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May 12, 2011

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Abstract

This research paper focuses on the mosaic art found in Cyprus that was created during the period of Late Antiquity, which for the purposes of my paper is defined as the 2nd to 6th century A.D. In the study of Cypriot history, mosaics are not simple pieces of art, but invaluable historical evidence that demonstrates the shift in societal values in the transition between two drastically different eras on the island, pagan and Christian. During Late Antiquity the ideals of society moved from pagan emphasis on outward action to inner contemplation and theological meditation. Coinciding with the advent of Christianity in the Roman Empire, earthquakes shook Cyprus in the mid 4th century. The styles in which the inhabitants chose to repair and rebuild these mosaics are of particular interest and reflect deep cultural and societal changes. Through the study of mosaics, scholars can better understand the complex relationship between pagan and Christian groups and learn more about their interactions in a larger context.
Each year thousands of tourists visit the mosaic art in Cyprus. When hobby historians gaze upon these ancient works, they see merely a picture. Granted it is a beautiful picture full of color and dynamic action; however, the majority miss the most significant aspect of these intricate works. Mosaics pavements are created by the careful assembly of small squares of stone or glass. This method gives the finished work the appearance of an image or a puzzle. Mosaics are literally a puzzle in that the artisan must carefully assemble different pieces to form a complete picture; yet they are also a puzzle in that they conceal a deeper significance that escapes casual observation. Since the early 20th century, scholars have been attempting to piece together various clues offered by mosaic art. Historians have gone from analyzing pavements in
according to a strict artistic perspective\(^1\) to dissecting them in a chemical laboratory.\(^2\)

Scholars have also shown that mosaics demonstrate shifts in ideology and mentality, especially in regions like Late Antique Cyprus where there is an abundance of surviving pavements. As reflections of the societies that produced them, these remnants tell the story of dramatic shifts in society, most notably, the changing nature of the relationship between Christian and pagan groups during this period.

The Greeks created the first examples of true mosaic art in the 4\(^{th}\) century B.C.E. (Figure 1) using small pebbles to form geometric designs and shapes,\(^3\) but these early models soon developed into a more complex art of figures and designs. By the time of the Roman Empire the materials used to create mosaics had progressed from simple pebbles to colored stones and glass known as \textit{tesserae},\(^4\) and the methods of construction, with layers of rubble, mortar, and terracotta, had become standardized.\(^5\) Indeed, in the Roman period, mosaic images showing designs and patterns represented beautiful works of art that not only complimented their architectural surroundings,\(^6\) but highlighted the societies that made them.

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\(^4\) Hornblower and Spawforth 1996, 996.

\(^5\) Even before the actual design of the mosaic was laid out, there was a great deal of work involved in laying the physical foundation. First the craftsman set down a layer of fine rubble, known as the \textit{statumen}, in order to create a level surface for the mosaic. The \textit{rudus}, which is a well compacted mortar normally nine inches in thickness, followed. An aggregate of terracotta, or \textit{nucleus}, at least six inches thick was then laid on top of the \textit{rudus}. At this point the conglomeration of various leveling methods was complete and the mosaicist could proceed with actually creating the design. Occasionally the artists would paint or incise cartoons on the top layer in order to facilitate the laying of tile. Only after all of this detailed preparation could the craftsman begin creating the final design using \textit{tesserae}, small tiles made of stone or glass.


\(^6\) The modern viewer perceives the mosaic in a manner fundamentally different from that of someone living during Late Antique period. If a museum displays its sampling of mosaics on the floor, they are roped off and the observer is forced to view the piece from a strange oblong angle. Even if a mosaic is left \textit{in situ}, the original architecture is gone. Frequently these pavements were intended to reach to the walls of its room and therefore it would have been impossible to view the entire creation simultaneously. Mosaics were not meant only for aesthetic appeal, but they
On one level, mosaics were constructed by highly-skilled individuals who worked carefully to construct the floors that would adorn houses and villas of the elite. Mosaicists were skilled laborers who made higher wages than many in their society. According to the Price Edict of Diocletian in 301 C.E., the *musearius*, who made wall mosaics from glass and precious metal, and the *tessellarius*, who created floor mosaics from stone,\(^7\) were paid, respectively, sixty *denarii* and fifty *denarii* per day.\(^8\) By comparison, common artisans, such as blacksmiths and bakers, were paid fifty *denarii* per day, but unskilled laborers were paid only one *denarius*. Clearly mosaicists were, then, highly-paid skilled laborers but they still belonged to a laboring society who made the works of art for high-status elite.\(^9\)

In Roman and Late Antique society, mosaics especially conveyed the views and social status of the patron who shared in the norms and values of elite society.\(^10\) As these pavements also played a role in the function of the room. The orientation of figural mosaics frequently indicates the main entrance(s) of a room and consequently the function of that room. Often geometric patterns and figural compilations would push and pull the onlooker in certain directions through their dynamic energy. It is clear that this component of mosaic art is fundamental to a complete understanding of their significance. See Clark 1979, 21, 52, and Dunbabin 1999, 305 for more discussion.

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\(^8\) It is important to note that these incomes were fixed under the Edict of Diocletian in 301 C.E. These particular rates were set in order to control inflation and stabilize currency throughout the empire. The income of mosaicists must have been greater than the values declared by the Edict or there would have been no reason to correct them. The different pay rates as well as the status of different mosaics indicate that wall mosaics were more valuable.

\(^9\) Due to the fact that mosaics are an elite form of art, it is difficult to not only find the voice of the common man, but the artist who created the work. Mosaics provide no indications of who created them neither are there maker’s marks or things of that nature. Only the careful study and pursuit of mosaic workshops seem to offer the chance of learning more about the craftsman and their agency within mosaic art.

\(^10\) From the remnants of these powerful figures, historians are hard pressed to discover the mentality of the commoner from the thought processes of the small portion of the population that comprises the aristocracy. However it was the common man’s labor that fueled the greatness of the Roman Empire and their influence was felt through all areas of Roman life via more subtle means. Without these hard workers the fields would have produced no grain, the trees no fruit, the sea would have born no nourishment. There are a multitude of mosaics that depict the lifestyle of the commoner. Particularly in Tunisia, enormous mosaics, complex in style and composition, grace many wealthy villas. These scenes depict the peasant fisherman in his element, drawing sustenance from the sea itself. The sea was a theme of particular significance in Tunisia as it provided the main source of income and trade. Therefore those who worked the sea and bent its natural resources to their will were integral to Tunisian society.

represented a huge investment of time and money, the selection of images and design reflects a deliberate choice on the part of the home owner. On Cyprus, for example, mosaics were popular as elite forms of artwork from the Roman period into the Early Christian, and remained prevalent as late as the 7th century. They belonged only to the wealthy and affluent of Cyprus, who owned large urban villas in cities such as Paphos and Kourion. The mosaics at these cities, however, represent only the most dramatic examples of a widespread phenomenon on the island. The pages of the *Report of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus* provides numerous examples of mosaic pavements in large cities, mid-sized towns, small villages, and churches. The affluent citizens used their wealth to publicize and immortalize their culture and ideologies via mosaic pavements.

