

Finding Krateros. Exploring the Signatures on the Mosaics in the Roman Villa of Skala (Kefalonia)

Author(s): Nikki Vellidis

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## FINDING KRATEROS: EXPLORING THE SIGNATURES ON THE MOSAICS IN THE ROMAN VILLA OF SKALA (KEFALONIA)

NIKKI VELLIDIS

*Abstract.* Mosaic signatures provide an incredible and unique view into a sector of the ancient world that is often difficult to access. These signatures are formulaic – utilizing similar vocabulary, grammar, and phrasing. Therefore, when a signature deviates from the so-called “norm,” the unique aspects of the inscription should be carefully considered. This article analyses the figure of Krateros, a possible mosaicist or patron mentioned in two lengthy mosaic inscriptions from an Imperial Period villa on the Greek island of Kefalonia. Krateros was traditionally believed to be a mosaicist with an elaborate signature. However, this conclusion has been debated, and his identity and relation to the mosaic and villa speculated. This article aims to provide Krateros with an identity that considers the plethora of information supplied in the inscriptions.

Steps away from the tavernas and cafés of the Greek village of Skala, the remains of an ornate Imperial Period villa sit waiting for visitors.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This article is an excerpt from my MA thesis titled “Beware of Envy: A Reconstructive Study of the Mosaics in the Roman Villa of Skala,” completed in 2021 under the supervision of Francesco De Angelis and in the Classical Studies Program at Columbia University in the City of New York. I would like to thank the Ephorate of Antiquities in Kefalonia and Ithaka for access to the mosaics and permission to photo-

Dating to the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. and excavated in 1957 by Vassilios G. Kallipolitis, the villa possesses some of the most exquisite floor mosaics present on the island of Kefalonia, Greece. It provides a glimpse into a period of history on the island that is slowly coming to light.<sup>2</sup> The Villa of Skala, categorized as a *villa rustica*, is largely isolated from other known ancient sites and situated 1.8 km from the southernmost tip of the island.<sup>3</sup> The villa's façade is oriented towards the south and was only accessible by a wooden bridge across a creek.<sup>4</sup> There is evidence of walls extending around the villa from the northern part of the area to the creek, serving as a protective barrier.<sup>5</sup> The villa was oriented towards the sea, following the trend seen on the island of sites moving from higher-lying Greek settlements to lower-lying "Roman" ones of the Imperial Period.<sup>6</sup>

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graph them. I would also like to thank the Onassis Foundation for their generous funding.

<sup>2</sup> Kallipolitis excavated and published the villa in 1957 and 1963. The mosaics were examined further by Bruneau (1966), Daux (1958, 1963), Donderer (1989), Dunbabin and Dickie (1983), and Kankeleit (1994). After a significant break in time around the study of the mosaics, Rathmayr and Scheibelreiter-Gail (2019) published on the inscriptions. Neira Jiménez (2014) discussed the iconography of sacrifice shown in the Altar mosaic. Recently, Scholtz (2021) published "The Unwelcome Guest: Envy and Shame Materialized in a Roman Villa." Kefalonia possesses a rich history, reaching as far back as the Neolithic Period. Until the arrival of the Romans in A.D. 189, four city-states (Sami, Pali, Krani, and Pronnoi) ruled autonomously, minting coins and creating and breaking alliances with each other and cities on the mainland. Roman arrival briefly caused a decline in the island's prosperity. However, this seemed to recover quickly. The Imperial Period brought with it the founding of two new cities (Panormos and Kateleio). The Imperial Period is not as well documented as other periods on the island. However, new sites are continually coming to light and providing more information for this important time in the island's history. At least six archaeological sites on the island have significant mosaic remains. See Randsborg 2002 and Sotiriou 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Rathmayr and Scheibelreiter-Gail 2019, 185.

<sup>4</sup> Kallipolitis 1963, 6.

<sup>5</sup> Kallipolitis 1963, 7.

<sup>6</sup> Randsborg 2002, 5.

Kallipolitis found evidence for three periods of inhabitation in the villa: Imperial, Early Christian, and Post-Byzantine. After a fire destroyed the Imperial Period villa in the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. – indicated by a layer of burnt material discovered in the courtyard – it was repurposed as a Christian church, once again destroyed by a fire, and then constructed upon in the post-Byzantine era.<sup>7</sup> The excavated area of the villa consists of five interior spaces and a courtyard (Fig. 1). The first interior space is a lengthy entry hallway that connects to every other villa space. The four other interior spaces branch off from the right (eastern) side of the hallway, while the courtyard is positioned to the left (western). Three of these rooms are positioned in succession, with the two southernmost rooms having direct access to the hall and the third northernmost of the three only being accessible through the central room. The fourth interior space is located at the end of the hallway. The hallway acts as the central artery of this portion of the house, connecting the spaces and requiring all individuals who desire to access other areas of the space to pass through the hall.<sup>8</sup> The villa certainly extended to the east, but further evidence of structures was partially destroyed by the addition of a narthex in the Early Christian Period and in 1822 by the installation of a large water tank and cultivation in the area.<sup>9</sup> Four of the five interior spaces possess mosaic pavements, and three are in good condition, while the fourth is almost wholly destroyed. This article will focus on two of the mosaics – those showing the personification of Envy and a sacrificial scene (the Altar Mosaic) – in which the figure of Krateros is mentioned in both inscriptions.

Mosaicist signatures provide some of the only information about their creation. Often surviving well in the archaeological record, mosaic inscriptions can be analyzed, and patterns in vocabulary and grammar can be identified to better understand the individuals responsible for the pavements.<sup>10</sup> These commonalities within signatures have allowed

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<sup>7</sup> Kallipolitis 1963, 4; Rathmayr and Scheibelreiter-Gail 2019, 186.

<sup>8</sup> See Kallipolitis 1963 for the architectural plan.

<sup>9</sup> Kallipolitis 1963, 2, 5.

<sup>10</sup> Donderer 1989, 13.

for the distinction of roles mentioned within inscriptions, from broadly “mosaicist” to specific roles in the process.<sup>11</sup> However, not all inscriptions are signatures, and not all that are signatures follow the patterns set forth by most documented mosaics. Some inscriptions are warnings, some are wishes for health, some memorialize the name of the individual who owned the house or acted as patron in the creation of the pavement, and some are not at all clear-cut.

