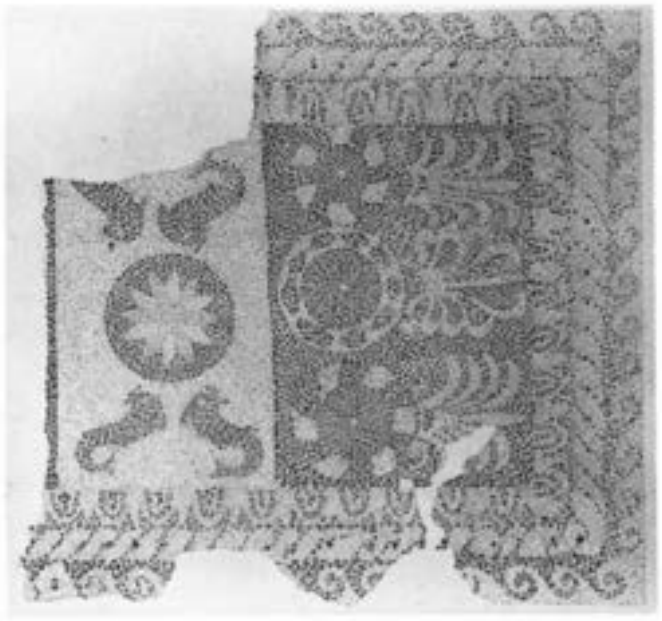


Fig. 9.12 The pebble mosaic in Tarsus-Gözlükule Höyük (Cilicia), 3rd – early 2nd c. BCE. Source: Goldman, 1950a, fig. 12.

Decorated Hellenistic mosaics in Asia Minor are widely found in western Anatolia, close to the Mediterranean sea: Bingöl provides examples from Letoon[1173], Halikarnassos[1174], Kyme[1175], Troy[1176], Erythrai[1177], Priene[1178], Aphrodisias[1179], Klazomenai[1180], Assos[1181] and Pergamon (see above). Towards the east, the use of (decorated) mosaics becomes much more rare; Tarsos[1182] in Cilicia, Sinope[1183] on the Black sea and the Commagenean mosaics are notable exceptions. Apart from the Pergamene (see 9.2.2) mosaics, none of the Anatolian mosaics contain crenellation. Furthermore, none of the Anatolian mosaics contain more than two or three decorated borders (again excluding Pergamon). Salzmann indeed called the amount of concentric borders in Arsameia on the Nymphaios *'auffallend'.*[1184] It shows that, at least for Anatolia, the elaborate concentric border design was not at all a common choice for mosaics. Instead, for example, the mosaic in the temple of Apollo Letoon merely represented the deity's symbols, a bow and arrow

[1173] Metzger 1978, 795 f., pl. 241, 6.
[1174] Poulsen 1994, 124 ff., fig. 14, 17, 19.
[1175] Salzmann 1993, 601-606, figs. 2-5
[1176] Campbell 1973, 208, pls. 4 and 2.
[1177] Clarke, Bacon and Koldewey 1902, 119 and 121, fig. 2.
[1178] Salzmann 1982, 124 f., cat. no. 168, pl. 84,1.
[1179] Erim 1965, 145.
[1180] Salzmann 1982, 122, cat. no. 159, pl. 86, 1-2.
[1181] Clarke, Bacon and Koldewey 1902, 141, 163, 164, fig. 1.
[1182] Goldman 1937, 272, figs. 24-25.
[1183] Akurgal and Budde 1956, 32, pl. 8b, 22a.
[1184] Salzmann 1982, 68.

and a lyre, within a small and undecorated frame.[1185] Another example of very limited concentric designs is provided by the pebble mosaic from section B of Tarsus-Gözlükule Höyük in Cilicia (fig. 9.12), which consists of only three borders (egg-and-darth, a white cable and a wave crest) and is placed around an exceptionally large central white panel with four dolphins placed on either side of rosettes and palmettes.[1186]

What kind of decorative elements and motifs were selected in mosaics of Syria and into what overall design were these placed? In her chapter on *'La Tradition hellenistique Dans La Mosaïque Du Proche-Orient'*, Janine Balty states that floor mosaics were in general rare in the Near East: '*Si l'on excepte la mosaïque de galets trouvée a Tarse en Cilicie (fin III^e^, début II^e^ siècle avant J.-C.) et les deux pavements mis au jour à Arsameia du Nymphée en Commagène (fin II^e^ , début I^er^ siècle avant J.-C.), aucune découverte ne vient éclairer, pour l'époque hellénistique, l'histoire de la mosaïque de pavement dans les provinces orientales de monde méditerranéen.*'[1187] This means that, safe for the Commagenean examples – now also including those from Samosata - no mosaics at all are known for Hellenistic Syria.[1188] If we widen the regional scope somewhat, we could include a group of Hellenistic mosaics from Judea, located in Tel Dor, Tel Anafa and Jericho.[1189] None of these examples however have evidence for the use of crenellated borders. Below, I will discuss these examples and compare their iconographic selections in light of the concentric border design and crenellated borders in Samosata. The fragments from Tel Anafa are too small and ill-preserved to discuss in terms of iconography and will be left out of this discussion.[1190]

[1185] Metzger 1978, 795f., pl. 241, 6.
[1186] Goldman, 1950, fig. 12. Found in room 6 of a large building complex (35,0 x 30,0 m. in the excavated area) with multiple rooms, and walls erected in ashlar masonry. This structure was date to the first half of the 3rd century BCE until the early years of the 2nd century (Goldman, 1950, 30-31). The structure contained a part that was centred around a courtyard, a two-room unit that the excavators called a "megaron" and a group of rooms that contained a bath complex. The pebble mosaic was found in room 6, adjacent to the court, and part of the main entrance to the building. The mosaic (3.10 x 1.90 m), was executed in white, red and dark blue tesserae.
[1187] Balty 1995, 161. Balty suggests the existence of a Levantine workshop in Arados (modern Arwad in Syria, on the Mediterranean coast) based on an artist's signature in the house of the Dolphins in Delos by [Askle]piades of Arados. Interestingly, this is one of the few early parallels known where a crenellated border was also found (app. E, cat. A10-11). I will come back to this in paragraph 9.2.4.
[1188] Balty 1995, 59 on Mosaics in Syria: *'la mosaïque hellénistique n'est représentée nulle part – pas même à Antioch -, contrairement à ce qu'on aurait pu croire en raison de la profonde hellénisation de toute la zone côtière, après la foundation de la Tetrapolis par Séleucos Nicator (300)'.*
[1189]The Judean mosaics mentioned are those pre-dating the Herodian examples as the Herodian mosaics most certainly post-date Samosata.
[1190] The mosaics have not been fully published but their context, the Late-Hellenistic 'Stuccoed Building' was. Weinberg 1969, 21–23; 1971a , 97–98; 1971b, 11– 13; 1972 , 9, fi g. 5; 1974 , 20, fi g. 3c. Final publication of the Late-Hellenistic Stuccoed Building (LHSB) appears in Herbert 1994, especially 31– 36 (overview of the LHSB phases and dates), 53– 62, pls. 32– 34 (mosaic). For a discussion of the fragments, see Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987, 137, cat. no. 234 as well as Martin 2017, 68-70.

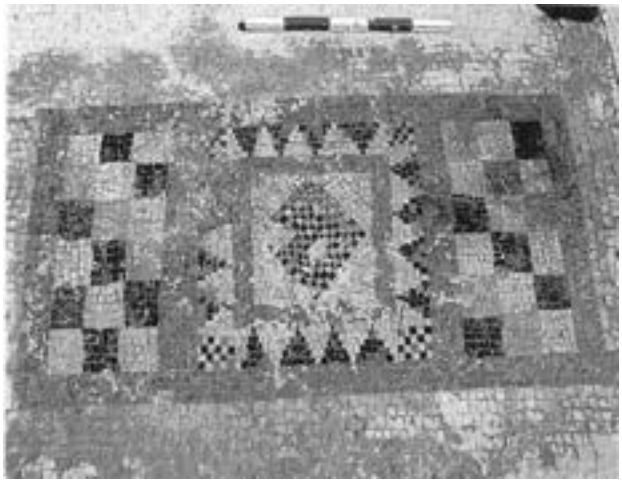


Fig. 9.13 Mosaic from room A[B] 42, in the apodyterion of the Winter Palace in Jericho. Source: Netzer 2001, pl. VII.

The Hellenistic (pre-Herodian) mosaics from Jericho were part of the Hasmonean baths in the Winter palace and date between ca. 64 BCE and 31 BCE.[1191] These mostly consist of very basic designs *in opus tesselatum* without any elaborate concentric borders. One of the relatively more complex designs is found in room A[B] 42, the palace *apodyterion* (see fig. 9.13). Here, a red triptych of about 1 x 2 meter is filled with a checkerboard pattern and stepped pyramids. The design is however clearly still very minimal compared to the elaborate concentric designs from Commagene and only covers a small (central) portion of the wider room.

[1191] Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987, 76– 66, nos. 110– 111, pls. XCIII:1– 2; Netzer 2001, 6– 7, 98– 101, pl. VII.

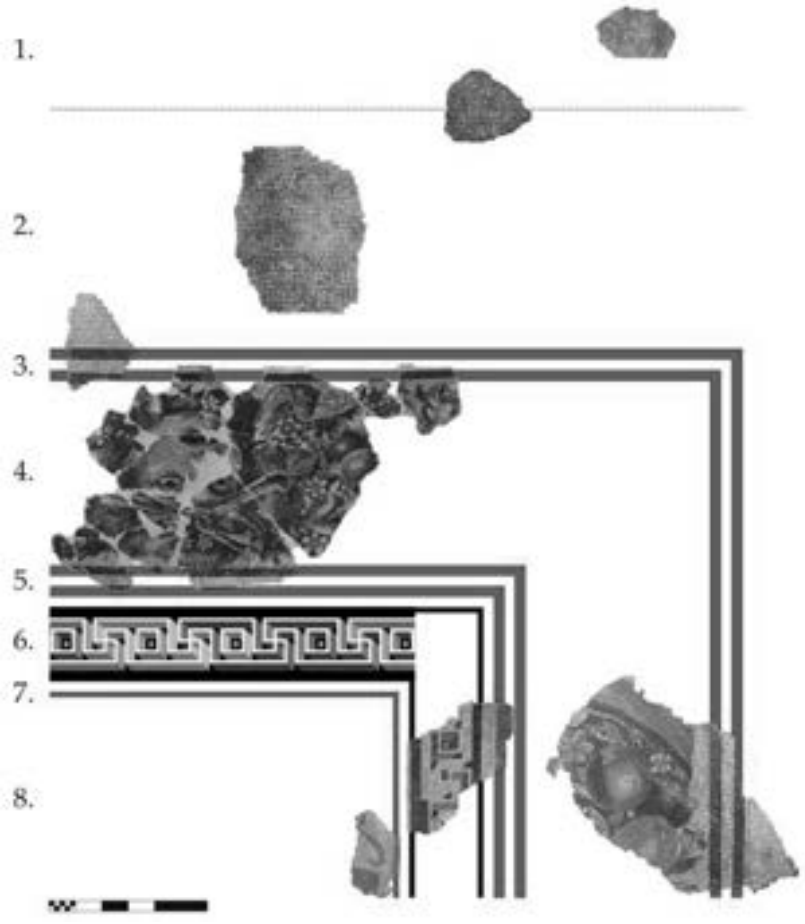


Fig. 9.14 Reconstruction of the mosaic from Tel Dor showing a central field surrounded with a polychrome meander in perspective and a mask-and-garland border, second half 2nd c. BCE(?). Source: Wootton 2012.