As elite-status goods, the choice of styles and form of mosaics shifted from the 1st to 7th centuries in accordance with shifting societal norms. The style of mosaics, for example, alters dramatically. In the Early Roman era, the pervasive style is a realistic, naturalistic, and life-like pose designed to imitate the world. However, when Christianity became dominant on the island, the idea of “naturalism” changed in accordance with Christian beliefs. Naturalism was reconceptualized as “the ‘still’, ‘supernatural’ and ‘sacramental’ vision of divine grace, as

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2. One of the most valuable secondary sources concerning Cypriot mosaics is known as an RDAC, *Report of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus*. These reports contain the preliminary findings from various archaeological sites throughout the island of Cyprus. Typically the authors are the directors of these excavations therefore they possess an intimate knowledge of the site. Through these reports scholars study the original context of the excavation, for example what was discovered along with the mosaic or the original theories concerning the mosaic. These records are extremely useful for garnering a relatively unbiased account of the primary source itself. “Archaeology is the search for fact, not truth,” and the RDAC’s provide the simple facts and circumstances of each discovery W.A. Daszewski. “Excavations at Kato (Nea) Paphos in 1970 and 1971.” RDAC (1972).
explicated by Christian theology."¹⁴ In other words, Christians morphed this traditional ideal and shifted its focus to inner spiritual realism as opposed to an imitation of the material world.

Similarly, the Christianization of the island in the 5th and 6th century introduced a transformation of themes and conception of images. Whereas the traditional Roman emphasis had been on mythology, the new images of the “Byzantine” style highlighted figures of authority.¹⁵ Not only do the depictions change, but the attitudes portrayed by these characters also transform. Accordingly, “the very means of reflecting on the nature of the individual and the state had become Christianized.”¹⁶ This Byzantine style of portraying figures in mosaic art, in keeping with the new concept of naturalism, mirrored the Christian emphasis on inner reflection.

For these reasons, mosaic pavements have a great deal to offer the historian interested in religious and social history. Traditionally the historic community has overlooked and simplified the study of mosaic art by discussing their significance primarily in terms of their artistic style and color schemes.¹⁷ These pavements reflect much more than artistic taste, and as such, scholars must address them as serious sources of cultural information.¹⁸ While current scholarship includes many overviews of mosaic art, most academic works are only summaries of the history of mosaic art and the details of their creation.¹⁹ These compendiums are invaluable to

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¹⁴ Ibid, pg. 248.
¹⁷ Anthony 1968, 122-123.
the basic study of mosaic art, but lack analysis of the cultural significance within mosaic pavements.

As I will show in the following study, mosaic art in Cyprus during Late Antiquity reflects the relationship between the “Christian” population and the “pagan” population. Mosaics reflect the general tolerance and assimilation of these two cultures into a dominant “Christian” group. However, some mosaics reflect potential tension between religions as “pagans” attempt to continue their traditions within a “Christian” Empire. Through the study of these pavements, scholars can better understand the complex relationship between these two groups and learn more about their interactions in a larger context.

**Late Antique Cyprus**

For centuries historians have discussed the period of Late Antiquity as a time of decline and stagnation. Many books addressing this period once highlighted the decline and fall of the Roman Empire,\(^2^0\) which propagated the image of decay. While this model persists in modern scholarship, our conception of the period has changed immensely since the early 20\(^{th}\) century. The scope of study, for example, has moved beyond political and military studies that had been emphasized until recently. Peter Brown’s work, *The World of Late Antiquity*, revolutionized the field and modern historians’ conception of the 2\(^{nd}\) – 8\(^{th}\) centuries.\(^2^1\) Instead of condemning the period as a time of upheaval and decimation of civilization, Brown analyzes not only change, but also the continuity of traditions and culture. The fall of an empire does not denote the “decline” of civilization if the focus is broader culture and society.


As Brown and other scholars have argued, the period of Late Antiquity was a time of immense cultural change. During this period, the chapter of the Roman Empire came to a close while another chapter of human history began. No longer was the entire Mediterranean basin united under the influence of one colossal power, instead it became a polycentric aggregate of individual tribes and city states.\(^{22}\) The culture of the Roman Empire centered on the city; however the period of Late Antiquity saw more increased development of the countryside.\(^{23}\) The scattered population withdrew to their individual regions where they developed their own distinct cultures. It is important to note that decentralization does not imply decline but change. The different regions and independent kingdoms that splintered from the former Roman Empire, such as Gaul and the Italian city-states, became much more diverse and were able to embrace their local heritage while attempting to preserve Roman values. They shaped a new world that was built from the mold of the old.\(^{24}\)

Religion was one of the greatest areas of change. During this time period Roman “paganism” gave way to “Christianity,” and “Christians” replaced “pagans” in the population. These are terms that require some definition, as both have recently come under academic scrutiny. For the purposes of this paper, paganism is defined as polytheism, a term that dispels the illusion that all pagans were part of a unified collective. Instead, “the populations of the Roman world (apart from the Jews), whether living under city jurisdictions or in ethnic communities, had many cults and worshiped many deities without structuring beliefs into a
religion." The range of beliefs and the lifestyles that resulted from these traditions were as
diverse as the empire itself. Roman citizens practiced various beliefs and lifestyles that ranged
from the traditional to the progressive and innovative. One such progressive philosophy,
Neoplatonism, took into consideration the material nature of sacrifice which led to a depreciation
of matter and a belief in an ultimate and potentially monotheistic power. Philosophical
changes such as this marked a “movement toward monotheism… [which] characterized the
religious temper of much of the Hellenistic world.” There are many other examples of
differences in ideologies and various cults that favored certain deities. During the initial phases
of Late Antiquity, paganism was thriving and “the fact that the Christians won should not lead us
to see the pagans as destined losers… paganism is vigorous and unaware of its own decline.”

The concept of Christianity also requires some explanation as it was widely persecuted
until its official acceptance by the empire. This persecution occurred largely because Roman
citizens were required to worship their emperor as a deity through sacrifice, whereas the
Christians refused to do so. The Christian goal to establish God’s kingdom on earth rang
strongly of treason to the Romans. As a result, Romans perceived the new Christian order as a
threat to the structure of their life. It was not until Emperor Constantine endorsed Christianity in
the early 4th century that it was assimilated into the existing paradigm of the Roman state.
Therefore “it is not that paganism gave way to Christianity and thus the pagan state gave way to
the Christian state, but rather that a ‘Christian’ state overcame a non-Christian state, and thus

<http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/1990/01.01.02.html>.
29 Ibid, pg. 112.
Christianity defined and forced out polytheism.”

Essential to the concept of Christianity in Late Antiquity is that the religion gained its power through higher imperial authority. It was the power of the state, not the power of the people that forced out the polytheistic traditions of the Roman people as a whole.