The mosaics of Skala are two such ambiguous pavements, and within their inscriptions, the figure of Krateros is introduced. The identity of the figure of Krateros is debated in scholarship. The unique composition of the inscriptions and the nature in which his name is mentioned obscure a straightforward identification of him as either the mosaicist or the patron. This article seeks to explore the so-called mosaic signatures to understand the role that Krateros played in the formation of the mosaic: mosaicist, patron, both, or perhaps another role altogether.

#### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE MOSAICS

The mosaic in the entry hallway, called the Envy Mosaic, depicts a youthful figure of the personification of envy, Phthonos, standing in the central panel of the pavement as four wild cats attack him (Fig. 2).<sup>12</sup> The wild cats, a panther, tiger, leopard, and lion, sink their teeth into his torso, shoulders, and legs. The mosaic stretches the length of the entry hall with the central panel of Phthonos approximately three meters and an average of seven steps into the villa.<sup>13</sup> Above and below the image are panels with three-dimensional cubes. The central panel is surrounded by a series of three geometric borders that serve as tools to draw a viewer’s attention to the image and inscription. The first is a border of spaced and poised serrated squares that extends to the walls before

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<sup>11</sup> Henig 2012; Poulsen 2012; Schibille et al. 2020; Zohar 2012.

<sup>12</sup> The mosaic measures 8.20 x 3.25 m and is marked as Room I on Kallipolitis’ plan.

<sup>13</sup> As part of my MA thesis, I examined the spatial aspects of the villa. During this examination, I created a two-scale model of the villa’s entryway and performed a test to see the average amount of steps needed to read the central panel of the Envy Mosaic. Three individuals walked to the central panel several times while counting their steps. The average of these steps was then taken, getting the number 7.

leading into a serrated saw-tooth (crowstep) pattern.<sup>14</sup> A simple guilloche follows and directly surrounds the central panel. The geometric panels possess an additional crowstep border oriented towards the guilloche.

This personification of Phthonos as a handsome youth with the cats attacking him is rather unique.<sup>15</sup> In literary sources and other images, Phthonos is most often depicted as a skeletal figure with hollow, exaggerated eyes, an enlarged phallus, and a hunchback.<sup>16</sup> Although partially damaged, the portion of Phthonos visible from the left side shows every sign of a healthy, smooth, youthful form. This departure from the canonical form of Phthonos that was well established by this point in time, suggests a distinct desire on behalf of the patron (or whoever was in charge of the design) for a unique version of Phthonos to achieve a specific goal and message. Below the figures, a twelve-line inscription, discussed in the following section and written in elegiac couplets, has been set in stone. The letters stand at approximately 0.04-0.05 m and are black tesserae against a white background.<sup>17</sup> The ends of the lines are marked with an ivy leaf.

The Altar Mosaic resides in a room almost directly to the right of the marble threshold that marks the entrance of the hallway (Fig. 3).<sup>18</sup> The mosaic can be divided into three registers: upper, middle, and lower. The registers are surrounded by a series of four geometric borders consisting of a row of tangent four-pointed stars as saltires, superposed triangles, round-tongued double guilloche, and tangent circles formed of four spindles.<sup>19</sup> The upper register is the largest and houses a representation of

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<sup>14</sup> Geometric patterns were identified with the help of Balmelle, Prudhomme, and Raynaud 2002.

<sup>15</sup> Dunbabin and Dickie 1983, 30-37. See Dunbabin and Dickie 1983 for a full discussion of the form in both material culture and literary texts.

<sup>16</sup> Dunbabin and Dickie 1983, 24.

<sup>17</sup> Kallipolitis 1963, 16.

<sup>18</sup> The marble threshold measures 1.05 x 0.50 m. The room, marked Room II on Kallipolitis' plan, measures 4.50 x 3.20 m.

<sup>19</sup> Geometric patterns were identified with the help of Balmelle, Prudhomme, and Raynaud 2002.

a fruit-laden altar with a human figure on either side. The two individuals, identified by Kallipolitis as children, stand on either side of the altar, which is oriented towards the right.<sup>20</sup> Kallipolitis does not assign a gender to the children, although Georges Daux asserts that it is a male and female pair.<sup>21</sup> Spyridon Marinatos asserts that the figures represent Krateros – who is mentioned again in this mosaic inscription – and his son while Rathmayr and Scheibelreiter-Gail suggest that the right-hand figure could be Pallas Athena.<sup>22</sup> Due to the damage on the Altar Mosaic, much of which is concentrated on these two figures, it is extremely difficult to identify them with any certainty. The figures possess notably different skin tones and hairstyles, but both appear to be wearing a knee-length garment, which appear to be the same, and are the same height. The right-hand figure does not have a beard, indicating either a female figure or a youth, and the left-hand figure's face is obscured with damage and therefore age cannot be gleaned with certainty. The right-hand figure's hair is depicted in a fringe-like hairstyle. A further discussion of the likely identification of these figures will take place below.

The middle register of the Altar Mosaic is positioned perpendicular to the top and depicts a boar, a bull, and a ram. This register is divided into three, with each animal standing on a piece of ground that divides the frame. Although the registers are oriented differently, they show a continuation of the same scene, likely with the animals facing the individuals at the altar. The sacrificial scene may be meant to reflect *trittoia boarchon* (Greek) or *suovetaurilia* (Latin), sacrifices that possessed a range of functions, one of the most significant for the *suovetaurilia* was the purification and protection of farmland – something that could be meaningful for a *villa rustica*.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Kallipolitis 1963, 18.

<sup>21</sup> Daux 1958.

<sup>22</sup> Marinatos 1958-1959, 359; Rathmayr and Scheibelreiter-Gail 2019, 191. Marinatos says that the figures are two men and “obviously” (προφανώς) Krateros and his son, although he does not provide any iconographical reasons for this conclusion.

<sup>23</sup> *EAH*, 2012, s.v. *suovetaurilia* (A. Bendlin); Burris 1927, 28; Ekroth 2014, 336; 2017, 22; Kallipolitis 1963, 31; Marinatos 1958-1959, 359; Rathmayr and Scheibelreiter-Gail 2019, 192.