In Tel Dor (ancient Dora, in the Haifa district of modern Israel), almost 200 fragments were unearthed belonging to a mosaic with a central field surrounded with a polychrome meander in perspective and a mask-and-garland border (fig. 9.14).[1192] The mosaic fragments, varying in size from small clusters of tesserae to larger sections measuring over 0.40 x 0.30 m., were unearthed in a fragmentary state in a refuse pit dating to the Roman period, in area D1 on the southwest side of the Tel; their original location is unknown.[1193] Because of this secondary find context, the dating is problematic and solely based on stylistic grounds; Martin and Stewart suggest the second half

[1192] Stewart and Martin 2003, 121-145. For all the fragments and a reconstruction, see Wootton 2012. For a reconsideration of Stewart and Martin's interpretation see Ovadiah 2012.
[1193] Martin remarks on the find context: '*Given the quality of this mosaic, it is hard to believe that someone destroyed it on a whim. Earthquake damage or urban renewal come to mind as possible explanations, but until the original context of the mosaic is found, no firm conclusions are possible.*' (Stewart and Martin 2003, 132)

of the 2nd c. BCE.[1194] The mosaic is executed in white, black, yellow, and several tones of red, grey and beige *tesserae*. The technique is in *opus tesselatum* and *opus vermiculatum*, with the size of the *tesserae* ranging from 3 mm. to 5 mm.[1195] Only one of two fragments with a mask-and-garland has been restored, the other is still unpublished.[1196] The mosaic consists of a central *emblema* with figurative decoration (too badly preserved to interpret) surrounded with several concentric borders. Wootton reconstructs seven borders of which several, especially the outer ones, are plain white. The two inner borders are elaborately decorated: the first consisting of a polychrome meander in perspective and the second with an elaborate polychrome mask-and-garland border.[1197]

The mosaic is particularly interesting for our analysis, as it is the only example of a semi-elaborate concentric border design with complex border decoration that can be found in the (wide) region around Commagene. If we would expect the crenellation motif to be selected anywhere in the wider region, it would be here. Instead, however, a very different selection is opted for. First of all, the mask-and-garland border is not found in any of the concentric border designs with crenellation presented in appendix E. Although the very figurative and animated character has similarities with the vegetal scrolls in Pergamon (app. E: cat. A31) and the dolphins in the House of the Dolphins on Delos (app. E: cat. A10), the inclusion of human faces in the borders (be they masks or actual people[1198]) does never occur in crenellated mosaics. Instead of an elaborate sequence of geometric flat outer borders, the concentric borders of the Tel Dor mosaic are merely plain, making the paradox between depth/ surface and naturalism/ artifice even more forceful. In some way, the complex polychrome borders of the Tel Dor mosaic should be considered extensions of the figurative *emblema* rather than a mere framing device. The glocal genealogy of the crenellation motif suggests that the selection of this motif in Tel Dor would not have been out

[1194] Stewart and Martin 2003, 141.
[1195] *Idem*, 133 further comment on the technique: '*The white limestone field is framed at top and bottom by red bands using larger tesserae up to 4 x 6 mm in size. Most of the tesserae used for this white background and adjacent sections of floor are rectilinear and laid horizontally. But as they approach the decorated areas they begin to curve and include tiny chips, often only 1mm across, in order to follow the contours of the fruits, flowers, and mask. This technique is particularly clear where the top of the mask approaches the upper red border. The work is set into a bed of fine mortar 0.019 m thick, supported by a heavy backing of coarser mortar.*'
[1196] '*a fragment of a second mask and a separate geometric zone await supplementation from further excavation and restoration*' (Stewart and Martin 2003, 132). It is suggested by a fragment of an eyebrow and adjacent wavy strands of hair.
[1197] The depicted mask is turned slightly to the viewer's left and shows a young man with coils of brown hair over the temples and forehead, large brown eyes with large black pupils, thick dark eyebrows, heavy eyelids and a wide-opened mouth with red lips. He wears a hat and a woolen fillet that is bound together with a blue *taenia*. He is surrounded by a garland that consists of mainly of ivy leaves, but also has vine leaves, olive leaves, olives, pomegranates, pine cones, trailing branches, tendrils and flowers (five- and six-petalled rosettes).
[1198] Stewart and Martin 2003 suggested that the figure in the frieze represents a mask and this was followed by Wootton 2012. Ovadiah 2012 suggests that the figure would represent a young Dionysos. He does not consider the fact that another fragment showing a mask was also found.

of place at all. Its absence in this context makes us aware that its presence in Commagene afforded the motif with the ability to achieve a certain distinctiveness on a regional scale.

This discussion of the evidence for mosaics in Anatolia and the Near East shows that the selection of crenellation in Commagene was in many ways a unique phenomenon on a regional scale. Most evidence for mosaics show very different selections in terms of decorative motifs and mosaic designs, selecting only motifs of frequent occurrence (e.g. the wave crest, stepped pyramid, meander etc.) in designs that only have a very limited amount of concentric borders or even completely lack such a design. Even when the elaborate concentric design is present, as in Tel Dor, the crenellation motif does not occur. This particular distribution pattern played a role in the impact of the crenellation motif in Samosata; its exceptionality on a regional scale afforded it with the ability to make the Commagenean royal visual context very distinct from its wider, regional 'neighbours'.

9.3.3.2 The absence of floor mosaics in 'palatial' contexts of the Near East

It is important to reflect some more on Balty's observation that floor mosaics from the Hellenistic period were very scarce in the Near East in general, as it might add to our understanding of the regional exceptionality of the Commagenean mosaics. This lack might be partially due to a methodological bias; it could be that we simply lack the archaeological data. The *argumentum ad ignorantiam* that 'absence of evidence is no evidence of absence' would particularly hold true for the nearby *Tetrapolis* (Antioch, Seleucia in Pieria, Apamea and Laodicea), where we would expect many Hellenistic mosaics but limited archaeological investigation into the period might be an important reason for their absence.[1199] However, even when we take this important methodological bias into account, the use of mosaics in a wide region around Commagene remains scarce. This becomes specifically clear when we focus on well-documented contexts in the Near East where one would expect mosaics on the basis of the general decorative repertoire of these sites. In this section I will therefore discuss some well-excavated comparanda to Samosata in the wider region around Commagene where mosaics are absent and the *argumentum ad ignorantiam* does not apply.

[1199] The '*Committee for the Excavation of Antioch and its Vicinity'* was an undertaking of various universities (Princeton university, Worcester Art Museum, The Baltimore Art Museum and the Louvre), which conducted systematic excavations in Antiocheia (Antakya), Seleukeia Pieria (Samandağ) and Daphne (Harbiye) between 1932-1939. These excavations unearthed more than 300 floor mosaics, which all only date from the 2nd c. – 6th c. CE. Also recent rescue excavations have not yielded any earlier results, cf. Pamir 2015, 65. For a re-evaluation of the Princeton excavations, see Redford 2014 and De Giorgi 2015. See also Bowersock 1994, 411-427.

In Jebel Khalid on the Euphrates, the so-called 'Governor's Palace', dated to the 3rd c. BCE, provides a fairly recently excavated context (conducted between 1986-1996) that in many ways compares well to the case of Samosata.[1200] The palace measures ca. 3200 m² and, like in Samosata, is located in the centre of the city's acropolis. Its finely decorated rooms consist of i.a. Doric columns, marbled plaster, stucco with vegetal decoration, polychrome plastering with *trompe l'oeil* decoration that includes integrated gold leaf. Despite the fine detail of the palace's decoration, which is not unlike the palace in Samosata, mosaics were attested. Instead, all floors were constructed with packed earth. Also in the domestic contexts of Jebel Khalid – which range in dating from the mid-3rd to 1st c. BCE - no evidence for mosaics was attested.[1201] The 'Housing Insula', excavated between 1988 and 2005, again contained only packed earthen floors. Especially in the more luxurious houses of the insula – containing for instance high quality wall paintings with a figured frieze that depicts *erotes* – the absence of mosaics is remarkable.[1202]

In Dura Europos, also located on the Euphrates, two subsequent palatial structures were found on top of the citadel, of which only the later and better preserved structure, the so-called Citadel Palace, can be assessed in the context of floor decoration.[1203] This structure was excavated in the early 20th century, but the level of available documentation allows some inferences to be made. It was executed in stone walls and its construction is dated to the mid-3rd c. BCE.[1204] The structure was characterized by long corridors and elaborate decoration, with a peristyle court consisting of Doric columns and a columned room in the south and a large court in the north. Nearby the citadel, the early 2nd c. BCE 'Redoubt Palace' or 'Strategion' at Dura Europos is also centred around a similar peristyle court.[1205] Leaving aside the question concerning the actual palatial function of these two buildings, it is again remarkable that, despite their architectural lay-out, reminiscent of palaces in, for instance, Pergamon and Pella, both do not contain any evidence for mosaics.

Further to the south, several examples of contexts also similar to the palatial complex of Samosata can be proposed where mosaics seem to have been excluded from the selection. In the well

[1200] Clarke et al. 2002, 25, 36-40. For a more elaborate comparison in terms of its architectural lay-out, see chapter 10.
[1201] Jackson 2014.
[1202] Jackson 2009. Jackson assigns the construction of the first houses in the Domestic Quarter of Jebel Khalid to the mid-3rd c. BCE, also referred to as Phase A. Construction is dated by four coins of Antiochus I (278-261 BCE) found below the first floor level. Attic black glaze and Attic West Slope ware, the earliest dateable ceramics, suggest a similar date.
[1203] Downey 1986, 27-37. Nielsen 1999, 115-117, no. 16. See chapter 10 for a more detailed comparison in terms of its architectural lay-out.
[1204] Perkins 1973, 15; Downey 1986, 27.
[1205] Rostovtzeff 1938, 35-37; Goldman 1973, 114, n. 7. This palace also recurs in chapter 10 when compared to the palace of Samosata in terms of its architectural lay-out.

excavated palace or fortress (*baris*) of Iraq el-Amir for instance, no mosaics were excavated nor do the excavators mention any tesserae finds.[1206] Josephus' rather detailed description of the *baris* and its surroundings does not contain any reference to mosaics either.[1207] The lack of mosaics happens in an environment that is otherwise characterized again by the selection of a wide variety of glocal elements such as 'Corinthian' pilasters, an 'Ionic' entablature, a 'Doric' frieze, stucco decoration, and 'Alexandrian' acanthus decoration.[1208]

Also in the so-called 'great temple' of Petra, which was most probably part of a large Nabatean palatial complex, no mosaics were found, despite recent thorough excavations by Brown University (1993-2006).[1209] The structure measures 113,0 x 70,0 m. and is dated to the late 1st c. BCE or the early 1st c. CE.[1210] The lower *temenos* has a well-preserved pavement of hexagonal limestone slabs of 77,0 x 80,0 cm. There, many decorative features were found, such as elephant-headed capitals, relief panels with deities in a naturalistic style and marine imagery. The pronaos of the 'cella' – which is now interpreted as the audience and reception hall of the palatial complex – is reconstructed as a Corinthian tetrastyle *in antis* and contains Attic bases with red stucco. A small room of 3,90 x 5,65 m. was entered through a vestibule and contained multi-coloured plaster and architectural imitations in stucco very reminiscent of the painting in Samosata, Masada, Jericho and Herodium. In the so-called 'baroque room', we find painted and gilded stucco fragments from the ceiling, which were part of an elaborate arrangement containing leaves, grapes and pomegranates around a round medallion of ca.1 meter in diameter. None of these heavily decorated rooms, nor the large pool and garden complex (*paradeisos)* to the east, contained any evidence for mosaic floor decoration.