After the conversion of Constantine it was the Christians who were forced to evaluate their relationship with the pagans. A huge issue between the two groups was the Christian emphasis on faith as opposed to the pagan emphasis on logic and reason. Christianity was largely an urban phenomenon and its followers were known as warriors for Christ. As a result, in an effort to contrast their behaviors, Christians in the Western Roman Empire identified their spiritual enemies as backwards and helpless, “pagani” or people of the countryside. In the east, Christians identified their non-Christian counterparts as “Hellenes,” because they ascribed to “Hellenic” philosophical beliefs (Plato) and educational practices (rhetoric), and a non-Christian frame of reference.

The changes of Late Antiquity impacted Cyprus on a global scale and “may be seen as a gradual reassertion of the complex role of Cyprus in the eastern Mediterranean.” Cyprus is famously located in the eastern Mediterranean and gained the reputation in antiquity as a hub of international trade. The island’s location along major trade routes brought great wealth and prestige, but also made it integral to empire building in the eastern Mediterranean. As a

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32 The word pagan originates from the Latin *paganus* which has a broad translation ranging from country dweller to civilian.
34 Hien 1998, 46.
crossroads, Cyprus represents a conglomeration of different influences, ranging from Near Eastern to Greco-Roman. Indeed, it is sometimes difficult to discover a tradition that is purely Cypriot. “Cyprus was a land that looked in several directions at once. Although a sensitive crossroads for two empires, it conserved its own special character.”\textsuperscript{35} In mosaic art, for example, craftsmen drew inspiration from Greece as well as the Middle East.\textsuperscript{36} The mosaics found in the House of Dionysus in Paphos demonstrate this multi-cultural influence and make it “clear that the Cypriot workshops developed their own style, which drew on the traditions of both East and West.”\textsuperscript{37}

From the 2\textsuperscript{nd} to the 7\textsuperscript{th} centuries C.E., Cyprus generally enjoyed a prosperous and peaceful existence, and flourished in its internationalism. Few incidents of violence and negative disturbances occurred on the island before the introduction of Christianity.\textsuperscript{38} There were small scale raids by the Goths as well as minor uprisings; however these carried very little disruptive force. Overall, the Cypriot people were content and loyal to the Roman state.\textsuperscript{39} This comparatively peaceful period on the island allowed for uninterrupted progress, accumulation of wealth due to trade, and stimulation of culture by constant occupation. For example, the capital cities Paphos on the west coast and (from the 4\textsuperscript{th} century C.E.) Salamis or Constantia on the east,\textsuperscript{40} suggest significant accumulations of wealth and attest to the renewed significance of Cyprus in a changing Mediterranean world.

\textsuperscript{35} Bowersock 1998, 25.
\textsuperscript{36} F.G. Maier. RDAC (1973): pg. 197.
\textsuperscript{37} Dunbabin 1999, 229.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid, pg. 131.
\textsuperscript{40} A Brief History and Description of Nea Paphos. (Cyprus American Archaeological Research Institute, Nicosia: Antiquities Department of the Republic of Cyprus, 1978) pg. 4.
By the time of Constantine’s conversion, Christianity was quite influential on the island, and by the late 4th century C.E., the Church had come to play an enormous role in the daily lives of Cypriot people, “for the Greek-speaking Cypriots, [Christianity] became the most important feature of their identity alongside their language.” However, the practice of paganism remained vibrant despite the boom in the growth of Christianity. Evidence of these two groups functioning and thriving alongside of each other testifies to a lack of tension and struggle between the two, at least at this point in history.

By the 5th century many pagans had abandoned their places of worship. Some scholars argue that this was a result of the earthquakes that ravaged the entire island in the mid 4th century, causing the destruction of entire cities and acting as a catalyst to the downfall of paganism. This explanation, while convenient, neglects to take into account the enduring history of paganism. Romans had been practicing their traditions for centuries despite numerous natural disasters. The transition evidenced by the desertion of pagan places of worship was a gradual process that was instigated solely by earthquakes. Rather these shifts were evidenced by the people in their rebuilding of their communities and how these choices reflected ideological changes that were already present. As a result of the decline in paganism, early Christians often converted the abandoned buildings into worship spaces that reflected their own religion.

This is not to say that Christianity presented a unified front. To the contrary, the Christians maintained various doctrines and beliefs concerning Christ and the nature of

41 Hunt 1982, 130
43 Thomas W Davis. "Earthquakes and the Crises of Faith: Social Transformation in Late Antique Cyprus." pg. 7.
44 Ibid, pg. 9.
Christianity. Throughout the 5th and 6th centuries, doctrinal controversy kept the Cypriot ecclesiastical leaders focused on internal affairs. Due to this distraction, in fact, the remaining pagan population on the island was allowed some leeway concerning their own practices.

Cypriot church leaders were even further occupied by the decree of Emperor Zeno in 488 C.E. which granted Cyprus autocephaly from the church of Antioch. This declaration marked the beginning of the separation of Cyprus from the east. Although the Cypriot churches presented a strong case to secure their independence, a great deal of the decision lay with the emperor and his desire to keep the churches free from the Monophysite influence which was becoming powerful in the east. The realignment of the small island was completed in the 6th century, when the emperor Justinian detached Cyprus from Antioch, not only ecclesiastically, but secularly.

In the mid-7th century, an Arab invasion under the leadership of Mu’awiya brought the island under Eastern influence once again. However, the goal of the invading general was not to bring Cyprus under their permanent control, but to use the island as a stepping stone to come within striking distance of Byzantium. These “two invasions of Cyprus were indeed part of a larger plan that fully recognized the international significance of the island for anyone who aspired, as Mu’awiya clearly did, to challenge the central power of Byzantium.” As a result,

46 Epiphanius in the late 4th century was the bishop of Salamis who became famous for hunting down and rooting out heresy within the Orthodox Church. He was very passionate about keeping the practices pure and revealing the false teachings of those who claimed to be within the church. He even targeted John Chrysostom at one point.
49 The Cypriot leaders presented the body of St. Barnabus, one of the first apostles to evangelize the island, to the church leaders to prove their religious autonomy. Not only did they produce the body of the saint, but he also held a gospel of St. Matthew supposedly written in his own hand. This was ample evidence to prove their significance and authority within the religious community.
51 Ibid, pg. 24.
cultural domination was not on the agenda for Mu’awiya. He allowed and even encouraged the practice of Greek traditions and their language. Although Cypriot Hellenism was allowed to thrive, Arabic influences remained, particularly on the eastern half of the island.

In the 8th and 9th centuries the Christian Church, as well as Muslim leaders, issued a decree ordering the destruction of figural mosaics. This act is later referred to as an iconoclasm. Many mosaics throughout the Mediterranean featuring holy figures were damaged in accordance with the ban on the possession of graven images.⁵² The survival of a large number of undamaged mosaics on Cyprus indicates that the people avoided the iconoclasm. Due to contemporary Arabic raids on the island the orders were not carried out.⁵³ Many mosaics in the East were destroyed during this time; as a result there are very few remaining examples of Byzantine mosaic art. These precious remnants found on Cyprus are the majority of the Byzantine mosaics available for study.⁵⁴ Therefore historians must utilize these precious resources to their full capacity and not limit them as simple decorations.