Although the bull is the only entirely preserved animal, the identity of the other two animals is known from the inscription that occupies the bottom register. Stylistically, the inscription is nearly identical to the Envy Mosaic, with its letters standing at the height of 0.04 m and rendered in black tesserae against a white background, but is written in dactylic hexameter. Unfortunately, a large portion of the inscription has been destroyed but has been reconstructed. Along with a list of deities to whom the offerings are given, the figure of Krateros is mentioned again, this time with the addition of his son. There appears to be a correlation in these mosaic pavements to reflect the individuals or items that the inscriptions mention in their figural decoration. For this reason, the identification of the two figures as Krateros and his son, as mentioned in the inscription, is quite convincing.<sup>24</sup> However, as there is a list of deities provided alongside Krateros and his son, the figures could also plausibly be any of the divine individuals, as suggested by Rathmayr and Scheibelreiter-Gail.<sup>25</sup> Accounting for the damage obstructing a clear view of the figures, I believe the most likely candidates are Krateros and his son as the inscriptions (provided in the next section) specifically mention the two individuals in relation to the altar just as each of the depicted animals is specifically named.

The villa is home to at least two more mosaics. The first is fragmentary but contains evidence of a third, illegible inscription and the possible depiction of a horse's leg.<sup>26</sup> This mosaic is in the center of the three rooms branching from the hallway. Although significantly damaged, this mosaic seems to have followed the pattern set forth by the previous two, with a series of geometric borders surrounding a central figural panel with an inscription. The second is a geometric pavement that, despite not possessing any figural depictions, includes a series of geometric borders leading to a central three-dimensional swastika meander in the center. This mosaic is positioned in the northernmost of the three

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<sup>24</sup> Marinatos 1958–1959, 359.

<sup>25</sup> Rathmayr and Scheibelreiter-Gail 2019, 191.

<sup>26</sup> See Kallipolitis 1963 and Rathmayr and Scheibelreiter-Gail 2019 for more information.



interior rooms – accessible only through the central room mentioned above.

#### THE INSCRIPTIONS

The Envy Mosaic's inscription is twelve lines written in elegiac couplets, echoing “the language of poetry generally and that of Homer specifically” (Fig. 4).<sup>27</sup> The inscription in both mosaics explain to viewers what is occurring in the figural depictions. This inscription explains how and why Phthonos came to be on the pavement:

Ὡ Φθόνε, καὶ σοῦ τήνδε ὀλοῆς | φρενὸς εἰκόνα γράψε  
 ζωγράφος, ἦν Κρατερός θήκα | το λαϊνέην,  
 οὐχ ὅτι τειμήεις σὺ μετ' ἀνδρά | σιν, ἀλλ' ὅτι θνητῶν  
 ὄλβοις βασκαίνων σχῆμα τό | δε ἀμφεβ[ά]λου.  
 Ἔστ[αθ]ι δ[ὴ] πάντεσσιν ἐνώπιος, | ἔσταθι τλήμων,  
 Τηκεδόνος φθονερῶν δεῖγμα | φέρων στύγιον.<sup>28</sup>

O Phthonos, here the painter has drawn an image of your sinister heart, which Krateros made of stone – not because you are praised among men, but because you disparage the prosperity of mortals were you beset this appearance. Stand before all, stand, wretched, bearing the abominable sign of the envious wasting away.<sup>29</sup>

The Altar Mosaic inscription is eighteen lines and is written in dactylic hexameter (Fig. 5). It provides definite identifications of the bull, ram, and boar with bristling hair and emphasizes the high quality of work with which the animals are rendered.

Παλλάδι καὶ Μ[ούσησι]<sup>30</sup> μά]λ' ἐν | πλοκάμοισι Τύχ[η] τε |  
 Φοίβω τε Ἀπόλ[λωνι] καὶ | Ἐρ[μῆ] Μαϊάδος υ[ι]εῖ |  
 αὐτῶ σὺν βω[μῶ] Κράτ]ερος | καὶ τοῦδε φίλ[ος] παις |  
 ταῦρον τε κρει[όν] | τε ἠδὲ φοριξ[α]ύχε | να κάπρον  
 Λεπτήσιν λιθ[ά]δεσι συ[να]ρμός | σαντες [ἔθ]ηκαν,

<sup>27</sup> Scholtz 2021, 342.

<sup>28</sup> Daux 1963, 636. For an alternate version of the translation, please see *SEG* XIX 408-409. Skala. *Carmina in Musivo Scripta*, in. s. IIIp or Dunbabin and Dickie 1983.

<sup>29</sup> All translations have been made by N. Vellidis unless otherwise noted.

<sup>30</sup> See Scholtz 2021 for a discussion on the possibility of Μ[ούσησι] (muses) being Μ[οίρησι] (fates).

τέχνης δαιδαλέης ἀναθήματα | καὶ μερόπεσσιν  
εἰκόνας εὐσεβίης ἔσορᾶν, ἧς λώϊον οὐδέν.<sup>31</sup>

For Pallas (Athena), for the Muses with exceedingly beautiful hair, for Tyche, for Phoebus Apollo, and for Hermes son of Maia. Here, with an altar, Krateros and his dear son have laid a bull, a ram, and a boar with bristling hair; and by fitting together small stones (have placed) votive offerings of a cunning skill and an image of reverence to the gods, of which for mortals nothing is more desirable to look upon.

### MOSAIC SIGNATURES

The figure of Krateros has been a source of debate among scholars. This name, fairly common in Greece, is mentioned once in each mosaic inscription. In the Envy Mosaic ἦν Κρατερος θήκατο λαϊνέην and in the Altar Mosaic Κράτ]ερος | καὶ τοῦδε φίλ[ος παῖς]. With the evidence of a third inscription in the Fragmentary Mosaic, and based on the patterns set by the Envy and Altar Mosaics, there may have been another mention of Krateros in this inscription.