From this discussion we can conclude that several 'palatial' contexts in the wider region around Commagene did not opt for floor mosaics at all, despite being comparable to the palatial complex of Samosata in several other ways. The selection of mosaics in Commagene then clearly was not a self-evident phenomenon; through the specific glocal genealogy of the motif, the crenellations in Samosata acquired the capacity to achieve an exceptionality on a regional scale.

[1206] Will and Larché 1991; McKenzie 2007, 95; Ginouvès 1994; Kropp 2013, 98-107.
[1207] Joseph. *AJ* 12.154-236. Jospehus's account is generally deemed largely unproblematic in its description of the baris and its historical context.
[1208] Kropp 2013, 98-107. An alternative explanation for the lack of mosaics might be that the structure was probably never finished, something mentioned by Kropp 2013, 100.
[1209] For a good introduction, see Joukowsky 2007 with further literature. The interpretation of the structure as a palace instead of a temple complex is widely accepted now, cf. Schluntz 1999; Seigne 2000; Bedal 2004; Kropp 2009; and Kropp 2013.
[1210] Based on the ceramics and the architectural decoration, cf. Joukowsky 1998, 136.

9.3.3.3 'Rare selections' in the royal Commagenean visual program

This relational capacity to achieve a rare, exceptional status can be compared to other such object capacities in 1st c. BCE Commagene. A good example of this is the Great Cult Inscription (and its *nomos*), written in Greek and widely available throughout Commagene (see above in 1.2). Versluys states: '*there are not many other examples of texts that comprehensively explain the context and meaning of the material culture in the context of which they are explained. (…) Although the great cult inscription with the nomos must (…) be seen as an attempt to create (dynastic) memory, it differs in several respects from the general Hellenistic practice. It is more extensive, it is more personal, it literally explains the material culture it is displayed with, and it was disseminated and put on public display in a standardised form all over the (target area).*'[1211] Parallels that Versluys mentions range from Egyptian hieroglyphs to the Behistun inscription to the somewhat later *Res Gestae* of Octavian Augustus. Versluys thus convincingly argues that the appearance of this element need not surprise completely if we understand its global availability. None of the parallels however occur in other Hellenistic Client Kingdoms of the Near east, nor in Asia Minor.[1212] So on a regional level, the phenomenon was in fact rare. It was through this particular geographically widespread but at the same time quantitively limited glocal genealogy that the Great Cult Inscription acquired its affordance to actively contribute to a distinct Commagenean cultural program.

Several elements of the royal visual program in Commagene were not regionally rare; we know that tumuli graves occurred throughout the region for instance, and the conical and Armenian tiara of the Commagenean rulers was far from regionally exceptional. Yet, it seems likely that object types with the capacity to make the Commagenean royal objectscape stand out were important to achieve a certain distinction on a regional scale. The crenellation motif should thus be regarded as one of at least a few elements in Late-Hellenistic Commagene that were *globally developed* (9.3.2), *regionally exceptional* (9.3.3) and *locally repeatable* (9.3.1).

9.4 Exploring relational capacities of the crenellation motif genealogy

In the previous section, I have concluded that the glocal genealogy of the crenellation motif played an active role in shaping the kinds of specific capacities it had in the palace of Samosata. This

[1211] Versluys 2017a, 124-125.
[1212] See Kropp 2013, 302-303 who for instance claims that '*The local dynasts of the Near East often sought proximity of local cults, but their rule was not always enhanced with religious overtones. The outright worship of living or deceased monarchs, which was practiced for hellenistic kings and Roman emperors, was even less common. The case of Commagene was a drastic one-off creation, and also the Nabatean ruler cult is an anomaly in the Arabian milieu'.* In the Nabatean context, however, no monumental inscriptions like the Great Cult Inscription from Commagene can be found (see Kropp 2013, 303-309 for a summary of the available evidence).

section will push this investigation further by moving from interpretation to analytical exoloration to see what kind of other capacities might have followed from the glocal genealogy. Contrary to the previous case study, where I showed that previous scholarship had overlooked the non-representative capacities of the mask mosaic, here I will instead explore the conceptual capacities of the crenellation motif, precisely because the object type has been rejected so strictly as mere geometric decoration. An exploration of potential meaning of the motif, allowing for the capacity to evoke certain concepts should emancipate the object type from a static marginal element to a vibrant element of the palace. Spinoza's observation that '*no one has yet determined what the body can do*'[1213], already mentioned in chapter 3, describes a similar sense that, in order to understand an object, one has to allow for its virtual, potential capacities as well.

Based on the glocal genealogy presented in section I of this chapter, I will explore the strength of the following four conceptual capacities: 1) the crenellation motif as a representation of architectural fortifications (paragraph 9.4.1). 2) the crenellation motif as a representation of carpets (paragraph 9.4.2) 3) the crenellation motif as a celestial representation with divine connotations (9.4.3), and 4) the crenellation motif as a form of Persianism (9.4.4).

9.4.1 The crenellation motif as a representation of architectural fortifications

As shown in section 9.1, the modern nomenclature that indicates the decorative motif under discussion in most languages makes a direct reference to architectural fortifications (*crenellation, mura merlate, tours crénelées* etc.). It is however not entirely clear whether the motif was indeed recognized as a representation of fortification as such in antiquity. We do not know for sure, for instance, what the motif was called, let alone specifically in 1st c. BCE Commagene. Attempts to connect written sources to the motif are problematic; the only ancient source that speaks in detail of mosaic motifs is the so-called Zenon papyrus 59665 (256– 246 BCE), but this makes no mention of anything that could refer to the crenellation motif.[1214] Some descriptions of textile mention a decorative motif that refers to towers (*πυργωτος*), and many authors assume this is a reference to the crenellation motif.[1215] It should however be kept in mind that it could also refer to the

[1213] Spinoza 1994, 155-156.
[1214] See Edgar 1931, no. 59665; corrections in Koenen 1971.
[1215] A mid-4th c. BCE inscription recording an inventory of the garments worn by cult statues in the treasury of Artemis at Brauron mentions a '*χιτωνίσκος λευκὸς πυργωτὸς παρακυμάτιος πλατυαλουργὴς ἀνεπίγραφος*' (IG II^2 1514, 45-47. The block of grey marble containing the inscription is stored in the British Museum inv. No. 1816,0610.223). The *χιτωνίσκος πυργωτος* would refer to a garment containing the crenellation motif. In passages by Kallixeinos of Rhodes (known through the *Deipnosophistae* by Athenaeus of Naucratis) the description of the luxury tent of Ptolemaios II refers to the (textile?) decoration of the beams of the tent also being *πυργωτα*, in this case assumed to ndicate a crenellated decoration in red or purple (Ath. 5.25.5 sq). Rouveret 1989, 196-197; Miller 1993, 45 n. 53; Guimier-Sorbets 2001. Studniczka 1914, 52-53: '(…) *mit einem Muster nach Art einer turmbesetzten Festungsmauer geschmückt, das in unserem Falle rot oder*

stepped-pyramid motif or any other decorative motif in textile that is either not known today or not necessarily associated with fortifications today.

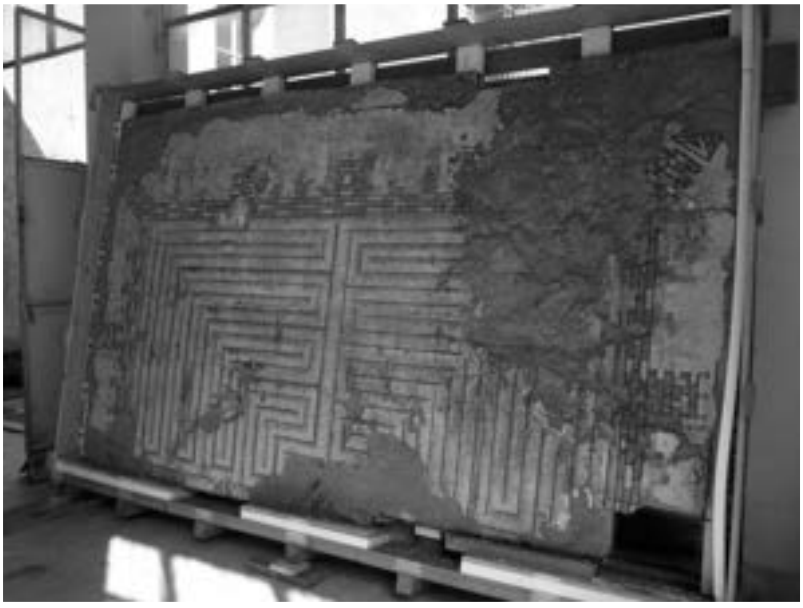


Fig. 9.15 The labyrinth mosaic with fortified border from a republican Domus on the Piazza di S. Giovanni in Laterano (100-80 BCE). Source: Salvetti 2016, fig. 1.

purpurn, sei es nur an beiden Seiten der weißen Mittelzone, sei es auch an den Iotrechten Nebenseiten der Balken zu denken ist.').

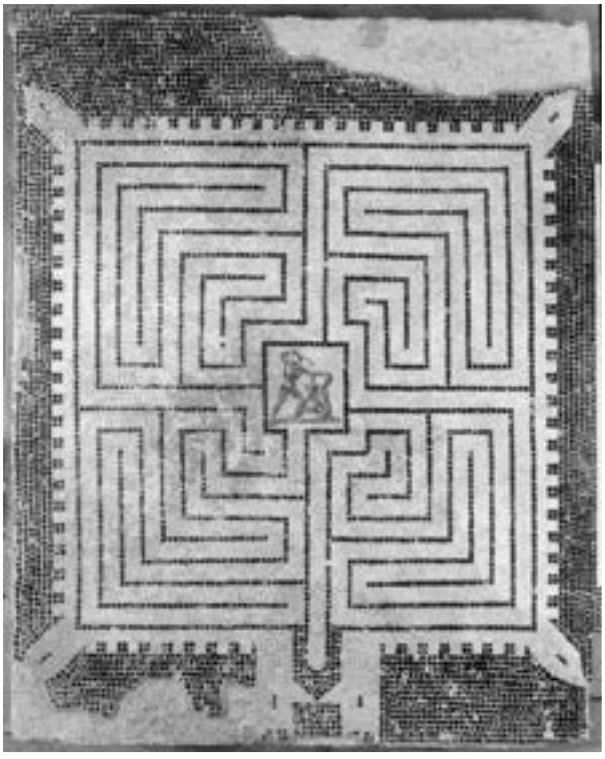


Fig. 9.16 Labyrinth mosaic from the Via Cadolini in Cremona, dating to the mid-1st c. BCE. Source: Passi Pitcher and Volontè 2010.