The Christianization of Cyprus, outlined above, and the resistances to it, are visible in the mosaic pavements across the island, which reflect both new Christian ideals as well as the reluctance of pagans to accept the new religion and preserve their own traditions and ideologies. The various themes and motifs of mosaic pavements reflect the changing nature of society and the shift between paganism and Christianity. Through changing styles and motifs historians are able to visibly track the progression of these different lifestyles and their impact on society. As such, the various levels of infiltration of Christian ideals into pagan scenes and vice versa, give

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⁵² Exodus 20:4  
historians a glimpse into the connection between these two groups and their acceptance or rejection of the other. Cyprus is the focus of this study because of the general attitude of tolerance and adaptation that permeated the island’s culture and society. A relatively non-violent past and abundance of foreign influence signifies that the people of Cyprus were accustomed to assimilation.

**Late Antique Mosaics of Cyprus**

The period of Late Antiquity was a time of immense change in the Late Roman Empire. Culture and society saw enormous shifts as the empire increasingly became decentralized and people progressively identified themselves with their regional identities. Christianity also factored into the changing landscape of the era. Instead of pagan temples and massive public bathing facilities, Christian basilicas and churches began to dot the countryside. Throughout this period there is a shift in the location of mosaic art which reflects the shift in societal values. Due to the influence and power of Paphos there is a great concentration of important figures and the remnants of their magnificent wealth. Their tastes and decorations have left a permanent mark on the landscape of Cyprus in the form of large villas and private residences. The spread of Roman villas to the outer provinces climaxed during the Pax Romana. These villas were “the product of settled conditions and economic stability and [were] an indication of the extent and intensity of Roman cultural influence.”\(^{55}\) Essentially the villa was at the heart of wealthy Roman country life; they carried the life blood of Roman culture and opinion.

On the other side of the spectrum are the mosaic pavements found in rural contexts where the art was much more likely to be a product of the community or geared to please the populous

as opposed to the will of one wealthy noble. While private villas were subject to the tastes of one man, baths and basilicas were communal territory. It is true that there were specific works that the affluent commissioned in order to garner recognition; however, other works were the product of communal consideration. This is especially evident in Christian mosaics as these pavements demonstrate that the formerly pagan populations of certain areas were willing to assist the growing Christian church and show their dedication to their communal churches.\textsuperscript{56}

Regardless of the context of a mosaic pavement, they are always expensive endeavors. Various groups of people differing in socio-economic status and location have all invested a remarkable amount of resources into the creation of this art. In order to support these undertakings, there must have been plenty of available funds. There have been various opinions concerning the welfare of the countryside during Late Antiquity. In the past, scholars believed that the economy of the Late Roman Empire reflected the political turmoil. Paradigms of decline and fall characterized every facet of life according to historians. However, recent scholarship shows that the economy during the period of Late Antiquity was thriving rather than suffering from the decentralization of the Roman Empire.\textsuperscript{57} There was not stagnation but growth. The

\textsuperscript{56} A pavement discovered in the nave at the Basilica of Ayia Trias near Yialousa in Cyprus reflects the changing attitudes of the wealthy during Late Antiquity. This mosaic dates to the 5\textsuperscript{th} century C.E. and is a remarkable work of art. Considering the location of the basilica gives added importance to the rich decoration and attention to complex detail of the pavement. The considerable investment of resources in this work is “rather surprising when one considers that it could only have served a small rural community.”\textsuperscript{56} The cost of the mosaic would have been shouldered by the community as well as wealthy patrons of the church. This mosaic further demonstrates the shift of the utilization of wealth from secular in favor of a religious environment, which in turn indicates an alteration of values in the community and culture of the people of Late Antiquity. It also reinforces recent scholarship which asserts the flourishing of the economy and growth of population during this period.

\textsuperscript{57} Jairus Banaji. \textit{Agrarian Change in Late Antiquity: Gold, Labour, and Aristocratic Dominance}. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) pg. 16.
urban populations began to grow and exceed their capacities, so much so that what could be defined as none other than suburban sprawl began to creep across the countryside.\(^{58}\)

While studying mosaics it is integral that historians keep these contexts in mind. A private citizen is able to take more liberties with the decoration of his own home, whereas a Christian basilica has public ideals and morals to uphold. The motifs and styles present in different contexts enables historians to understand the importance of various spaces and the freedom, or limitation, of expression caused by Christianity.

**Traditional Roman Mosaics**

Roman mosaics can be found in abundance on the island of Cyprus. There were many wealthy aristocrats who built their private villas on the scenic countryside overlooking the Mediterranean and ordered numerous pavements as an indication of their wealth. As a result mosaic art is hardly a scarcity. One of the most concentrated areas is found at Paphos which boasts more than a dozen beautifully preserved examples from the 2\(^{nd}\) and 3\(^{rd}\) centuries C.E. The overarching theme of all these mosaics is mythological content.\(^{59}\) This attests to the complete penetration of paganism of Roman lifestyle. These mythological tales were not a religion for ancient Romans, but they were the lens through which these ancient peoples viewed life.\(^{60}\) Analyzing the chosen themes of the mosaics\(^{61}\) permits an even deeper understanding of ancient

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\(^{60}\) Fradier 1982, 31.

\(^{61}\) Very often the different functions of certain rooms lent their themes to the pavements that decorated the space. The most common example of mosaic scene relating to its architectural space is in the *triclinium*, or the dining room. This room and its well known Π configuration made it easier for guests and clients to admire a specific work of art throughout the duration of the meal. As a result, there was a great deal of thought put into the mosaic ornament of the *triclinium*. During the meal, guests would discuss the artistic merits of the scene as well as its philosophical merit.\(^{61}\) Also any other type of dinner entertainment, such as dancing, would be performed with the mosaic scene as a backdrop. There are multiple themes that are commonly found in *triclinia*. Scenes of feasting and merrymaking encouraged a festive atmosphere within the dining space. There are also examples of mythological scenes which were intended to encourage debate amongst the viewers as well as comment on the
culture and society as well as the understanding of those who experienced the transition to Christianity in the 4th century.

All of the Roman mosaics discussed in this portion of the paper are located in the House of Dionysus, an enormous Roman villa. It was built in the second half of the 2nd century C.E. and was ultimately destroyed by the earthquakes that devastated the island in 332 and 342 C.E. Scholars generally accept that this structure was “a palace building of a governor or to a villa of some wealthy citizen of Paphos.” According to one theory the shops located across the road from to the north of the villa may have belonged to the owner of the house and been the source of his wealth. Regardless of the citizen’s occupation, he nevertheless represented an affluent member of Roman society, a society saturated with paganism.