Initially, the name was identified by Kallipolitis as an artist's signature, a notion with which other scholars initially agreed.<sup>32</sup> Michael Donderer, in his monograph discussing the social standing and signatures of ancient mosaicists, pushes back against this notion, positing that Krateros was instead the name of the villa owner, citing specifically the length of the inscriptions and the frequency of the name being mentioned.<sup>33</sup> Katherine Dunbabin, Alexandra Kankleit, and Elisabeth Rathmayr and Veronika Scheibelreiter-Gail also argue for the identification of Krateros as patron.<sup>34</sup> Scholtz also favors an identification of Krateros as patron as does Luz Neira-Jimenez.<sup>35</sup> The identification of Krateros as the patron and not the mosaicist is certainly the majority. However, the fact that there is debate,

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<sup>31</sup> Daux 1963, 636. For an alternate version of the translation, please see *SEG* XIX 408-409. Skala. *Carmina in Musivo Scripta*, in. s. IIIp.

<sup>32</sup> Bruneau 1966; Daux 1963. Among others in favor of Krateros as mosaicist, see Daux 1958 and 1963, Hood 1957, Lavagne 1978, Megaw 1962-1963.

<sup>33</sup> Donderer 1989, 126.

<sup>34</sup> Dunbabin 1999, 324; Kankleit 1994, 77-67; Rathmayr and Scheibelreiter-Gail 2019.

<sup>35</sup> Neira Jiménez 2014; Scholtz 2021.

even if the debate has trended with the identification of Krateros as patron as of late, indicates that there is something occurring within these inscriptions that is worthwhile to examine.

While not immensely common, signatures of mosaicists are plentiful enough to recognize a distinct style of their composition. From extant evidence, mosaics were usually signed with the name of the artist and with some form of the Greek verb *ποιέω* (“make, do”), such as ΓΝΩΣΙΣ ΕΠΟΗΣΕΝ from the Stag Hunt Mosaic in Pella, ΣΩΦΙΛΟΣ ΕΠΟΙΕΙ from the mosaic of Berenice II in Alexandria.<sup>36</sup> However, Diklah Zohar notes that it is “not always clear” whether *ποιέω* always refers to the mosaicist or if there are nuances that cause it to indicate the patron.<sup>37</sup> One mosaic, a copy of a famous mosaic from Pergamon, uses the verb *ἐργάζομαι* (“work at, make”) and says ΗΡΑΚΛΙΤΟΣ ΗΡΓΑΣΑΤΟ.<sup>38</sup> Donderer produced a list of words that he believes indicate that an inscription on a mosaic is a signature of the mosaicist. These include *γράφειν/γρᾶφή* (“draw/paint/drawing”), *ἐργάζεσθαι* (“work, labor at, make”), *ἔργον* (“work, deed”), *ζωγράφος* (“painter”), *κονιᾶν* (“cover with stucco or whitewash”), *μουσιάρχιος κεντητής* (“mosaic worker”), *ποιεῖν/ποιεῖν* (“make, produce”), and *ψηφοθέτης* (“maker of tessellated pavements”).<sup>39</sup> Other common words used – at least in mosaics found in Crete and identified by Rebecca Sweetman – include “ἔψηφοθέτησα (placed the tesserae) ... ψηφιῶται (person who worked the mosaic), κυβευταί (person who made the cubes), or τεχνῖται (craftsperson).”<sup>40</sup> Many of these are similar to those indicated by Donderer in form and meaning but are not exact. These illustrate that a wide variety of words can be utilized in mosaic signatures.

With the exception of *ζωγράφος* and *γράφω*, none of these “buzz” words appear in the inscriptions of the Skala mosaics. For verbs indicating some sort of making or doing, the inscriptions use *συναρμόζω* (“fit

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<sup>36</sup> Hurwit 2015, 65, 67; Pappalardo 2020, 110.

<sup>37</sup> Zohar 2012, 173.

<sup>38</sup> Hurwit 2015, 68.

<sup>39</sup> Donderer 1989, 15-20.

<sup>40</sup> Sweetman 2013, 117.

or put together”) and τίθημι (“put, place, set”). That said, it should be noted that τίθημι finds itself as a root for several mosaic-related terms that are identified as indicators of mosaicist signatures (ψηφοθέτης, “maker of tessellated pavements” and ψηφοθετέω, “to make tessellated pavements”), but is distinct in its isolated form in the Skala Mosaics. The patterns set out by previous signatures do not seem to apply to these inscriptions. Moreover, there was a trend in the Late Antique period – later than when the Skala mosaics date – where owners were identified.<sup>41</sup> However, the identity of the owner was often marked by the verb ἔδωκεν (“donated, gave”), which is not present in either inscription in Skala. It was more commonly used in church environments where the mosaic was a donation.<sup>42</sup> In the absence of such apparent indicators of ownership, Sweetman suggests that the aorist case can point towards an individual as an owner instead of an artist.<sup>43</sup> The verbs used in the Skala inscriptions are overwhelmingly in the aorist – although again, none of these are traditional, as seen in other signatures and inscriptions. It should be noted that a possible explanation for the divergence in vocabulary could partially result from the verse inscriptions and the requirement for words to fit into a specific meter. However, as will be explored below, the unique nature of the inscriptions and the pavements suggest a greater significance in word choice than can be explained by meter alone.

#### THE IDENTITY OF KRATEROS

The identification of Krateros as a mosaicist seems to be the first and most natural train of thought because, in its most literal sense, that is what the inscriptions say (ἦν Κρατερος θήκα|το λαϊνέην (“which Krateros made of stone”) and Κράτ]ερος | και τοῦδε φίλ[ος παῖς] ταῦρον τε κρει[όν] | τε ἠδὲ φοιξ[α]ύχει|να κάπρον λεπτήσιν λ[ιθ]ά|δεσι συ[να]ρμός|σαντες [ἔθ]ηκαν, τέχνης δαυδαλέης ἀναθήματα (“Krateros and his dear son have laid a bull, a ram, and a boar with bristling hair; and by fitting together small stones (have

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<sup>41</sup> Sweetman 2013, 117.

<sup>42</sup> Sweetman 2013, 117.

<sup>43</sup> Sweetman 2013, 117.

placed) votive offerings of a cunning skill"). Were readers supposed to take this at face value or endow it with meaning beyond what is right in front of them? In the Envy Mosaic inscription, there are two possible mentions of the mosaic making process. The first is γράψε ζωγράφος ("the painter has drawn") and the second ἦν Κρατερος θήκα|το λαϊνέην ("which Krateros made of stone"). As mentioned previously, Donderer marks both ζωγράφος and forms of γράφειν/γραφή as words that indicate a signature.<sup>44</sup> Could this distinction between the painter and Krateros making the image out of stone be an indication into the division of labor in a mosaic workshop?