A corpus of mosaics with outer borders that unquestionably represent urban fortifications provides some context.[1216] Almost all of these concern mosaics with a central field containing a labyrinth, surrounded with a border of 'realistically' depicted fortifications (e.g. figs. 9.15 and 9.16).[1217] They are found almost primarily on the Italian peninsula, but some examples are known from north-Africa[1218], France[1219] and Serbia[1220]. Most scholars working on the Hellenistic-period crenellations have refuted the connection with these realistic fortification borders. Lavin, for instance, writes: *'As Mrs. Brown observes, the abstract design in these Hellenistic mosaics is not the same as the imitations of actual fortifications which appear in the borders of other, generally later, pavements.'*[1221] Indeed, most of these mosaics showing actual fortifications date to the mid-

[1216] Salvetti 2016, 587-609.
[1217] In general, see Daszewski 1977. Often these labyrinth mosaics contain a direct reference to Theseus and the Minotaur, in some cases depicting both (or either of the two) in the centre. In some cases, it also depicts Ariadne's thread as a single line of tesserae. See also Marec 1962, 1094-1112.
[1218] Slim 1980, 201-215 (Thysdrus, Tunisia); Daszewski 1977, 101, no. 1 pl. 39 (Annaba, Tunisia); Daszewski 1977, 102, n. 3, pl. 19 (Dellys, Algeria); Slim 1980, 207, n.2 (*Bulla Regia*, Tunisia); Daszewski 1977 123-124, n.52, pl. 18 (Henchir el Faouar, Tunisia); Daszewski 1977, 103, n.5 (Tametfoust, Algeria).
[1219] At Verdes, see Daszewski 1977, 108-109, n. 18, pl. 46.
[1220] At Stolac, now in the Museeum of Sarajevo. See Daszewski 1977,127-128, n. 59, pl. 41.
[1221] Lavin 1963, 194, n.15. See also Parlasca 1959, 130ff.

Imperial Roman period.[1222] There are, however, some mosaics with an outer band of actual fortifications that date to the late-Republican period which were either not known by Lavin and others or simply neglected in their analysis.[1223] These include a labyrinth mosaic belonging to a domestic context on the Piazza di S. Giovanni in Laterano (fig. 18), dated to 100-80 BCE[1224]; a labyrinth mosaic from the Via Cadolini in Cremona (fig. 19), dating to the mid-1st c. BCE[1225], a labyrinth mosaic from Calvatone, also dating to the mid-1st c. BCE[1226]; and a mosaic from the Via d'Azeglio in Ravenna, dating to the 1st c. BCE.[1227] All of these early examples were found on the Italian peninsula and derive from domestic contexts.[1228]

Contrary to Lavin, Salvetti argues that these fortified borders and the labyrinth designs derive from the crenellated borders and concentric designs of Hellenistic-period mosaics.[1229] The association of the motif and its labyrinth design with fortification and the urban centre would be a Roman innovation that developed around 100 BCE. Salvetti provides multiple, closely related layers of interpretation of this iconography which he convincingly contextualizes in Late-Republican Rome. First of all, this new conceptual frame emphasized an idea of the fortification as a delimitation of urban space, a division between a sacred interior and an uncertain exterior space.[1230] Connected to this symbolic aspect of the fortified wall are the depictions of fortifications as *pars-pro-toto* of an entire city, that accompany texts of Roman *agrimensores* (land surveyors).[1231] Furthermore, the depiction of such fortified urban centres in a *domus*-context, can be understood as a manifestation of the relation between the city and the *domus*, in which the collective serves as a magical, protective structure that protects the individual.[1232] The location of

[1222] Around two/thirds of Daszewski's catalogue dates to the late 1st c.- 3rd c. CE, and only a couple of mosaics date to the 4th c. CE or even later.
[1223] Note that also Zschätzsch's catalogue, here expanded on in appendix E, excluded these fortified borders.
[1224] Daszewski 1977, 129, n.62; Salvetti 2013 81-87; Salvetti 2016, 587-609. After restorations in 2014, the mosaic was transported to the Museo Centrale Montemartini in Rome.
[1225] Passi Pitcher and Volontè 2010, 53-60.
[1226] Volonté 2013.
[1227] Maioli 1995, 514.
[1228] Salvetti 2016, 597 with n. 26.
[1229] *Idem*, 599: '*non si può mettere in discussione il fatto che sia la rappresentazione della cinta muraria che quella del labirinto, abbiano un'origine ellenistica*', referring directly to the so-called *pyrgotos*-borders in mosaic and in *idem* 599 n. 37: '*Questa derivazione da modelli tessili mi sembra possa essere applicata solo nel caso del motivo di torri bicrome alternate*', he points specifically at the crenellation motif.
[1230] Salvetti 2016, 600: '*All'adozione di queste iconografie, la cultura romana associa ben presto il concetto di centro urbano, racchiuso entro le mura che ne enfatizzano il carattere sacro e ne sottolineano la funzione di delimitazione di spazio interno contrapposto a quello esterno dai contorni incerti*.' See also Rosada 1992, 124-139.
[1231] Salvetti 2016, 600: *'La stessa cortina muraria è del resto significativamente utilizzata nelle rappresentazioni che accompagnano i testi degli agrimensori romani, dove le città sono rappresentate non da un insieme di abitazioni, ma da una cinta turrita continua "simbolo riassuntivo dell'intero insediamento".'*, See also Rosada 1992, 130-131, with several examples.
[1232] Salvetti 2016, 600: '*Tra le varie interpretazioni proposte nell'esegesi dei pavimenti musivi di provenienza occidentale con questo tipo di rappresentazione, quella che ricorre nella maggior parte degli studi, è*

these mosaics in *triclinia* or, more often, in *atria* or vestibules which preceded the most private quarters, could also constitute an explicit declaration of the double social role of its commissioner, being, on the one hand, a public, institutional magistrate, and, on the other hand, a private *patronus*.[1233]

If Salvetti is right that the fortified borders on the Italian peninsula were related to the crenellations in earlier mosaics and developed already around 100 BCE, it is interesting to hypothesize what it would imply if the crenellations in Samosata indeed had the capacity to evoke actual fortifications. We might ask, for instance, to what extent the late Hellenistic Commagenean kings were interested in presenting themselves as city founders and builders of fortifications - a typical trait of Hellenistic kings in general - by depicting several mosaics as *pars-pro-toto* for their urban project. It is, for example, notable that Antiochos I Theos presents himself as *ktistēs* (founder and benefactor) in the inscription on the back of an early *dexiosis* stele (known as SO) found in Sofraz Köy, nearby Samosata.[1234] In inscription A, from the Great Cult Inscription on the rock wall of pedestal III at Arsameia on the Nymphaios, Antiochos mentions that Arsames, his forefather, had founded the city of Arsameia on the Nymphaios (A13-14), which consisted of two separate halves, hence creating an *'amphipolis'* (double city) and he emphasizes the importance of its fortification: '*Because of the fact that he* [=Arsames] *strengthened the unassailable fortification construction […] he created for the country a never-taken military basis and made for our lives a safe refugee in times of war*'(A 23-27).[1235] Antiochos furthermore emphasizes that, among other things, he improved the *defences* founded by his forefather. Interestingly, no evidence of ancient remains was found indicating any kind of urban foundation at Arsameia on the Nymphaios.[1236] It might be that the rhetorical claim of urban foundations and fortifications was more important than their actual materialization. If we assume that the crenellation motif was indeed a representation of fortified settlements, it would fit very well within such a royal strategy of self-representation.

If we further follow this though experiment, the crenellations as city fortifications enter into a relation with the actual fortification walls in and around Samosata. It could for instance be argued that the construction of the fortification walls around the city of Samosata, as well as its citadel wall – both executed in *opus reticulatum* – would have enforced the conceptual connection

ovviamente quella che riconosce nell'associazione labirinto-cinta muraria il rapporto tra città e domus*, con una ulteriore funzione magica e protettiva che coinvolge tanto il singolo quanto la comunità*.'

[1233] Grassigli 1998, n. 21.

[1234] Wagner and Petzl 1976; Brijder 2014, 141-144; translation by Crowther and Facella 2003, 71-74. For the use of *ktistēs* by Seleucid kings in relation to their city foundations, see Lauter 1986, 86; Hoepfner and Schwandner 1994, 230.

[1235] Translation by Crowther and Facella 2003, 71-74.

[1236] Hoepfner 1983, 58.

between the crenellation motif and the idea of fortification. A problematic issue in this regard is the chronology; as we have discussed in chapter 4, some structures in *opus reticulatum* – those on top of the *höyük* - most definitely post-date the palatial complex. The city walls in the lower city could date earlier and thus have existed contemporary to the mosaics but it seems more likely that all structures in *opus reticulatem* date to the early 1st c. CE during the reign of Antiochos IV.[1237] The siege of Samosata by Ventidius in 38 BCE, makes it however likely that an earlier fortification existed already in the mid-1st c. BCE.[1238] For the Roman period, we have indications that the city of Samosata was strongly associated with its fortification walls - similar to the pars-pro-toto function described above –, especially when we look at the only known fragment in which the 2nd c. CE author Lucian of Samosata describes his hometown.[1239] Furthermore, it could be questioned whether the crenellations in the palatial complex of Samosata could have connoted a similar declaration of the king's double social role: being, on the one hand, a mortal king residing within the limits of the city, and, on the other hand, a sovereign that resides among the gods, located on a high *höyük*, looking upon the city as one looks upon a crenellated mosaic.[1240]

9.4.2. The crenellated mosaics as representations of carpets

As already mentioned in paragraph 9.1.2, many authors have argued that the crenellation motif had strong connections to textile, describing it as a motif that originally derived from the outer borders of carpets.[1241] Furthermore, the elaborate concentric border design (which structurally

---

[1237] See chapters 4 and 7 (especially section 7.5).

[1238] For this siege, see Josph. *AJ* 14.15.8, 439-441.

[1239] '*However, any mistake in mere expression or arrangement is excusable; but when you come to fancy geography, differing from the other not by miles or leagues, but by whole days' journeys, where is the classical model for that? One writer has taken so little trouble with his facts — never met a Syrian, I suppose, nor listened to the stray information you may pick up at the barber's —, that he thus locates Europus: —'Europus lies in Mesopotamia, two days' journey from the Euphrates, and is a colony from Edessa.' Not content with that, this enterprising person has in the same book taken up my native Samosata and shifted it, citadel, walls, and all, into Mesopotamia, giving it the two rivers for boundaries, and making them shave past it, all but touching the walls on either side. I suspect you would laugh at me, Philo, if I were to set about convincing you that I am neither Parthian nor Mesopotamian, as this whimsical colony-planter makes me.'* (Lucian *Hist. conscr.* 24).