The two following examples contain what some scholars label as artistic errors. Some place the blame for these inaccuracies on the Roman Cypriots obvious employment of the mosaic workshops and copybooks. They also allocate responsibility for the mistakes to

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64 Nicolaou 1967, 106-7.
65 Another element provides a deeper understanding of mosaic art in Late Antiquity is the ubiquitous establishment of mosaic workshops. These workshops utilized copy books which enabled them to create mosaics in a uniform style and ensure accuracy of various pavements. Unfortunately none of these books survived to the modern period, but there is a great deal of evidence pointing to the existence and widespread employment of various mosaic copybooks, as well as workshops. Most scholars today accept this theory as fact due to the frequency of overlapping trends and styles. Not only were these workshops established in localized areas, but there is evidence that these artisans took their craft abroad. Guilds of traveling mosaicists and other craftsmen spread their art to the far reaches of the empire. This led to the development of various schools of style throughout different regions. Stylistic commonalities between pavements at opposite ends of the Mediterranean demonstrate that these works could not have originated in isolated workshops. These books and the existence of mosaic workshops are in no way detrimental to the art form, but indicate the stability, popularity, and lucrative nature of the business.
uneducated craftsmen. This evidence also indicates that the artisans of these mosaics, and probably the patrons, were not overly concerned with the accuracy of their work. Through this disregard we can perceive the beginning of the shift in societal values of Roman culture. This ignorance reinforces the theory that the laity was prepared to embrace new traditions after centuries of the old. By this time paganism was merely tradition, and no longer held sway over the system of values held by the locals.

The first mosaic from the House of Dionysus depicts a mythological scene, as is customary with the vast majority of Roman mosaics. The legendary love story of Pyramos and Thisbe (Figure 2) is represented through an interesting composition which simultaneously depicts different events that occur throughout the myth. The panther is depicted holding Thisbe’s torn and bloody veil while Pyramos and Thisbe themselves are represented underneath. This pavement, as with all those found in the House of Dionysus, dates to the 2nd or 3rd century C.E. and is known to at least antedate the earthquakes of 332 and 342. The most intriguing element to this particular work is the controversial depiction of the young man, Pyramos. Instead of portraying the ill fated lover as a man, which he was, the Pyramos found in this scene is represented as a river god. This association is clear due to the cornucopia he carries and the urn that he rests upon which is pouring forth a seemingly endless stream of water. Both of these traditionally herald the presence of a river god. There are multiple explanations to address the perceived misrepresentation of Pyramos.

One perspective claims that the mosaic reflects the Greek version of the myth as opposed to the Roman representation. In the Greek version of the tragedy Pyramos and Thisbe are

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66 Elsner 1998, 199.  
67 Nicolaou 1963, 12.
transformed into a river and spring, respectively, upon their untimely deaths.\textsuperscript{68} In this case the alleged misrepresentation becomes a difference in the regional understanding of the myth.

According to Ovid’s myth the gods instead darkened the berries of the mulberry tree to commemorate the blood that was spilled.\textsuperscript{69} These opposing accounts testify to the lack of a cohesive theology or doctrine in the Roman world. This provides more evidence to support the theory that Roman citizens were ready for a more concrete and defined religion by this point as opposed to their vague philosophies.

However there are others who believe that the misrepresentation of Pyramos is just that, a mistake. This is reinforced by the fact that this building may have belonged to a prominent citizen from Rome who would not have been familiar with the Eastern versions of these myths. As previously mentioned, the Roman tale speaks naught of rivers and springs but of a mulberry tree, which some would argue is depicted to the left of Thisbe (Figure 2). Therefore some scholars attribute this error to the widespread use of copybooks during the Roman period.

Pyramos is not only the name of the young man in this myth, but is also the name of the god of a river in Cilicia.\textsuperscript{70} This error suggests that a master, or even a craftsman, who was familiar with Roman mythology, did not create this mosaic.\textsuperscript{71} Again, the lack of attention given to the detail of this mosaic propagates the idea that the general public was prepared for a change, or at least that they were not as immersed as they once were. By no means was it a quick transition, society and culture had been preparing itself for the coming shifts.

\textsuperscript{69} Ovid, \textit{Metamorphoses}: Pyramus and Thisbe. 237-240.
\textsuperscript{70} Daszewski 1988, 40.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid, pg. 6.
This theory is reinforced by the *Rape of Ganymede* (Figure 3), which is also dated to the 2nd and 3rd centuries and found in the House of Dionysus. In this composition the eagle’s wings are cut off which signifies that it is too large for the designated space. This mishap is sometimes explained away as a stylistic attempt to convey the sheer immensity of the bird.\(^{72}\) However, it seems clear that this was not the object of the copyist since the eagle is cut off only on the right side. If the goal was to convey a sense of mass, both of the eagle’s wings would been clipped in order to show the expanse on both sides.

Another mosaic brings to light the values of islanders, again through a mythological story. The *First Wine Drinkers* (Figure 4-5) tells the tale of Icarios who was blessed with the gift of the vine by the god Dionysus. He shared his first harvest with a few workers and while suffering from intoxication they thought themselves to be poisoned and killed Icarios. This serves as a warning against drinking in excess, which demonstrates virtue in pagan society.\(^{73}\) Also, there is an interesting commentary found on the attitude of the pagan gods in this pavement. The god Dionysus relaxes despite the fact that Icarios is about be murdered. Even though the god is the reason Icarios possesses the wine in the first place, the mortal did not use the gift wisely. Therefore Dionysus feels no obligation to save the first human wine maker.

This is an interesting comment on the role of the gods in the lives of ancient Romans. Although appeasing the gods was integrated into their society, the people knew very little about the gods themselves, there was no theology associated with them.\(^{74}\) This also may have prepared the pagans to accept the new Christian system and values. Christianity offered a definitive

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\(^{73}\) Daszewski 1988, 27.

\(^{74}\) Elsner 1998, 206.
religion which included theology and concrete knowledge concerning their monotheistic God.\textsuperscript{75}

This type of reflection and detailed analysis of society through mosaics endures as time progresses. It also adds to the peaceful transition that seems to have occurred during the early phases of Christianity on the island. As mentioned before, the pagans were prepared to share their philosophies and, in time, learn the doctrines and theology of this new religion.

Mosaic inscriptions also assist historians in understanding the original message of the design itself. Fortunately there are many examples of mosaic inscriptions dating to the Late Roman period. On the island of Cyprus, one of the most common usages of these messages is labeling certain characters within mythological scenes. This is clearly seen in many of the pavements found at the Roman site of Paphos (Figures 2, 4, 5, 7, and 10). The practice of marking various figures is intriguing due to the popularity of myths in Roman culture. One would think that there is no need to label such figures, yet the artist ensures that each is readily identified. Perhaps this is to guarantee that the viewer truly understands the scene and the figures acting within it. There are instances of characters appearing in various mosaics in Paphos that have no precedent in ancient mosaic art. In these cases, it would be for the benefit of discussion and the understanding of the mosaic to clearly indicate which deities and mortals are represented. It is also possible that these inscriptions were a method of flaunting the education of the patron and his privileged lifestyle and education.