It is likely that mosaic workshops consisted of a range of individuals who were responsible for various roles within the construction process, with some individuals being extremely specialized.<sup>45</sup> Poulsen mentions a mosaic inscription from Lebanon that specifically designates a painter and a mosaicist, so it is not an impossible scenario to take the inscription literally and assign Krateros the role of mosaicist and an unnamed individual the role of painter who either designed the mosaic in painting form first or who drew the guidelines for the actual mosaic.<sup>46</sup>

Following trends seen in Crete and suggested by Sweetman, the presence of only the name Krateros with no other name attached to it could point to a non-elite artist.<sup>47</sup> However, there was likely a wide range of social statuses for mosaicists that varied throughout the empire.<sup>48</sup> It is unclear how apparent these nuances in the language, such as a single

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<sup>44</sup> Donderer 1989, 15-20.

<sup>45</sup> Poulsen 2012, 132. There was, at least in late antiquity, a distinction between at least four types of mosaicists. These were *pavimentarii*, *tesserarii*, *tessellarii*, and *musivarii*. The distinction was further divided by decree in 302 B.C. (Diocletian's Edict) where we are told that there was a pay difference between the *tessellarius* (50 denarii), *musivarius* (60 denarii), and common worker (25 denarii). Poulsen 2012, 129; Schibille 2020, 1.

<sup>46</sup> Poulsen 2012, 132.

<sup>47</sup> Sweetman 2013, 118.

<sup>48</sup> Donderer 1989, 47-49. There is evidence from tomb that shows a *musivarius* was an imperial freedman and mosaic signatures that indicate the individuals making them were slaves. Poulsen 2012, 132.

name or the presence of the aorist case, would have been to ancient viewers. What would have been obvious, however, would be the intent of the signature. If Krateros were a well-known or famous mosaicist, having his work directly attributed to him through the presence of his name would undoubtedly increase the prestige of the villa.<sup>49</sup> Although no other inscriptions bearing the name of Krateros have been discovered, there is some evidence pointing to a mosaic workshop on Kefalonia or the mainland in Nikopolis or Patras.<sup>50</sup> Before continuing, however, it is important to note that the verification of a mosaic workshop is an extensive process that requires very detailed viewing of the available pavements. Although the possibility of a workshop in this area is endlessly interesting, the purpose of this article is not to definitively identify a workshop, only to present it as a possibility. Therefore, the evidence presented here is only a brief overview.

On the island, Georges Daux attributes one of the mosaics discovered in Sami to the Skala mosaics' artist. He writes, "the variety of colors, technique and geometric patterns are reminiscent of the Skala mosaics. They are certainly two contemporary mosaics, works by the same workmen."<sup>51</sup> If not the same artist, it was almost certainly the same workshop. On the island of Kefalonia, specifically from the town of Sami on the eastern coast, there are at least four mosaic pavements that can possibly be attributed to the same workshop.<sup>52</sup> These mosaics all date somewhere in the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries A.D. and display iconographic similarities to each other and to the mosaics in Skala (Fig. 6). On the mainland in Patras, several mosaics with the same color schemes, geometric patterns, shadowing, and rendering of figures have been discovered and a workshop connection to Kefalonia has been suggested by Rathmayr and Scheibelreiter-Gail and Delis, who includes Nikopolis in

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<sup>49</sup> Hurwit 2015, 65.

<sup>50</sup> Dellis 2013, 60; Rathmayr and Scheibelreiter-Gail 2019, 184, 196.

<sup>51</sup> Daux 1958, 659: "La variété des couleurs, la technique et les motifs géométriques rappellent les mosaïques de Skala... Il s'agit certainement de deux mosaïques contemporaines, œuvres des memes artisans."

<sup>52</sup> These mosaics are currently on display outside of the Archaeological Museum of Sami. See Dellis 2013.

the workshop group.<sup>53</sup> It is very likely that it was only one, or, at the most, two, workshops that supported these areas as it appears that these communities acting independently would not have been able to support a workshop.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, a connection between these areas is almost certain, although it would take considerably more work to identify the center of the workshop. It is likely that the mosaics in these areas come from the same workshop and that the same artist, or artists, made or had a very prominent role in the making of all of them – although it should be noted that if it is difficult to pinpoint a workshop, it is even more challenging to identify an individual artist.<sup>55</sup>

Shelia Campbell provides a list of three stylistic traits that can be used to identify a workshop. These traits include "variations on standard geometric forms," "repeated combinations of geometric forms," and "repeated themes or iconography."<sup>56</sup> Poulsen also emphasizes that a workshop can be identified by looking for certain motifs that they might create often, although since there is an element of popularity of motifs that spans across the empire, this is not always a solid way of identification.<sup>57</sup> It is generally agreed that a detailed examination of the actual formation of the geometric shapes, i.e., the idiosyncrasies in their intricate details that is needed to identify workshops and individual mosaicists. However, as previously stated, that is not the goal of this paper.<sup>58</sup> From a surface examination of the mosaics from Kefalonia, Patras, and Nikopolis, there is a significant pattern of repetition in the combinations of geometric forms that appear in the mosaic pavements. There is also a distinct similarity in the style of figural decoration that is consistent

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<sup>53</sup> Dellis 2013; Rathmayr and Scheibelreiter-Gail 2019. More mosaics in Patras could be from the same workshop that are mentioned in this section. For an overview of the mosaics in Patras, please see Papapostolou 2009 or Aktypi 2020. For Nikopolis, see Zachos 2008.

<sup>54</sup> Martin 2017, 57; Poulsen 2012, 132.

<sup>55</sup> Campbell 1979, 288.

<sup>56</sup> Campbell 1979, 288.

<sup>57</sup> Poulsen 2012, 129.

<sup>58</sup> Clarke 2006; Martin 2017; Poulsen 2012; Zohar 2012.

throughout these areas as well as the design of the pavement overall, including the spatial layout.