[1240] The tension and interdependency between the 'two antithetical societies' of court and city (Nielsen 1999F, 208) is well documented for Hellenistic courts; e.g. Strootman 2014, 55-57 on their symbiotic relationship. Strootman 2014, 57 claims: '(…) *through the use of architectural elements adapted from religious structural design, the palace precinct was shaped as a sacred* temenos *of sorts. Thus the sacredness of kingship was accentuated, and a mode was created of separating and connecting royal and civic space*.' The fact that the palace of Commagene was located on an elevated position within the city of Samosata illustrates this paradoxical strategy of contemporaneous separation and connection very well. Kropp 2013, 109 states: '*The fact that the palace was erected (…) on the acropolis hovering above the city among the main sanctuaries is already a good indicator of an absolute monarchy, matching the self-projection of Kommagenian rulers as kings and gods at the same time*.' It is impossible to assess whether this double social role was experienced as a tension by the royal Commagenean commissioners and whether there was any need to explicate this by means of its mosaics (like was the case in Late-Republican aristocratic, Roman *domus* contexts).

[1241] Wataghin 1990, 269-298: '*ossia dalla tradizionale rifinitura delle stoffe di lana che avevano un bordo detto* pyrgotos*';* Ghedini 1995, 129-141; Meyboom 1995, 366-367, n.3: '*the motif of the turreted border [i.e. crenellation] is essentially a textile pattern*'; Dunbabin 1999, 292: '*For others* [i.e. patterns] *a derivation from textiles is likely, despite the lack of surviving examples; patterns like crenellation and crowstep, where designs*

co-occurs with the crenellation motif) is also regarded as typical for carpets.[1242] However, the mosaics in Samosata are generally not explicitly interpreted as carpet imitations.[1243] I would like to make a distinction here between the notion of crenellated mosaics as *deriving from* carpets on the one hand, and the notion of such mosaics *contextually connoting* carpets on the other hand. The point is that the *contextual meaning* of the mosaics cannot be answered solely by looking for *origins;* the active role of (perceived) origins can only be assessed by analysing their meaning in

in two colours form complementary images, are particularly well suited to be executed in weaving.'; Steingräber 2006, 288: *'Textiles, some of them produced in eastern Asia and Persia, are certain to have played a large role in the transmission of ornamental motifs. Unfortunately, our knowledge of ancient textiles from the Mediterranean region, especially Etruscan textiles, is still very limited. (…) Crenellated friezes are an obvious example.'*; Martin 2017, 78 and n.43: '*A flattened tassel device derived from textiles (so-called "crenellation")'.* Salvetti 2016, 599: '*È opinione ormai ripresa in molti studi che il primo motivo* [i.e. crenellation] *derivi dall'arte tessile* (…) *e che nella sostituzione del tappeto con un pavimento più consistente e duraturo, se ne riprendano anche i motivi e le trame.'*; Steingräber *A number of the motifs found (…) in mosaics and in wall painting appear to have been based primarily on textile designs. Crenellated friezes are an obvious example.';* Note that Asher Ovadiah has attempted to pinpoint the origins of many decorative mosaic patterns (Ovadiah 1980) but his conclusions are generally considered unreliable because of methodological problems, see Salzmann 1983, 737-743; Note also that Studniczka 1914, 53 and Jacobthal 1938, 207 have both suggested that the crenellation motif occurred on ceramic decoration as well, but this has convincingly been refuted by Parlasca 1959, 129 n.7, who explains that in all the offered examples it concerns 'broad meanders', or 'U-Haken-Leiste', which are very common in mosaic decoration but something very different from the crenellation motif.

[1242]Rostovtzeff called the mosaics with concentric border decoration *'stone carpets'* (Rostovtzeff 1913-1914) and Bruneau used the term '*tapis central'* (Bruneau 1972, 7) to describe the concentric mosaics from Delos; Meyboom 1995, 366-367, n.3: '*Friezes are a natural pattern for textiles'*. Ling 1998, 20–21: '*It is often suggested that the motifs and general design reflect the influence of textiles, and one can well believe that there is some truth in this; surviving fragments of Greek textiles, and more especially representations of them in other works of art, confirm that they used motifs seen in the Olynthian mosaics.'* The scholarly debate about the general origin of (pebble) mosaics will be largely left out from this discussion, as it by now it is clear that mosaics developed already in the early Iron Age and most of its decorative patterns co-developed in a variety of media, something which cannot be said for the crenellation motif. Von Lorentz, Robinson and Bruneau argued that the (apparently) sudden appearance of pebble mosaics in the later 5th century meant a one-to-one *translation* from Near Eastern luxurious textiles into the more permanent medium of stone, see Von Lorentz 1937, 165-222; Robinson 1946, 337-338; Bruneau 1972, 37ff. Salzmann 1982 refuted the idea that the early pebble mosaics would be copies of carpets and argued that many of the iconographic motifs, especially the meander, wave crest, and palmette frieze are part of a decorative repertoire that by then already appeared on a wide variety of media, such as ceramics, architecture and, specifically, painting. Also, he argued that the development of decorated pebble mosaics was in fact much less sudden than often thought; examples from Gordion and Syria had already started in the 8th c. BCE. It is nowadays generally accepted that mosaicists probably drew their inspiration from multiple sources and that mosaics probably should not be uncritically considered just one-to-one 'copies' of carpets (see Martin 2017, also in relation to the origins of tessellated mosaics). Such sources seem to include textiles, architecture and painting, although the latter probably only developed in the 4th/3rd c. BCE. The idea that mosaic decoration would have been influenced by ceramics is however not very likely and has been largely refuted by Katherine Dunbabin: '(…) *it seems unlikely that a small-scale art such as vase-painting would have acted as a primary inspiration for work in a very diferent medium; and the two do not in fact have much in common. The rendering of the figures on earlier pavements is infinitely less sophisticated than on contemporary vase-painting, and seems to revert to a level of anatomical knowledge typical in that medium of a century or more earlier. (…) only in the treatment of vegetal ornament is there a comparable development in mosaic and vase-painting, which does suggest a relationship, though perhaps in the sense that both drew on a common source.'* (Dunbabin 1999, 10).

[1243] One notable exception is Annete Haug: '*A telling example is the fish mosaic of palace (IV) on the acropolis of Pergamon. The opulent frames do not simply compete visually with the central* emblema*, they also replicate the experience of a precious carpet and thus run counter to the impression of a basin*.' (Haug 2021).

context; a motif that did not originally derive from textile could still at some point in time come to connote textiles, while motifs deriving from textiles do not necessarily need to actively evoke the idea of textiles at all. This issue seems to be less problematic for the painted tomb ceilings with crenellation than for the mosaics (see appendix F), for which there is broad consensus that they actively connoted the idea of hanging textiles, arching over the tomb like a baldachin. In this paragraph, I will explore to what extent the crenellated mosaics in Samosata also actively referred to carpets.

Contextual conceptual networks are hard to reconstruct, especially when, as in this case, we lack ancient viewer-responses of people seeing and using the crenellated mosaics. However, we can analytically explore how these mosaics with crenellation were categorized in Samosata by looking at the two principles behind the way that conceptual relations are created in people's perception. Mol has argued how conceptual networks and categorizations are derivatives from the material world and how resemblance and co-occurrence of objects are the prime principles behind the creation of a category.[1244] I will now explore the question as to whether the mosaics from Samosata connoted carpets along these two principles, first looking at *resemblance* and then at *co-occurrence*.

[1244] See Mol 2017: '*These semantic relations in the brain work through a complex set of storage capabilities, linked to hierarchies, symbolism, and visual input. On the most superficial scale semantic relations can be defined on the basis of a couple of premises: resemblance (…) and co-occurrence. When things resemble each other they are likely to be linked (…) when things do not resemble, but usually occur together they are also linked*'. See also Stock 2010, 1951-1969.

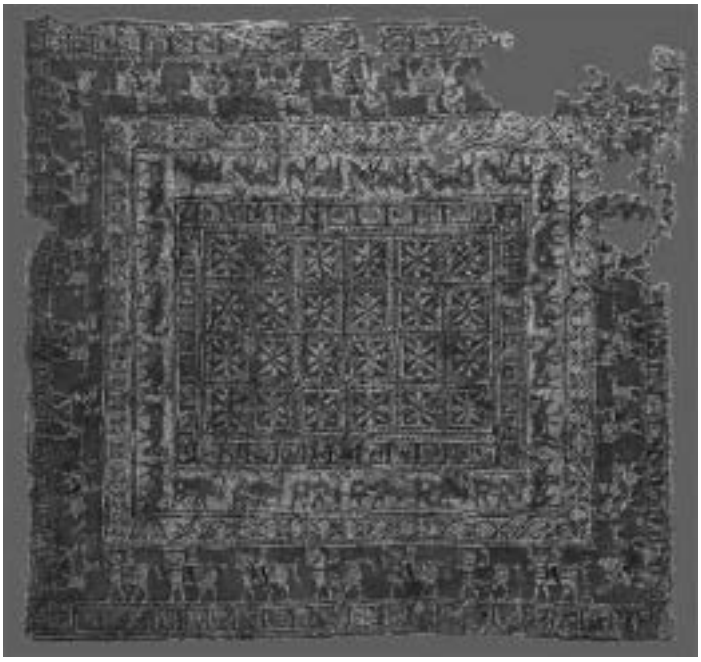


Fig. 9.17 The Pazyryk carpet, found in a Scythian grave in the Pazyryk Valley of the Altai Mountains in Siberia, 5th c. BCE. Source: Rudenko 1970, plate 147.

In terms of *resemblance*, it is hard to say whether the crenellated mosaics indeed looked very similar to carpets that existed in Samosata; no textile fragments were preserved in Samosata or Commagene. Looking at the wider corpus of preserved carpets and textiles from the ancient world, no comparanda for the crenellation motif can be found; none of the preserved textiles contains any decorative element resembling the crenellation motif. The elaborate concentric border design, however, does occur extensively in ancient carpets. A good example is the 5th c. BCE 'Pazyryk carpet', found in a Scythian grave in the Pazyryk Valley of the Altai Mountains in Siberia (fig. 9.17).[1245] The elaborate concentric design is placed around an inner field that contains identical square frames arranged in rows on a red ground, each filled by identical, star shaped ornaments. The concentric borders contain depictions of elk or deer, warriors on horses and square decorative elements.

[1245] It is a woollen carpet of 1,83 x 2,00 m., weaved in the so-called pile-weaving technique and executed in red and yellow fabric. This is one of the oldest and best preserved pieces of elaborately decorated textiles. The grave had been completely frozen, a condition that safeguarded the carpet's preservation. Based on radiocarbon dating it could be established that the carpet dated to the late 5th c. BCE. Because of its unicity, it is hard to establish whether this was a Scythian production or an import from elsewhere. It has been suggested that the carpet was produced in Armenia or Persia. Rudenko 1970, 205-6, 275, 295-304, pls. 147, 154, 174-177; Ghirshman 1964, figs. 466-470; Zick-Nissen 1966, 569-581. Exhibited in the Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg, inv. No. 1687/93.

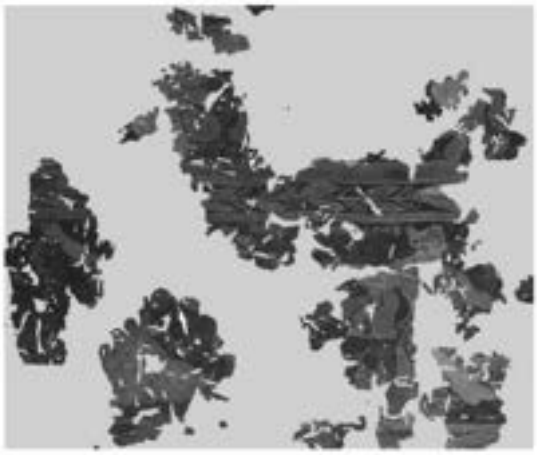


Fig. 9.18 Batik cloth from the Seven Brothers Barrow on the Taman peninsula, 4th c. BCE. Source: Gerziger 1975, 51, pl.24.