Inscriptions are also used to inform the viewer and influence their perception of the space the pavement decorates. One of the more interesting inscriptions on the island, known as the Φιλοθάλασσος inscription (Figure 6), comes from the baths at Mansoura. Scholars know very

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid, pg. 211.
little about the building in which the mosaic was found and the pavement itself. The small building is comprised of only two small rooms, and is generally dated to the 4th century. However the message relayed is interesting in that it comments on the sea. Romans are famous for their abundant use of baths and the facilities to accommodate this obsession sprung up wherever the Romans took up residence. Despite their affinity for cleanliness and bathing, there is very little mention of the sea, which is even more interesting on Cyprus due to the fact that it is an island and the sea is a constant presence. The inscription reads: “You bathe well who love the sea.” This is an interesting commentary on the use of baths and their relation to the sea. According to ancient sources, such as Pliny the Elder, water is the source of healing for a variety of ailments. There are different benefits allotted to fresh water and sea water, as well as the advantages of a range of temperatures of the water. Often the wealthier and private inland bathing facilities would import sea water for use in its facilities due to their medicinal properties. This bath is located on the coast of Cyprus therefore sea water easily obtained. The inscription which declares the use of sea water in the baths ensures its patrons that they will receive the finest care at their facilities.

These Roman inscriptions fulfilled a variety of functions, but the main purpose was to inform the viewer of the function of a certain space or the events occurring within a specific scene. With the conversion of the majority of the island to Christianity the function of these inscriptions began to change to accommodate the shifting social structures and ideologies.

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77 ΚΑΛΩ/ ΛΟΥΕΙ/ ΦΙΛΟΘΑ/ ΛΑCCΟC
Michaelides 1992, 75.
However, these remaining inscriptions from the Roman Empire allow historians a glimpse at the
textual culture of various individuals within their changing society

**Transition Mosaics**

There is only one example that is analyzed here due to its exemplary nature; it captures
the essence of the transition between pagan and Christian ideals. *Theseus and the Minotaur*
(Figure 7) is a beautifully preserved example of the transition period between two completely
different thought processes. This mosaic was constructed under pagan influences. However, it
was damaged in the earthquakes of the 4th century. The manner in which the mosaic was
repaired is most intriguing. Upon closer study, it is clear that there are two different styles in this
mosaic, one pagan and one Christian. The majority of the work remains in the pagan style but
the face of Theseus draws the most attention (Figure 8). In this scene Theseus is in mid-strike,
yet the look on his face is relaxed and poised. This depicts an emphasis on inner
contemplation. There is an emphasis on inner reflection that belies the turmoil occurring
outside. The calm face of the hero reflects the new Christian emphasis on inward motivation
rather than simple actions. The motive with which one acts becomes as great as the action one
commits.

This pavement demonstrates the smooth and subtle shift in ideologies between the two
very distinct religions. Obviously the patron who commissioned this mosaic was a pagan at the
time of its construction. However, the owner seems to have had a change of heart or at least
some political persuasion when the time came for the repairs of the mosaic. Both of the
earthquakes occurred after Constantine’s imperial endorsement of Christianity. For whatever

79 Daszewski 1988, 21.
80 Stylianou 1997, 22.
reason instead of clinging to his pagan traditions, the transition between pagan and Christian seems relatively easy for this man. There was a quick acceptance of the new orders and a smooth shift, which demonstrates easy relations between the ancient order and the fledgling religion.

“Pagan” Mosaics in a Christian Empire

Despite the complete Christianization of the island many wealthy aristocrats still attempted to preserve Roman traditions by depicting mythological themes. These mosaics demonstrate that, at least among some of the affluent citizens, there was indeed a battle to maintain pagan beliefs.\(^{81}\) Although these traditions are upheld in this pavement, the style still reflects the pervasive influences of Christianity. It seems that in an effort to make pagan beliefs more acceptable, they were being tailored to fit into Christian morality and values.\(^{82}\) By the 5\(^{th}\) century there was essentially no area of life that was left untouched by the authority of Christianity.\(^{83}\) There are many examples of this fusion of pagan beliefs with Christian morals found in the House of Aion at Paphos.

Within this mid 4\(^{th}\) century context there were still many who upheld the traditional customs. The construction of new pavements portrays a continuation of pagan themes. Despite the imperial endorsement of a unified Christian empire, there were still many pockets of pagan ideology found in the material culture of the island.\(^{84}\) As stated above, even these traditional pagan scenes begin to show Christian influences in order to conform to the popular religion. The House of Aion at Paphos contains a compilation of five different scenes into one huge pavement

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81 Daszewski 1988, 71.
82 Ibid, pg. 70.
84 Stylianou 1997, 21.
(Figure 9). All of these scenes have been created in an interesting style and with a strange twist. The common factor between all of the scenes is a connection with the god Dionysus or the triumph of divinity over wild forces. However, Dionysus is not depicted in his normal state of chaotic frivolity. Instead the twist is that the joyous god is sedate and calm while his worshippers are not full of ecstasy but respect.\textsuperscript{85} These are all abnormal qualities for the god of wine. Even more significant than the change in Dionysus’ attitude is his portrayal as the culmination of all other Roman deities.\textsuperscript{86} Many scholars label all of these new characteristics of Dionysus as an attempt to equate and compare him with Jesus Christ.

However, the significance of these mosaics is under debate. The archaeologist who discovered the complex and who has directed multiple digs on the island, Wiktor A. Daszewski interprets the entire panel as “a profound theological message celebrating the epiphany and triumph of Dionysus as supreme god and saviour.”\textsuperscript{87} Any scene without Dionysus depicts victory of cosmic order over wild nature, which is in keeping with Christian theology. However, there are some who believe it is a simple dining room filled with Dionysiac themes (common for these spaces), erotic and musical motifs, and obscure references which allow the patron to flaunt his education.\textsuperscript{88} As such, these scholars warn against the popular practice of attributing great significance to every piece of material culture.\textsuperscript{89}

\textsuperscript{85} Daszewski 1988, 70.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid, pg. 70.
\textsuperscript{87} Dunbabin 1999, 230.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid, pg. 231.
\textsuperscript{89} There are many critics of the tendency to believe that every figure and scene contains deep religious and social meaning. Complex imagery can be misunderstood even in contemporary settings. One image can have many concepts, just as one concept can have many images. There is a possibility of enormous discrepancies between a scene’s potential symbolism as opposed to the message that the artist and patron intended to convey. For example, a coin of Justinian II utilized images of seated woman to personify Constantinople; however people associated the image with the goddess Aphrodite. To correct the misconception authorities replaced the ambiguous figure of a woman with the more obvious Christian symbol of the cross in later coinage. A Four Seasons mosaic was also the victim of misinterpretation when a 9th century chronicler mistook the personifications for biblical prophets. It is
However, in certain mosaic panels there are undeniable associations and transitions between pagan and Christian traditions. This comparison is especially evident in one of the mosaics present at the House of Aion. This mosaic details the first bath of the god Dionysus (Figure 10). In this pavement, the god Hermes is holding the baby Dionysus while sitting in a pose similar to that of an emperor (Figure 11). He is garbed in royal robes which reflect the strong desire to appease Imperial officials during the time. Most importantly is the figure of the baby Dionysus. He has a halo, which reflects obvious Christian influences. Also, he is sitting in a pose similar to that of the Christ child. All of these changes in style reflect an effort to make this scene more Christian while maintaining traditional pagan beliefs.90

Also within the panels of the House of Aion there is a scene depicting the contest between Apollo and Marsyas (Figure 12). This fabled contest between legendary musicians ended, naturally, in Apollo’s victory. The defeated Marsyas was lead off to his death at the order of the god, which is the scene portrayed by this pavement. The unique personification of ΠΛΑΝΗ (error/misjudgment) is in attendance during the judgment of Marsyas. This is the only known appearance of this character in mosaic art. His presence “indicates an active engagement with the element of contest and debate [within pagan society].”91 As discussed earlier, the traditional mythology of Rome lacked a concrete doctrine and the appearance of this character reinforces the element of debate which was bred into their lifestyle. As part of rhetorical exercises, educated men would argue a different outcome of a certain myth or debate the validity and morality of the results. This scene within the panels at Aion may have encouraged

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90 Daszewski 1988, 70.
discussion amongst the onlookers concerning the fairness of Marsyas’ punishment or perhaps his foolishness in challenging a god.