In the mosaics from Sami in Kefalonia, they are overwhelmingly designed so that the central panel (whether figural or decorative) is surrounded by a series of detailed geometric borders as in Skala (Fig. 6).<sup>59</sup> In Patras, three mosaics are of particular interest because of their stylistic and spatial similarities to the Skala mosaics.<sup>60</sup> The Mosaic of the Wine-Press is extremely similar in layout to the Envy Mosaic in design – both spatially and decoratively. The same geometric combination of the cubes in 3D perspective and the crowstep pattern are shown, while in both the Mosaic of the Sacrifice and the Mosaic of the Horae the "intersecting circles and concave squares" pattern is used and in the latter mosaics is paired once again with a crowstep border.<sup>61</sup> In terms of repeated themes or iconography, two of the Patras mosaics depict altars of almost identical form to the Skala mosaic. All are positioned in a

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<sup>59</sup> Of course, this is a trend seen throughout Greece and the eastern empire during this time. However, the geometric patterns utilized as borders in these areas are repetitive and designed in a highly distinctive manner.

<sup>60</sup> These are the Mosaic of the Wine-Press (3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.), the Mosaic of the Sacrifice (2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.), and the Mosaic of the Horai (2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.). I do not have access to images of the mosaics to reproduce here, so please see Papapostolou 2009 or Aktypi 2020 for images. The Mosaic of the Wine-Press is extremely similar in design to the Envy Mosaic in Skala with a long vertical design with a figural panel in the center. The central panel depicts Pan stomping grapes with two individuals while two more carry baskets and are putting them into the basin. In the top right corner of the panel, there is a depiction of a theater mask. There is a partially preserved inscription above the figures. The Mosaic of the Sacrifice also possesses a central figural panel that is off-centered. The panel shows an altar with a burning sacrifice on top. The altar is surrounded by a rooster on one side and a goose on the other. Garlands and sacrificial tools are scattered throughout the panel. The Mosaic of the Horae is centered but possesses the same series of geometric borders as the others. In its central figural panel, it shows three women, likely the Horae clasp hands and dance counterclockwise around an altar.

<sup>61</sup> Ovadiah 1980, 21, 23; Papapostolou 2009, 48-50, 50-55, 56-59. I do not have access to images of the mosaics to reproduce here, so please see Papapostolou 2009 for images.



three-quarters view and are square in shape. Notably on the altars of the Altar Mosaic and the Mosaic of the Horae, the representation of a lit flame was created in the same way, namely a squat triangle shape. Additionally, the Mosaic of the Wine-Press finds its match in the Envy Mosaic in layout, geometric design, and presence of inscription. Furthermore, there is consistent use of shadows beneath figures across the pavements. This evidence could be the beginnings of what is needed to identify a "signature," as suggested by Campbell, that can be used to prove the presence of a workshop and, possibly, the hand of a single artist.<sup>62</sup>

With the presence of a workshop being extremely likely, it is interesting that there are not any typical mosaicist signatures that have been discovered. However, this itself is not incriminating evidence against Krateros as mosaicist. It could just be that signatures were not in vogue in this area. There are several examples, however, especially from Patras, of mosaic inscriptions. A majority of these inscriptions appear to be informative labels identifying individuals, but there are at least three (one from Kefalonia and two from Patras) that identify real individuals by name and describe political positions they held and specifically state that they commissioned the pavements.<sup>63</sup> With the exception of one, however, these all hail from public spaces. Therefore, mentions of individuals and especially their political positions not out of place. Howev-

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<sup>62</sup> Campbell 1979, 288. To this list of mosaics from a possible workshop, I would add (from Patras) the mosaics from Syssini Street showing fish and poultry (2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.), the Triton Mosaic from Nikita Street (3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.), the Mosaic of the Caledonian Boar Hunt (3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.), the Gladiator Mosaic (3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.), the fish mosaic from Londou Street (2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.), the mosaic showing the cyclopes Polyphemus (2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.), the mosaic from Ypsila Alonia showing actors and athletes (2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.), the mosaic of Aphrodite/Venus (2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.), the Mosaic of the Hunt (2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.). For a continuation of the same workshop at a later time than the Skala mosaics, I would suggest the Nile Mosaic from Kanakari Street (Patras, 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) and the mosaics from the House of Manius Antoninus (Nikopolis, 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> century A.D.). See Papapostolou 2009 and Zachos 2008.

<sup>63</sup> Aktypi 2020, 129-130, 133-134; Dellis 2013, 56; Papapostolou 2009, 50-55.

er, the two mentions of Krateros without any specific mention of a political association, being located within a private space, and an emphasis on the skill and techniques used in the mosaics could point to an elaborate signature. If he is the artist, it is a rare example of an artist making themselves very present in the domestic space, which is not usually seen. It adds to the lux appeal and prestige of the mosaics – if the owners allowed such a presence, it certainly was for a good reason.

On the other hand, the identification of Krateros as the owner comes with its own case of convincing evidence. If these mosaics are pieces from a more expansive, accomplished, and well-known workshop, why do none of the other mosaics possess any type of signature from the artist? The owner could have specifically requested it for these mosaics while others did not. Still, the praise of skill seen in the inscriptions seems too flattering for others not to have wanted the prestige that would have come with identifying the artist. However, the most significant evidence pointing towards the identity of Krateros as the owner comes from the number of times his name appears in the inscriptions. His name is mentioned twice, with the possibility of a third mention in the Fragmentary Mosaic's lost inscription. His son is also mentioned – something that has not been seen in other signatures. One mention of the mosaicist shows prestige and luxury, but two mentions and the inclusion of a family member suggest a familiarity not allowed to an outside artist. Additionally, the same evidence utilized in the argument for Krateros as mosaicist in a recorded division of labor (ζωγράφος and γράφειν/γραφή) could be used to signify a distinct break from the workshop (γράψε ζωγράφος) and the patron (ἦν Κρατερος θήκα|το λαϊνέην) who made the image of stone not literally, but by commissioning it.