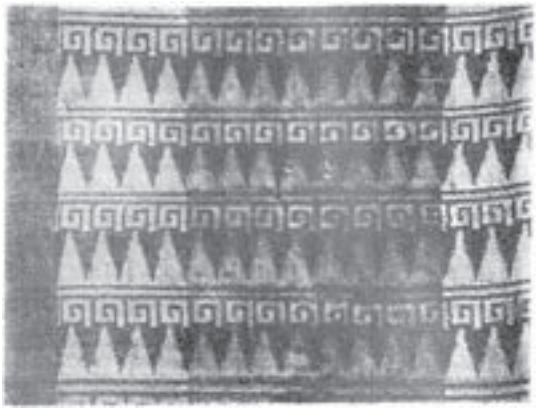


Fig. 9.19 Fragment of silk (150 x 18.5 cm.) from barrow no. 23 of the Xiongnu tombs of Noyon Uul in northern Mongolia (1st c. BCE). Source: Trever 1932, 38, pl. 19.3.

A later, 4th c. BCE example of textile with a concentric design is offered by the batik cloth from the Seven Brothers Barrow on the Taman peninsula, bordering the Krim, a site which is associated with the Greek Black sea colony of Panticapaeum (fig. 9.18).[1246] On it, we see a border with red figures on a dark background, interpreted as an Amazonomachy[1247], as well as a border with two foiled-garland decoration. For both this batik cloth and the Pazyryk carpet, the elaborate concentric border design clearly resembles the mosaic designs in Samosata. The type of decorative elements used within these borders is however very different from the crenellated mosaics. None of the decorative motifs used in Samosata are found on the carpets from Pazyryk

[1246]The textile was found in the Semibratny barrow 6 main sepulchre. Now in Saint Petersburg, The Hermitage VI.16. Cf. Gerziger 1975, 51-55, pls. 21-24.
[1247] Gerziger 1975, 51-55.

and the Taman peninsula. In the 1st c. BCE, however, we have evidence for the application of such decorative motifs on textiles. On a fragment of silk (150 x 18.5 cm.) from barrow no. 23 of the Xiongnu tombs of Noyon Uul in northern Mongolia, we see the use of the meander and the dog-tooth motif (fig. 9.19).[1248] Interestingly however, these motifs are placed in a layered border design instead of a concentric border design.

This discussion show that ancient textiles clearly resembled the elaborate concentric design of the mosaics in Samosata; especially their concentric border decoration is very reminiscent of the mosaics. The occurrence of decorative borders containing meanders and dog-tooth motifs on the Noyon Uul silk (see above) however also suggests that elaborate concentric designs with motifs like those in Samosata are conceivable very well for textiles in the 1st c. BCE.

The second principle by which conceptual networks are created, *co-occurrence*, provides us with a different perspective on the question whether the mosaics in Samosata actively connoted textiles. This argument draws on the discussion of paragraph 9.3.2, in which it was concluded that most regional palatial structures lacked any evidence for mosaics. In Dura Europos, Jebel Khalid, Iraq el-Amir and 'the Great Temple' of Petra, there is no evidence for mosaic floors, despite relatively extensive excavations and publications. The hard-packed earthen floors in Jebel Khalid might have been actual walking surfaces, but we might very well imagine such earthen floors to have been covered with carpets. In Dura Europos, fragments of tapestry were in fact found in the citadel tombs dating to the 1st c. CE, just after the abandonment of the palace.[1249] It seems therefore likely that, instead of mosaics, most palatial structures in the wider region around Samosata had decorated textiles on their floors. From this perspective, the co-occurrence of floors, elaborate concentric designs and particular motifs (such as the crenellation motif) could easily have developed a category in which mosaics and carpets were to some extent equated; they occurred in the same type of context and were treaded in the same manner. The important point is that, in a region where mosaics were ubiquitous, such as western Anatolia, the categorization of the mosaic as a form of textile would have been much less obvious. The capacity to connote textiles

[1248] The fragment was found in the lower beam of the external eastern corridor Trever 1932, 38, pl. 19/3. It is also discussed in the catalogue (no. 78) for the exhibition *Scythian, Persian and Central Asian Art from the Hermitage Collection*, *Leningrad* in Tokyo, published in 1969 by the Tokyo National Museum. The Xiognu tombs of Noyon Uul contain several fragments of well-preserved textile that predominantly show a concentric border style with decorative motifs reminiscent of the Pazyryk carpet. Most of the fragments show borders decorated with stylized floral motifs, lozenges, animals and warriors, all very much unlike the elaborate concentric mosaics from Samosata. See Trever 1932; Rudenko 1962; Miller and Brosseder 2017, 475-479; Eregzen 2011.

[1249] For a complete overview of the textiles from Dura Europos (many of them dating to the Roman and early Christian period), see Pfister and Bellinger 1945. The fragments from the four citadel tombs are Pfister and Bellinger 1945, 17, cat. nos. 1 and 2; p. 19, cat. no. 17; p. 26, cat. nos. 65 and 66; p. 30, cat. no. 90; and 34, cat. no. 116. These fragments are now in the Yale University Art Gallery. For the excavation report of these tombs, see Matheson 1992, 121-140.

was more activated in a region where mosaics could not be their own category because of their rare appearance.

Based on the above, we could cautiously conclude that it is not unlikely that the crenellated mosaics in Samosata connoted an idea of carpets. These mosaics clearly *resembled* the elaborate concentric designs on textiles and both media accommodated similar decorative motifs, be it that the crenellation motif is lacking. The rare occurrence of such mosaics in the wider region around Commagene suggests that the mosaics were likely also to be categorized along the principle of *co-occurrence* and held as a type of floor decoration similar to carpets. In this way, the mosaics would have indeed been interpreted as 'stone carpets', something which would inherently stimulate the urge for comparison between the two different media. The hard, cold and stable character of the mosaics would have been perceived as a radical change from the soft, portable and more perishable nature of the carpets. The production and trade of textile is attested early in Commagene and seems to have been a trade-mark product[1250]; if it was indeed the case that the use of mosaics was perceived as a shift away from textiles it most probably meant a shift away from an object-type that was deeply ingrained in Commagenean culture. Such a radical shift in the material repertoire of Commagene fits well with the overall character of the Commagenean cultural program in the 1st c. BCE.[1251]

[1250] Gaspa 2017, 85: '*The strengthening of trade contacts with Anatolia in the Sargonid Age in the field of imported textiles is also confirmed by a Sennacherib's letter mentioning wool from the land of Kummuh, corresponding to classical Commagene'*. In this letter from Sennacherib to Sargon, the tribute paid by Kummuh to the Assyrian king is described as born by seven teams of mules and including red wool. See: SAA 1 33: 19 r. 3. In another mid-Iron Age source, the Assyrian king Sargon II besieges and captures the city of Kummuh (later Samosata) after king Mutallu of Kummuh rebels against him in 708 BCE. From the so-called 'Display Inscription' of Salons IV, VII, VIII and X in the Assyrian palace of Khorsabad, we know that the (Iron Age) palace of Kummuh (Samsat) was plundered, the spoils of war contain '*150 chariots, 1500 cavalry, 20,000 bowmen, 1000 bearers of the shield and bearers of the land*' but also *'horses, mules, asses, camels, cattle and sheep […] gold, silver, garments of brightly coloured wool, and linen garments, blue and purple garments, elephant hides, ivory, maple and boxwood, and the treasures of his palace'*. See Luckenbill 1927, 23 paragraph 45. Note that the inscription implies that the city under discussion is Melid but Hawkins 2000, 285 and n.50 argue convincingly that it concerns Kummuh/Samosata. A third text, of less certain date but still dating to the mid-Iron Age, mentions merchants from Kummuh in Harran, selling skins and linen. See Fales and Postgate 1995, 26 and xix-xx.

[1251] Note also how the concept of 'indestructibility' and aspirations to eternity plays a major role in the ruler cult of Antiochos I. In the Great Cult inscription, he states: '*And I have taken forethought to lay the foundation of this sacred tomb, which is to be indestructible by the ravages of time'* (N 36-53); '*the fortunately preserved outer form of my person, preserved to ripe old age'* (N 36-53); ''*the soul beloved by God has been sent to the heavenly thrones of Zeus Oromasdes, rest through immeasurable time*' (N 36-53); *'a holy law, which shall be binding upon all generations of mankind who in the immeasurable course of time* (…) *shall successively be destined to dwell in this land*' (N 105-124). Transl. F. K. Dörner, see Sanders 1996, 206, 217).

9.4.3 The crenellation motif as a celestial representation with divine connotations

Building on the tentative conclusions of the last paragraph, we might furthermore explore what these 'stone carpets' in Samosata connoted on a more symbolic or even cultic level in the royal cultural and cultic program of 1st c. BCE Commagene.

One particular aspect of the Commagenean ruler cult that is emphasized time and again in the monuments and inscriptions of the *hierothesia* and *temene* is the *king's spatial and physical vicinity to the (sacred) heavens*. The colossal statues of Antiochos I enthroned amidst the gods on both terraces of Nemrut Dağı (possibly also in Arsameia on the Nymphaios) are a strong illustration of this claim. The choice of deities makes no mistake about the scope of his ambitions; especially Zeus-Oromasdes and Apollo-Mithras-Helios-Hermes make a claim to universality and a vicinity to the heavenly throne (Zeus) and the sun (Apollo).[1252] Obviously, the high location of the king's tomb (or cenotaph[1253]), is described in the Great Cult Inscription as '*in close proximity to the heavenly throne'*(36) and this anticipates the moment the king's '*soul beloved by God has been sent to the heavenly thrones of Zeus-Oromosdes*' (36-53). A similar argument can be made for the elevated location of the Commagenean palace in Samosata, as already discussed above. Furthermore, the *dexiosis* reliefs also explicitly make a claim for the king's close vicinity to the heavens. On the back of the *dexiosis* relief from Seleukeia-on-the-Euphrates/Zeugma, Antiochos claims: '*I set up in sacred stone of a single compass alongside images of the deities the representation of my own form receiving the benevolent right hands of the gods, preserving a proper depiction of the undying concern with which they have often extended their* heavenly hands *to my assistance in my struggles'*(my emphasis).[1254] The relief depicts Antiochos I shaking hands with Apollo-Mithras-Helios-Hermes, emphasising the physical bond between the king and the heavenly spheres. A last example of Antiochos I's claim to a physical and spatial vicinity to the heavens is the so-called lion-horoscope, which emphasizes the entangled nature of the king's persona to the heavens; his life was literally *written in the stars*.[1255]

[1252] Many Hellenistic monarchies reinforced their claim to universality by associating their terrestrial monarchy with the heavenly kingship of Zeus. See Holt 1999, Strootman 2007, 247-248, Strootman 2013. In Hellenistic dynastic thinking, the dream of a world empire was closely related to the promise of a new golden age, for which the symbol of the sun was of prime importance. See Strootman 2007, 247.

[1253] Versluys 2017a suggests that it could well be that the *hierothesion* did not in fact contain the king's dead body.