The small village of Alassa contains a particularly interesting example of a pagan mosaic in a Christian context (Figure 13). This pavement is located inside a bath complex within a small Roman villa. The entire complex is comprised of two rooms, two bathrooms and a pool with an atrium and impluvium at the center.\(^\text{92}\) A common theme with Roman bath pavements is to depict more erotic scenes. This trend often reflected the activities that occurred within large bath facilities. This type of entertainment and company became taboo under the influences of Christianity.\(^\text{93}\) However baths remained part of Christian culture despite their questionable morality. The shocking element of this particular mosaic is that it is one of only two known secular mosaics that carry mythological representation past the late 4th century.\(^\text{94}\) Even at this late date, remnants of pagan culture remain, proof that some small percentage of the relatively wealthy population clung to the old ways. Although the mosaic is of poor quality, its simple existence demonstrates that change is not ubiquitous nor is it fully endorsed by the locals. Throughout the period of Late Antiquity there are immense changes, but there are also traces of continuity as evidenced by this last pocket of visible paganism in Cyprus.

Also continued from the Roman period is the importance of mosaic inscriptions during this transition period. Due to its extraordinary nature Kourion deserves special attention concerning its inscriptions. In fact there are three separate inscriptions found at Kourion and each carries distinct cultural implications. These examples demonstrate perhaps better than any

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\(^\text{93}\) Yegül 1992, 314-5.
\(^\text{94}\) Michaelides 1989, 192.
other the tolerance of the shift from pagan beliefs to Christianity. All three of these pavements are contemporary (5th century) and were laid in public gardens near a bathing facility. As a result they would have been visited and seen by the general public and their messages would be clearly received.

The first inscription (Figure 14) clearly asserts the dominance and supreme power of Christ in the temporal world by saying: “In place of big stones and solid iron, bright bronze of even adamant, this house has girt itself with the much venerated symbols of Christ.” This indicates that the owner of the house was a Christian who wished to uphold the virtues of the new religion and honor his God. The futility of earthly pleasures and security is made clear. However, this message is not limited to Christian tones. It is written in the style of Homeric verses, and as such the “propaganda of new religion was being made through the traditional pagan means of expression.”

However there is a second inscription found within the same house that adds a bit of intrigue to this seemingly good willed testament to the Christian faith found in the other room. This second message, instead of giving honor to the Christian God gives honor to the patron of the mosaic and the owner of the house (Figure 15). In this dedicatory message the patron of the pavement is given honor in a fashion similar to that of the Roman sun god, Apollo. It is interesting that this Christian man who asserts the divinity and strength of Christ would, in the same building, assert his own dominance and authority in the temporal world. Perhaps this patron is a recent convert and takes the opportunity to fill the vacuum of power left by the dissolution of the pantheon of Roman gods. Instead of giving all glory and honor to his new god,

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95 Herrin 2002, 16.
97 Michaelides 1992, 85.
the patron wishes to secure a bit of respect for himself. These different mosaics demonstrate the shift in ideals from pagan to Christian. Despite the patron’s professed Christian beliefs, he maintains his pagan tendencies of self glorification and almost deification. The slow transition between pagan lifestyles and Christian practices is evident in this mosaic.

In the third inscription, the patron is once again careful to uphold standard Christian beliefs and values (Figure 16). “The sisters Reverence, Prudence, and Piety to God tend to this exedra and the fragrant hall.” This inscription ensures that the public understands the concepts of the new religion, Christianity. Similar to the first inscription, this message also carries close ties to Homeric prose. Not only is this verse reminiscent of classical literature, but the values themselves echo the traditional values of Roman society. Once again there are themes of continuity throughout these pavements. Through these inscriptions historians can connect stylistic trends and patterns within these three inscriptions to further support their simultaneous construction as well as the intent for their messages to be read and understood as one.

All of these inscriptions provide yet another demonstration of the slow moving conversion of the population and culture to the new Christian faith. Essentially these three inscriptions inform the public of three very important concepts. In this fashion, the inscription becomes somewhat didactic in its purpose. The three main messages spread by these pavements were 1) the rule of Christ over the temporal world, 2) the patron rules the community with the same authority and right to respect that that god Apollo once had, and 3) the three main principles of the Christian faith. Due to the public location of the message, the patron was able to ensure that passerby would learn from the inscriptions. In this way the message of

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Christianity was diffused among the people of Cyprus and assisted in the transition from the old to the new during the Late Antique period.

“Christian” Mosaics

The mosaics of the Early Byzantine period continue to reflect Classical society and share in the paradigm of continuity. It is particularly interesting to see how pagan traditions manifest themselves in fully established Christian ideologies. The balance between the two groups at this point has completely turned in favor of Christians; therefore it is the new religion that is ousting the old. This is especially evident in the theological controversies that arose in the early life of the church. In the basilica of the Panagia Kanakaria at Lythrankomi there is a beautifully preserved mosaic of the Virgin and Child (Figure 17) which dates to the early 6th century. The most unique element of this mosaic is the mandorla (Figure 18) that surrounds both the Virgin Mary and the Christ Child. This is more than an artistic touch; it makes a doctrinal claim concerning Mary. At this time it is “theologically improper to include Mary (Θεοτόκος) in the divinity of Christ”101 Therefore this mosaic shows the inordinate amount of devotion the local church displayed toward the Virgin Mary. As a result, we can use this mosaic to determine the beliefs of this localized Christian community, something literary sources do not accomplish.

Another mosaic reflects the issue of Christ’s two natures. Panagia Angeloktistos at Kiti also boasts a beautifully preserved Virgin and Child mosaic (Figure 19) also dating to the 6th century. This mosaic is very different from the mosaic at Kanakaria in that its style is much

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99 Daszewski 1988, 43.
100 Θεοτόκος means God bearer. In the council of Ephesus (431 A.D) Mary was declared the mother of God but she herself is not divine as the mandorla implies. Therefore this was an inappropriate honor given to the Virgin. A.H.S. Megaw and E.J. Hawkins. Church of the Panagia Kanakaria at Lythrankomi in Cyprus its mosaics and frescoes. (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, 1977) pg. 78.
101 Megaw and Hawkins 1977, 76.
more naturalistic and shows Hellenistic influences. Not only is the style much more Hellenistic but it is theologically very different. As stated earlier, Mary was declared Θεοτοκος in 431 C.E. However, the inscription above the mosaic at Angeloktistos describes her as Hagia Mary or Holy Mary. Through these two mosaics we see very conflicting, yet contemporary, ideas concerning the Virgin. The church of Kanakaria was willing to accept and overstep the honors given to the Virgin as Theotokos, while the church of Angeloktistos maintained her title of Holy or Saint Mary. These two contrasting theological positions show the doctrinal progression of the early Church. Although there is an abundance of literary sources which trace this same development; mosaics display these topics on a more individualized level and illuminate the contrasting opinions held by specific communities. These pavements bring to light the diverse theological and social opinions of the native islanders during the 6th century.