Rathmayr and Scheibelreiter-Gail believe they have identified the figure of Krateros from a temporally compatible inscription from Olympia that mentions the figure Lucius Pompeius Krateros Cassianus and his son Publius Egnatius Maximus Venustinus.<sup>64</sup> While the single name could point to a non-elite artist, it could also point to an individual go-

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<sup>64</sup> Rathmayr and Scheibelreiter-Gail 2019, 196.

ing by only his cognomen in his home while “it was obligatory in the honorary inscription of the public realm that he was addressed with his full name.”<sup>65</sup> This is not certain, but the temporally compatible inscriptions point to the existence of at least one individual with this name in the area of Kefalonia and should not be discounted. The lack of direct comparisons to the iconography of Phthonos supports this claim further, as it is commonly accepted that departures from “stock scenes used more commonly ... imply that owners were closely involved in choosing particular designs and they asked for special motifs which were not part of the usual repertoire.”<sup>66</sup> A desire to personalize the mosaics in this way could point to Krateros being the owner of the villa.

There is a third possibility: that of Krateros being both artist and owner, or something similar. Perhaps such strong evidence can be produced for both cases of identification because Krateros was a master mosaicist who provided the pavements for his own dwelling. The syntax of the inscriptions, the probable presence of a workshop in the area, and the personalization of the iconography (a unique form of Phthonos and sacrificial scene likely showing Krateros and his son) support this. Campbell notes the existence of itinerant mosaicists, who travelled without a home base, so, while slightly different in this case, it is not out of the realms of possibility that a craftsman such as Krateros could have lived in Kefalonia but belonged to a workshop in Patras, which is approximately 86 km away on the mainland, or vice versa.<sup>67</sup> Métraux highlights a trend in the late antique period of owners of villas moving away from contracting out work and “know, do, and supervise everything [themselves].”<sup>68</sup> This could perhaps be a rather extreme case of that, where the owner already possessed the necessary skills for the construction of the pavements and followed the broad trend of providing in-house work. Luz Neira Jiménez ponders whether the mention of Krateros' son could indicate a trend that appeared in the late 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Rathmayr and Scheibelreiter-Gail 2019, 196.

<sup>66</sup> Nevett 2010, 127.

<sup>67</sup> Campbell 1979, 288.

<sup>68</sup> Métraux 2018, 405.

centuries A.D.<sup>69</sup> This trend shows a desire on behalf of the craftsmen to document the work of the workshop as a whole and highlights crafts being passed down to the children of artisans.<sup>70</sup> Although she ultimately rejects the idea, this could be an important element to the inscription. There is evidence, both from mosaic and funerary inscriptions, that illustrate it was common for workshops to be family businesses, with the father training their sons in the craft.<sup>71</sup> Conceivably Krateros had other family members, likely a wife and other children as well. However, the decision was made to only include a mention of his son in the Altar Mosaic inscription.<sup>72</sup> This decision could have been motivated by the fact that Krateros was training his son to be a mosaicist and therefore decided to commemorate their joint effort in the pavement.

The discovery of the possible full name of Krateros by Rathmayr and Scheibelreiter-Gail does not necessarily negate this workshop connection. If the Krateros they have identified from the monument in Olympia is the same Krateros that is named in the mosaic, it would be likely that he occupied a privileged status in the ancient world. As previously mentioned, mosaicists seem to have come from a wide range of economic backgrounds. I do not believe there is any reason why Krateros could not have been a privileged individual and a mosaicist, but there is another option. J. Becker, C. Kondoleon, and Zohar present evidence that the head of a workshop could have been a business person responsible for the organization and original financing of the workshop and not actually the individual placing the tesserae.<sup>73</sup> If this was the case for Krateros, this could explain why his name is found outside of Kefalonia

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<sup>69</sup> Neira Jiménez 2014, 79.

<sup>70</sup> Neira Jiménez 2014, 79.

<sup>71</sup> Poulsen 2012, 131; Zohar 2012, 173: funerary inscription from Perinthos (2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.), mosaic inscriptions in Beth Shean and Beth Alpha (6<sup>th</sup> century A.D.), funerary inscription from Beneventum, mosaic inscription from Umm al-Rasas (8<sup>th</sup> century A.D.), mosaic inscriptions at Kefar Kana and Sepphoris (4<sup>th</sup> century A.D.), mosaic inscriptions Zahrani (6<sup>th</sup> century A.D.), mosaic inscription at Palymra (3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.).

<sup>72</sup> Of course, there is the Fragmentary Mosaic in the villa which could possibly contain mentions of other family members.

<sup>73</sup> Zohar 2012, 171.

in a privileged area and why the inscriptions are written in verse, which would presumably have required a “classical” education.

Both scenarios (Krateros as actual mosaicist or Krateros as owner of the workshop) could explain the personalization and the knowledge displayed within the inscriptions to the inner workings of the mosaic-making process. Specifically, in the Altar Mosaic, the actions of Krateros and his son are described using the verb συναρμόζω (“fit together, put together, join together”) on the λεπτήσιν λιθάδεσι (“small stones”), seemingly speaking to the technique of making a mosaic which, of course, is a collection of small, individual tesserae that come together to form a larger image. The inscription also uses the aorist form of the verb τίθημι (ἔθηκον, “place, put, lay”). Although this is not the most commonly used word concerning the construction of mosaics when used in isolation – again, it is notably present in ψηφοθέτης (“maker of tessellated pavements”) and ψηφοθετέω (“to make tessellated pavements”) – there is another instance noted in a papyrus fragment from the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C., which reads:

... θήσει δὲ καὶ  
[ἐν] τῇ προς[τ]άδι τὴν πρὸς τῶι  
[ἀν]δρείῳ [θόλω]ι τῇ αὐτῇ λέ[ξ]ει.<sup>74</sup>

He will lay in the porch of the women’s room the same arrangement of pebbles as in the porch of the men’s room.<sup>75</sup>

Although separated in chronological terms, this papyrus fragment provides an account for future mosaic plans where the physical act of putting a mosaic in a space is referred to with the future form of the verb τίθημι. The use of τίθημι, and by extension συναρμόζω, may be terms used by actual mosaicists in the context of their work, while the others previously discussed represent words that were used for an audience on non-mosaicists – a layman’s term of sorts. Since Krateros is taking up a unique position of being the individual in charge of creating the pavements in a space that he also owned, he had greater freedom to use the vocabulary of a mosaicist without worrying about the individu-

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<sup>74</sup> P. Cairo Zeno 59 665.