[1254] Crowther and Facella 2003, 47-48.

[1255] The lion horoscope was found on the at the northern side of the West terrace of Nemrut Dağı. The stele shows a lion that strides to the right but a head that turns to the spectator in a frontal manner. On his chest a moon crescent is depicted and several eight-pointed stars are rendered across the stele's surface. Three larger sixteen-pointed planets (Jupiter, Mercury and Mars, mentioned in the accompanying inscription) are placed above the back of the lion. The iconography shows the constellation of Lion and is generally interpreted as the *'frozen picture of the positions of the heavenly bodies at a certain moment at a certain date.'* (Versluys 2017a, 65). There is no consensus about the exact date that is meant nor its significance, but most

How could the 'stone carpets' have played a role within this ubiquitous message of the king's spatial and physical vicinity to the heavens? Could the mosaics indeed have played an active role in the royal cultic program of 1st c. BCE Commagene? A possible answer to these questions might lie in the specific role that carpets had clearly developed throughout Eurasian tomb contexts. Here, they were hung as baldachins against the ceiling or, as we have already mentioned, painted as such on the ceilings.[1256] This tradition already starts as early as the 6th c. BCE in Etruria and can be found across Eurasia in a variety of forms. It has been convincingly argued by Monica Baggio and Monica Salvadori that these baldachins had a sacred connotation; they evoked a celestial ambience in which the divine heavens guarded over the dead and delimited a sacred space.[1257] In fact, there are at least two examples of preserved textiles found in tombs that contained celestial representations, with star and moon motifs in the central field, making this connotation very clear.[1258] In descriptions and depictions of Persian royal rituals, the tent was also considered a celestial symbol, under which, for instance, not every servant was allowed to even stand.[1259]

---

scholars agree that the horoscope presents a date that is strongly connected to the king's life, either his birth or his ascension of the throne.

[1256] 1) The corpus of ancient *textiles found in tombs* is too large to discuss here in detail. Some well-preserved fragments are discussed already in paragraph 8.2.2. Other important Hellenistic fragments derive from the so-called tomb of Euridice in Vergina, where several pieces of textile were found in the antechamber of the tomb (Guimier-Sorbets 2001, 218). The tomb contained nails still fixed to the stuccoed walls which were most probably used to hang the textile against the ceiling. 2) *Painted textiles* were, inter alia, found in tombs of Alexandria (e.g. Mustafa Kamel (Pasha) Tomb II and Tomb III; Anfouchy Tomb V, 5, and 2; Anfouchy Tomb III, see Brown 1957), Etruria (e.g. Tomb 5512 (appendix F: cat. B2)/Tomb of the Hunter/Tomb of the Tapestry/ Tomb of the Anina Family in Tarquinia, in general, see Steingräber 2006), Capua (e.g. tomba 8 San Prisco, see Benassai 2001, 77ff., fig. 98.); Macedonia (app. F: cat. B5, the Tomb of Lyson and Kallikles in Lefkadia, see Miller 1993, 45; Alabé 2002, 248; Brecoulaki 2006, 230), Delos (app. F: cat. B4, Maison des Sceaux, see Alabé 2002) and Crimea (app. F: cat. B1) Mount Vasjurin tomb 1, see Rostovtzeff 2004). In the latter painting, the relation with carpets is indicated specifically by the tassels that adorn each corner. A link might be made between the painted tomb ceilings and the paintings on a wooden sarcophagus found in Magdola in the Egyptian Fayum, dated to 250-200 BCE (app. F: cat. B3, see Edgar 1905, 10, pl. 5 (CG No. 33123)), which contains an elaborate concentric design and a crenellated border.

[1257] Baggio and Salvadori 2017, 301: '*Il velario dunque sembra costituire un topos del repertorio decorativo dei sistemi parietali architettonico-illusionistici, veicolando un messaggio strettamente connesso all'importanza dello spazio che esso delimita: il tendaggio (…) può alludere alla sacralità dell'ambient*e'. Guimier Sorbets 2002, 159-180: '*Dans quelques cas où elle est conservée, la représentation de la tenture peut être peinte sur le plafond, soit à l'intérieur du* loculus *soit à l'extérieur, au-dessus de l'ouverture. On retrouve ainsi à Alexandrie, la fonction symbolique très forte du baldaquin funéraire, marquant de façon pérenne le statut héroïque du défunt.*'

[1258] See the so-called Pazyryk-carpet discussed here in paragraph 9.4.2, which is decorated with many yellow star-shaped ornaments in the central red field (see Rudenko 1970, plate 147). Tomb C in Sédès (late 4th/early 3rd c. BCE), near Thessaloniki was also adorned with a star-motif, see Brecoulaki 2006, 315- 316.

[1259] Paspalas 2005, 73: '*The enthroned Great King, always shown in monumental art beneath a canopy (…) must have been one of the most important images of the royal Persian repertoire. (…) There is no doubt that the canopy over the Great King's throne played an integral part in the projection of his majesty. (…) The image of the enthroned king travelled widely*.' Paspalas for instance refers to the Audience scenes of the so-called Treasury reliefs which were originally on show in the central fields of the Apadana's northern and eastern stairways (see Paspalas 2005, 73 fig.1). Here we see the king seated underneath a canopy, that is also hovering above a dignitary who is received by the king, the crown prince and two other dignitaries. The fact that the guards are placed beyond the canopy suggests that the hanging textile delimited a hierarchical, royal space. See also Schmidt 1953, 167, pls. 119, 121.-123; and Tilia 1972, 183-190 fig. 3 (reconstruction) and figs. 6-7. Calandra 2008, 50 suggests that '*è proprio la funzione simposiastica del padiglione che*

With these connotative capacities in mind, it becomes an attractive idea that the crenellated mosaics in Samosata were in fact representations of celestial stone carpets which functioned in a royal rhetoric that emphasized the king's spatial and physical vicinity to the heavens. This rhetoric was so ubiquitous in the 1st c. BCE royal context of Commagene that it could have easily activated the capacity of the mosaics to evoke such celestial connotations. The delimitating and hierarchizing function of both the tomb baldachins and the Persian royal canopies - making a distinction between a sacred royal space and an outer non-sacred space - is reminiscent of the conclusions from paragraph 9.4.1, in which the crenellated mosaic as a fortification was discussed. It is not unlikely that the crenellated mosaics in the palatial complex of Samosata functioned in a similar delimitating way, making a clear distinction between spaces of different hierarchies that gave access to an exclusive social group.[1260]

9.4.4 The crenellation motif as a form of Persianism

A last virtual conceptual capacity of the crenellation genealogy regards its cultural evocation. As we have seen extensively in the previous chapter, many scholarly interpretations argue that the mosaics of Samosata were representative of either Greek ethnicity or Greek cultural identity.[1261] These claims are generally based on ideas about the origin of mosaics, their design and the decorative motifs as well as their geographic spread. However, they do not so much assess what it actually was that they mean with *Greek* as a cultural concept in the Commagenean context. In chapters 2 and 3, I have deconstructed the pre-theoretical reduction of material culture to merely a cultural label, and I have shown that the genealogical relations of the crenellation motif also opens up many non-representational capacities. However, it cannot be denied that cultural concepts *did* exist as explicit cultural constructs, in antiquity in general and in Commagene specifically. Therefore, I will here explore the radical alternative hypothesis that, instead of evoking an idea of 'Greekness', the crenellations evoked an idea of 'Persia'.

In his monograph on Nemrut Dağı, Versluys demonstrates how Antiochos I explicitly appropriated 'Persian elements' into his cultural program. In his ancestral gallery, Antiochos for instance claims descent from the Persian kings through his paternal line, claiming a lineage that harkened back to

attribuisce sacralità al luogo e che lo qualifica a tutti gli effetti come "una sorta di temenos" ritagliato nel palazzo reale e delimitato dall'elemento mobile dei tendaggi.'.

[1260] See paragraph 10.3 for an exploration of the use of these mosaic rooms in the Commagenean ruler cult and a discussion of the evidence for social differentiation in the cultic banquets of the ruler cult.

[1261] Westgate 2002, 242: *Although some of the public monuments commissioned by the Kommagenian regime reflected the ruling dynasty's mixed Greek-Persian origins, their choice of interior decor seems designed to stress the Greek side of their cultural identity.;* Kropp 2013, 109: '*The mosaic pavement and wall paintings are rooted in a Greek artistic tradition*' Like Westgate, Kropp too understands these Greek credentials as standing '*in stark contrast to the public image of Antiochos I*'(109).

Persian king Darius I.[1262] Another example of Persian elements derives from the inscriptions on the back of the colossal statues at Nemrut as well as on several *dexiosis* stelai. From these we know that the gods venerated in the ruler cult were granted double, triple or even quadruple names containing both Greek and Persian elements: Zeus-Oromasdes, Apollo-Mithras-Helios-Hermes, Artagnes-Herakles.[1263] Furthermore, several of the colossal statues were supposed to 'look Persian': the dress of the figures features boots, trousers, a long-sleeved tunic and a cloak. In the Great Cult Inscription, it is even explicitly stated that the king '*decorated it* [the *hierothesion*] *with representations of their* [the gods'] *forms by all the kinds of art that the ancient traditions of Persians and Greeks–the fortunate roots of my ancestry–had handed down to me'*.[1264]

Versluys convincingly argues that we have to understand these explicit appropriations of 'Persian elements' as forms of 'Persianism': '*ideas and associations revolving around Persia and appropriated in specific contexts for specific (socio-cultural and socio-political) reasons*'.[1265] In the volume *Persianism in Antiquity*, it becomes apparent that this cultural strategy was widely available throughout Eurasia from the Persian period onward. From the overview provided in this volume it is clear that the goals and concepts connected to 'Persianism' as well as the forms through which such 'doing Persian' could be evoked can take a variety of shapes and function in very contextual ways. Also, Versluys explains that the elements used to evoke 'Persia' did not in any way need to refer to *actual* origins or realities in Persia itself. Persianism thus should be considered a cultural construct that had acquired a life of its own, far beyond the chronological and geographical boundaries of the Achaemenid empire. Through time, it seems that this cultural construct had become an exceptionally strong cultural currency that allowed to express specific concepts and evoke specific atmospheres and senses. Versluys demonstrates that Antiochos I made use of Persianism within the context of active dynastic legitimation, making use of the royal prestige of the (idea of the) Achaemenids.[1266]

[1262] Versluys 2017a, 60.
[1263] See the Great Cult Inscription (N), Sanders 1996, 206-217.
[1264] N24-34: '*After taking over my paternal dominion (archē) […] I proclaimed that the kingdom (basileia) subject to my throne should be the common dwelling place of all the gods; and I decorated it with representations of their forms by all the kinds of art that the ancient traditions (logos) of Persians and Greeks–the fortunate roots of my ancestry–had handed down to me, and honored them with sacrifices and festivals in accordance with the original law (nomos) and common practice (ethos) of all mankind*'. (Translation from Sanders 1996, 206-217).
[1265] Versluys 2017a, 215. For a thorough discussion of the concept of Persianism as well as a wide chronological overview of examples see Strootman and Versluys 2017.
[1266] Versluys 2017a, 219. Versluys shows that this was in no way a unique thing to do in the Late-Hellenistic period. He refers to Mithridates of Pontus who, in 89 BCE, also boasted about his royal Persian dynastic genealogy (Just. *Epit.* 38.7.1) and the royal Ptolemaic ritual known as the Donations of Alexandria in which Alexander, one of the children of Cleopatra and Mark Antony, was dressed in explicitly Persian attire to stress rulership over the east and suggest dynastic claims (Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 54).