There is another theological debate which these two mosaics address: the dual nature of Christ. In the church of Panagia Kanakaria there is a unique artistic element known as a mandorla. This device is used to separate divine figures from those on earth. The presence of the mandorla indicates the emphasis of not only Mary’s divinity but the divine nature of Christ. Symbolically the mandorla represents Christ’s separation from mankind and even the heavenly angels that are attending him. Therefore the church at Panagia Kanakaria emphasizes the divine elements of the nature of Christ. On the other hand the more naturalistic poses and positions of the Virgin and Child at Angeloktistos emphasize the humanity of Christ. This is significant due to the fact that during the 6th century there was continuous

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102 Megaw and Stylianou 1963, 12.
103 Stylianou 1997, 47.
104 Megaw and Stylianou 1963, 11.
105 Ibid, pg. 6.
106 As described on page 4. Modern-day conceptions of “Naturalism” do not align with their ancient counterparts.
107 Megaw and Stylianou 1963, 7.
debate concerning the nature of Christ. Here is material evidence that this debate was not between upper class Christians and the clergy. While these mosaics do not permit a sweeping conclusion concerning the broad theology of the island of Cyprus at this time, they demonstrate that each church had its own perspective concerning the issue and conveyed their opinions through mosaics. Therefore, within these two contemporary pavements, there are a multitude of theological debates. These different perspectives show the variety of responses to Christianity and that even in the 6th century A.D the church had yet to create a universal doctrine that was upheld by all Christian communities.

Both of these Early Christian mosaics not only reflect theological debates, but they also display the pagan remnants of society. In both mosaics the Christ Child is holding a scroll. The scroll is held “in the manner characteristic of antique philosopher figures.” This reflection on ancient iconography attests to the gradual rise of Christianity. Society does not change overnight; there are many attributes that persist through any amount of change. These mosaics depict the perseverance of pagan traditions. Many believe that when Christianity gained Imperial support a completely new form of art was born, the Byzantine style. However, the earliest forms of Christian art mimicked Hellenistic images. Despite Imperial endorsement of Christianity, one can find remnants of the classical culture and the origins of Christian art. Although mosaics can be used to demonstrate changing of society during the period of Late Antiquity, they also demonstrate the continued influences of pagan traditions, both in art and society.

108 Megaw and Hawkins 1977, 90.
The social and cultural shifts wrought by the advent of Christianity brought change not only to the types of scenes depicted in mosaic art, but also the nature of inscriptions. The use of inscriptions became more commonplace and these messages commemorated the names of patrons, various bible verses, and even the names of the mosaicist.\footnote{Michaelides 1992, 7.} Instead of pavements depicting mythological scenes, images of Christ, the Virgin, and the apostles became popular. However, there are mosaics that do not depict a figural Christ, but instead use allegorical images to convey their intended message. This tendency to avoid the human figure may correspond to the location of the mosaic. All of the examples of allegorical images found in early Christian basilicas are located on the floor, while images of the Virgin and Christ child are constructed on a wall or in the apse of the basilica, places of honor and prominence.\footnote{Michaelides 1989, 198.} The use of images such as amphorae, vines and various animal motifs on floor mosaics may reflect the theological hesitancy to tread over an image of Christ, as would have been the case with a floor mosaic. These depictions of sundry figures are often accompanied by a verse of Christian scripture in order to explain the allegory and illuminate its connection with Christ.

In the Basilica of Chrysopolitissa there are multiple examples of these allegorical figures juxtaposed with explanatory inscriptions. One is an image of a deer located in a field drinking from a stream (Figure 20). The associated inscription is a quote from Psalm 42 and reads: “As the hart panteth, after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, (O God).”\footnote{ΟΝ ΤΡΟΠΟΝ ΕΠΙΠΟΘΕΙ Η ΕΛΑΦΟC ΕΠΙ ΤΑC ΠΗΓΑC ΤΩΝ ΥΑΤΩΝ ΟΥΤΩC ΕΠΙΠΟΘΕΙ Η ΨΥΧΗ ΜΟΥ, ΠΡΟC ΑC (O ΘΕOC).} This passage of Psalm was the basis for one of the most favorite allegories of Early Christian art.\footnote{Michaelides 1992, 69.}
portraying Christ directly, the congregation chose to depict the reverence and love Christians should have for their God and Savior.

A dedicatory inscription found in the baptistery of the Basilica of Shyrvallos Ktima in Paphos is especially interesting to the history of patronage and the credit that is given to those who support mosaic art. The inscription reads: “He whose name only God knows, praying for his household, made this mosaic.”¹¹⁴ This asserts the growing importance of anonymity in the new Christian culture. No longer are inscriptions and donations to public works intended for personal fame and glory, but they are private gifts meant to glorify the Christian God. Again this display of modesty mirrors the changing mentality of the affluent on the island of Cyprus which is obviously reflected in their employment of their most precious resource, their wealth.

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Cyprus provides a unique glimpse into the shifting attitudes of the rapidly developing world of Late Antiquity. The location of the island and its status within the Roman Empire established its significance and prestige. The period of Late Antiquity was a time of immense change, yet continuity remains between the classical traditions and the formation of the new.¹¹⁵ Both the geographical and temporal placement of these mosaic pavements contribute to their significance in modern scholarship and the depth of knowledge they add to the field.

Mosaics during the period of Late Antiquity illustrate many different comparisons concerning the culture of Cyprus in the Late Antique period. They especially provide insights to the complex relationship between pagans and Christians, as well as demonstrate the struggle of

¹¹⁴ Ibid, pg. 108.
¹¹⁵ Michaelides 1989, 194.
the Early Christians to reconcile their traditions with their new ideologies. Through the analysis of Roman mosaics, it is possible to discern indications the coming societal and cultural changes. Mosaics also demonstrate a fusion between two completely different ideals and lifestyles. One of the most important elements that these pavements depict is the deeply ingrained nature of paganism in Cypriot society during Late Antiquity.\(^{116}\) Despite all of the differences and changing values, there remains a unity and continuity in the culture.

Certainly these beautiful works are art aesthetically pleasing, yet they offer much more on a deeper level. Mosaics reflect the people that create them and their relationships to other groups as well as demonstrate the intricacies of culture and society. This flourishing field must be allowed to enter fully into its own significance. Mosaics are historical documents that reveal information about societal values and culture that literary sources do not always include. By using these mosaics scholars are able to fit another piece of the historical puzzle of Late Antiquity into place.

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Images

Figure 1
Figure 2

Figure 3
Figure 6
Figure 9
Figure 10

Figure 11

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Figure 14