<sup>75</sup> Koenen 1971, 277.

als he was commissioned by not understanding. These words would signify an intricate understanding of the work and portray an image of Krateros as a master craftsman.

Returning briefly to the discussion of the probable mosaic workshop in Kefalonia, Patras, and Nikopolis and the three previously mentioned inscriptions (one from Kefalonia and two from Patras) that identify real individuals by name and detail their political gains and positions.<sup>76</sup> The previously mentioned Mosaic of the Wine-Press possesses an inscription that names two individuals.<sup>77</sup> The names are either Theodoros (or Diodoros) and Statianitas, and they are noted to have funded the building of the building mentioned in the inscription.<sup>78</sup> Another mosaic from Patras names Neikostratos and cites his position as an *oikonomos* (οἰκονόμος) and *agoranomos* (ἀγορανόμος).<sup>79</sup> The inscription from Kefalonia was discovered in a bath complex in Sami in 2008 and dating to the Imperial Period.<sup>80</sup> Although incomplete, it shows the Dionysus (Enthusiastic Dionysus) surrounded by geometric borders similar to those in Skala and with an inscription above the god. The inscription is likely naming the procurator of the baths, as evidenced by the noun ἐπιτρέπω being present.

These three inscriptions are similar in structure to each other but are different from the Skala inscriptions in length, vocabulary, meter, and individuals named. These differences in otherwise aesthetically similar pavements could point towards the identity of Krateros as the mosaicist and owner of the house, as the meter, vocabulary, and length found in the Skala Inscriptions are not repeated in these mosaics. Additionally, the reading of Krateros as mosaicist and owner provides a greater understanding of why the gods mentioned in the Altar Inscription are present. It could be a connection to the verse – which is valid to some extent – but it could also be a connection to Krateros' role in the world. If he was a mosaicist – and a cunningly skilled one at that (τέχνης δαιδαλέης) – then

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<sup>76</sup> Aktypi 2020, 129-130, 133-134; Dellis 2013, 56; Papapostolou 2009, 50-55.

<sup>77</sup> For the entire inscription, see Papapostolou 2004–2009.

<sup>78</sup> Papapostolou 2009, 54.

<sup>79</sup> Goodrich 2010, 108-112.

<sup>80</sup> Dellis 2013, 56.

the presence of deities that rule over skill and craftsmanship aligns with the image that he is portraying through the pavements.

Additionally, although not the focus of this article, the spatial elements of the mosaic pavements within the built environment indicate that there was equal, if not more, care placed into the visual and spatial setup of the mosaics. The Altar Mosaic, with the registers placed in different orientations and geometric patterns encouraging the viewer to move to the right and causing a viewer to circumnavigate the mosaic in order to view all of the registers correctly, was designed to imitate the circular movement of the *suovetaurilia*. The central panel Envy Mosaic was placed seven steps into the hall, once again with motion being encouraged by the geometric patterns, causing the viewer to have to venture into the house to see the image and read the inscription. The panel was placed in a portion of the hall where there were no windows. This, paired with the horrifying imagery and warning message, would have created a sense of being trapped – a very purposeful placement for a very purposeful warning mosaic. Regardless of if the mosaicist can be identified as Krateros or not, the expert placement of the pavements indicates a mosaicist with great knowledge and foresight – and seemingly control over every aspect of the pavement.

## CONCLUSION

Mosaicist signatures continue to be a source of great insight into a sector of the ancient world that was rarely documented in detail. They provide names of individuals that would have otherwise been lost, details of the distribution of labor, and, occasionally, present modern-day viewers with an explanation for the unique elements of a pavement. There is something distinctive happening in this pavement. The syntax, the mentioning of Krateros (twice) and his son, and the design of the pavements all indicate that there was an immense level of care that went into these mosaics and this villa space. These inscriptions do not fit the pattern of what has been seen in this area.

If Krateros is both the mosaicist and owner, the identification could provide a glimpse into the lives of master artists not seen up to this point. Of course, this is just a possibility. However, the iconography, the inscriptions, and the level of personalization do not find parallels in the

extant evidence in or around Kefalonia or the wider ancient world. Krateros makes himself extremely visible and prominent throughout the mosaics, something that would have been unlikely for an artist, even a prestigious one, to have done in someone else's domain. An identification of Krateros as the owner and nothing more does not explain the level of knowledge about mosaic making process that the unique choices in vocabulary indicate. It is a possibility, of course, that Krateros was the patron and simply possessed a specific interest and a more-than-average knowledge about the mosaic making process. However, there are elements that indicate a more intimate, vocational knowledge of the process.

Although not discussed in depth in this article, the liberty taken with the composition of the mosaics (unique form of Phthonos and the inclusion of Krateros and his son in the figural decoration of the Altar Mosaic) and the manipulation of the physical space that the mosaics are placed within suggest an individual with more knowledge than a patron, even one with specific desires in mind. Whether Krateros inhabited this villa while still a master mosaicist and travelled around Kefalonia or to the mainland to work using the villa as a home base, or whether he worked as a truly itinerant mosaicist and settled in Kefalonia after making a significant amount of money is still unknown. Several routes could have led Krateros to own this villa and create these mosaics. As mentioned previously, there was likely a wide range of individuals who were mosaicists and, therefore, a wide range of possibilities for how Krateros came to create a pavement for this home. Regardless of if Krateros was likely the mosaicist and the owner or just one or the other, his message is this: "this is luxury, this is wealth, this is being blessed by the gods – and this was made by me."

*St Cross College, University of Oxford, UK  
nikki.vellidis@stx.ox.ac.uk*





Figure 1. The interior rooms of the villa.<sup>81</sup>



Figure 2. Envy Mosaic in the entry hall and detail of the central panel.

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<sup>81</sup> All photographs have been taken by the author.



Figure 3. Altar Mosaic in the entry hall and detail of the top register of the central panel.



Figure 4. Inscription of the Envy Mosaic.



Figure 5. Inscription of the Altar Mosaic.





Figure 6. Mosaics from Sami (L-R): Karalis Plot (2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.), Bath Complex (2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.), Dichalion Street Building (3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.), Bath Complex in the area of Constantatos Square (2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.).

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