On the basis of the glocal genealogy of the crenellation motif presented in this chapter, a link with a concept of 'Persia' can be explored. It should of course readily be acknowledged that the distribution patterns of the crenellation motif and the elaborate concentric design are largely confined to the Mediterranean; almost no examples of crenellation were found in the areas that were originally inside Persian territory, except perhaps for the Commagenean mosaics. However, the capacity to evoke textiles, baldachins and canopies, explored in 9.4.2 and 9.4.3, could be used as an analytical stepping stone to now explore the crenellation's potential evocation of Persianism.

First of all, the elaborately decorated carpets were often imported from the east and were therewith connected to an idea of 'eastern' luxuries (*luxuria asiatica*).[1267] This was also true for the painted textile imitations, which, according to Steingräber '*potrebbe essere un ricordo delle contemporanee importazioni di tessuti dall'area orientale.*'[1268] The concept of such eastern luxuries was strongly tied to an idea about Persia and, specifically, Persian royalty, one that was re-used and further developed time and again to create a negative stereotype of the 'Persian' cultural Other. Already in the late 4th century, Theophrastus from Lesbos makes a direct link between tapestry and Persian soldiers in his ridiculing description of an 'obsequious character': '*You can be sure he is apt to keep a pet monkey, and buys a pheasant, and some Sicilian pigeons, and dice made from gazelle horns, and oil flasks from Thurii of the rounded sort, and walking sticks from Sparta of the twisted sort, and a tapestry embroidered with pictures of Persian soldiers* (…)'.[1269] The description mentions a variety of odd and exotic elements that seem to portray the 'obsequious character' as eccentric and indulgent in luxury. Like several of the other 'characters' described by Theophrastus, the obsequious character is a negative stereotype and aims to represent anything but the Greek male ideal. Within this description, the role of the carpet with pictures of Persian soldiers embroidered onto it is to enforce this strategy of cultural Othering. Through this, the carpet is connected to a negative image of luxury and effeminate Persian soldiers.

In his *Deipnosophistae,* Athenaeus of Rhodes offers a wide variety of descriptions of 'eastern luxuries' and, in many of them, carpets play an important role. Although Athenaeus was a 3rd c. CE author, he often derives his descriptions from more ancient authors, which makes it a useful

[1267] Baggio and Salvadori 2017, 297: '*In sintesi, (…), le sontuose tende sono simbolicamente connesse all'immaginario tipico della luxuria orientale*. (…)*le tende d'arredo vengono comunemente associate dalle fonti ad una consuetudine tipicamente orientale connessa ad ambienti prestigiosi.'* Note that this concept played a large role in a rhetoric about the downfall of Roman society by means of the import of foreign objects: Plin. *HN*, 33.148*: 'Asia primum devicta luxuriam misit in Italiam, siquidem L. Scipio in triumph transtulit argenti caelati*'. Plin. *HN* 34, 34: '*Ad devictam Asiam, unde luxuria';* Livy *Ab urbe cond.* 39, 6, 7: '*luxuriate enim peregrinae origo ab exercitu asiatico invecta in urbem est*'; August. *De civ. D.* 3.21: *'tunc primum…Asiatica luxuria Romam omni hoste peior inrepsit'.* In general, see Gruen 1992.

[1268] Steingräber 1985, n. 51, 301.

[1269] Theophr. *Char.* 5.9: '*ἀμέλει δὲ καὶ πίθηκον θρέψαι δεινὸς καὶ τίτυρον κτήσασθαι καὶ Σικελικὰς περιστερὰς καὶ δορκαδείους ἀστραγάλους καὶ Θουριακὰς τῶν στρογγύλων ληκύθους καὶ βακτηρίας τῶν σκολιῶν ἐκ Λακεδαίμονος καὶ αὐλαίαν Πέρσας ἐννφασμένην*.'

source for our understanding of the place of carpets within the cultural concept of Persianism in the Hellenistic period. One of these earlier authors is Kallixeinos of Rhodes (writing ca. 200 BCE), who describes the luxury tent of Ptolemaios II. In it, he refers to the decoration of the beams of the tent also being *πυργωτα*, in this case likely indicating a crenellated decoration in red or purple.[1270] In another passage, Athenaeus describes : '*And Phylarchus, in the twenty-third book of his History, and Agatharchides of Cnidus, in the tenth book of his History of Asia, say that the companions also of Alexander gave way to the most extravagant luxury. (…) Cleitus, who was surnamed The White, whenever he was about to transact business, used to converse with everyone who came to him while walking about on a purple carpet.*'[1271] A passage written by Phylarchos (writing in the second half of the 3rd c. BCE) and cited by Athenaeus, describes the public audience at the court of Alexander in a tent, illustrating how 'Persian' Alexander had become: '*His tent was furnished with one hundred couches and was supported by fifty gilded pillars. The roof was covered with carpets embroidered with gold thread and sumptuously ornamented. Inside first five hundred Persian* melophoroi *stood, dressed in colourful robes of purple and yellow.'*[1272] The carpets placed on the roof would have had the effect of a baldachin, which referred to the Persian Great Kings' audience tents.

A last example is offered by Philo of Alexandria, a Hellenistic Jewish author writing in the late 1st c. BCE and early 1st century CE, who again makes an explicit connection between Persian royal luxury and tapestry: '*For those physicians of the body, when a man favoured by fortune is sick, even though he be the Great King himself, take no notice of the colonnades, of the men's apartments, of the ladies' bowers, of the pictures, of the silver and gold whether coined or uncoined, of the accumulation of goblets or tapestry work and the rest of the magnificence which adorns kingship*.'[1273] The passage imagines a hypothetical palatial context that, by mentioning the 'Great King', is immediately placed

[1270] Ath. 5.25.5. Rouveret 1989, 196-197; Miller 1993, 45 n.53; Guimier-Sorbets 2001. Studniczka 1914, 52-53: '(…) *mit einem Muster nach Art einer turmbesetzten Festungsmauer geschmückt, das in unserem Falle rot oder purpurn, sei es nur an beiden Seiten der weißen Mittelzone, sei es auch an den Iotrechten Nebenseiten der Balken zu denken ist*.'

[1271] Ath. 12.55.

[1272] The complete passage continues as follows: '*behind them no less than one thousand archers were standing, some in flame-coloured clothing and many in dark blue clothes. In front of these were five hundred Macedonian* arguraspides. *In the centre of the pavilion stood a golden throne on which Alexander was seated, giving audience; at either side [of the throne] were his* somatophulakes*, standing close by him. Outside the pavilion the elephant contingent was arrayed in a circle, fully equipped, and also a thousand Macedonians in Macedonian costume, besides ten thousand Persians and a large company of five hundred who were all clad in purple, as Alexander had granted them permission to wear such clothes. And the number of friends (*philoi*) and guards was so large that nobody dared to approach Alexander; such was the majesty of his presence'* (Ath. 539e-f). Athenaeus mentions that Phylarchos' source was a certain Douris, who drew upon the Histories of Alexander of Chares of Mytilene, Alexander's chamberlain.

[1273] Philo *CW* 2, 17, 386-390: '*ἐκεῖνοι μὲν γάρ, ἐπειδάν τις εὐτυχὴς νοσήσῃ, κἂν ὁ μέγας ᾖ βασιλεύς, πάνθ' ὑπερβάντες τὰ περίστωα, τοὺς ἀνδρῶνας, τὰς γυναικωνίτιδας, γραφάς, ἄργυρον, χρυσόν, ἄσημον, ἐπίσημον, ἐκπωμάτων ἢ ὑφασμάτων πλῆθος, τὸν ἄλλον τῶν βασιλέων ἀοίδιμον κόσμον*'. Translated by F. H. Colson. LCL 363, 468-469.

in a royal Persian setting. The rhetorical goal of the imagined space is to evoke the idea of ultimate Persian luxury, in which tapestry could clearly not lack.

Fig. 9.20 Drawing of the painting on the interior of a shield held by a Persian combatant on the Alexander Sarcophagus. Source: Von Graeve 1987, 134, fig.3.

In visual culture too, the connection between the idea of the Persian king (Persianism) and carpets was developed outside Persia itself. A good example is offered by the Alexander sarcophagus, found in a cemetery near Sidon (Lebanon) and dated to the late 4th c. BCE (see fig.9.20).[1274] On the interior of a shield of a Persian warrior we see the vague traces of a painting depicting the Great King enthroned underneath a canopy. The sarcophagus clearly has a strong preference for Alexander and it dates to after the fall of the Persian empire and the death of Dareios III. As such, the depiction is definitely a form of Persianism, referring to Persia and Persian royalty rather as an idea than an actual reality.

All these textual and visual examples underline that in the 1st c. BCE Mediterranean world, textiles and textile imitations had acquired the capacity to evoke a concept of Persia. If we accept that the crenellation motif evoked an idea of carpets, a next potential capacity might be the evocation of a form of Persianism that was about royal luxury. As we have seen, this cultural strategy was in fact

[1274] Paspalas 2005, 74-76.

explicitly selected and applied enthusiastically in the royal cultural program of Commagene. Could it therefore be that Antiochos, in his wish to evoke Persia, selected a visual element, the crenellated mosaic, that had developed into something quintessentially Persian? Such Persianism would have in fact fitted well in the context of palatial space, where the king's audiences could benefit from an evocation of Persian royal grandeur.

9.5 Conclusions

This chapter has explored the relational capacities of the crenellation motif as a vibrant element in the palatial complex of Samosata. It has done so by taking very seriously the glocal genealogy of this decorative motif. As such, it has become clear that, when the crenellation motif was selected and applied in Samosata, it had already undergone a long Afro-Eurasian development since the 3rd c. BCE. Through a comparative approach, it could be argued that the selection of the crenellation motif in Commagene largely adhered to the demands of the glocal object type. It was argued that the very conscious adoption of a global cultural element fits well in the wider royal cultural strategy of Late-Hellenistic Commagene and in fact contextualizes some of its elements. Moreover, it has been demonstrated that the regional distribution pattern of the crenellation motif afforded the motif to actively contribute to a distinctive visual character of the Commagenean royal contexts. It has been argued that this again should be understood within a royal cultural strategy that indeed seems to have targeted such visual distinctiveness. This strategy moreover seems to have gone hand in hand with a strategy of cultural canon building, in which repetition and coherence of visual culture was of prime importance. The specific global and regional distribution patterns of the crenellation motif as well as its inherent replicable character, afforded the motif with the ideal object capacities to actively contribute to such strategies of cultural canon building. This capacity was clearly enthusiastically taken advantage of by applying the motif in six mosaics in Commagene, both in Samosata and Arsameia on the Nymphaios. In section 9.4, I have explored four different conceptual capacities that might have been activated by the crenellated mosaics in the palatial complex of Samosata: the capacity of these crenellations to connote architectural fortifications; textiles, the royal vicinity to the heavens; and 'an idea of Persia' (*Persianism*). In all cases, it should be underlined that these have been explorations rather than definitive interpretations.