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The rapports between 'techné' and 'paideia' in the Roman Empire: reading the Antiochene mosaics

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ABSTRACT. Discussion on the Roman mosaic as *techné* or as *ars*, is provided, or rather, a decoration technique for interiors made at high specialization levels. When the main procedures adopted in mosaic art are established, we will show how a certain technique, a particular way in handling unsophisticated materials learnt by semi-illiterate people, lost throughout the ages, was used to express themes and motifs connected with *paideia*, the superior education of the Greco-Roman elite. As a case study, two mid-3rd century CE mosaics found in the so-called House of Menander, a *villa* located in the suburb of Daphne, in southern Antioch, will be investigated.

Keywords: late antiquity, *paideia*, image.

Artes do fazer e usos do saber no império romano: 'lendo' os mosaicos de Antioquia

RESUMO. Neste artigo, pretendemos desenvolver algumas reflexões acerca do mosaico romano como *techné* ou *ars*, ou seja, como uma técnica de decoração de interiores que comportava um alto nível de especialização. Uma vez estabelecidos, em linhas gerais, os procedimentos empregados na confecção dos mosaicos, buscaremos, em seguida, demonstrar como determinada técnica, uma maneira particular de manipulação de materiais rústicos dominada por indivíduos semiletrados cuja memória praticamente se perdeu, é mobilizada com a finalidade de exprimir temas e motivos conectados com a *paideia*, a formação cultural superior concedida aos membros da elite greco-romana. Como estudo de caso, tomaremos dois mosaicos encontrados na assim denominada Casa de Menandro, uma *villa* situada no distrito de Dafne, ao sul de Antioquia. Ambos os mosaicos datam da segunda metade do século III.

Palavras-chave: antiguidade tardia, *paideia*, imagem.

Artes del hacer y usos del saber en el imperio romano: 'leyendo' los mosaicos de Antioquía

RESUMEN. En este artículo, pretendemos desarrollar algunas reflexiones acerca del mosaico romano como *techné* o *ars*, o sea, como una técnica de decoración de interiores que comprendía un alto nivel de especialización. Una vez establecidos, en líneas generales, los procedimientos empleados en la confección de los mosaicos, buscaremos, enseguida, demonstrar cómo determinada técnica, una manera particular de manipulación de materiales rústicos dominada por individuos semi-letrados cuya memoria prácticamente se perdió, es movilizada con la finalidad de exprimir temas y motivos conectados con la *paideia*, la formación cultural superior concedida a los miembros de la élite grecorromana. Como estudio de caso, tomaremos dos mosaicos encontrados en la así denominada Casa de Menandro, un *pueblo* ubicado en el distrito de Dafne, al sur de Antioquía. Ambos los mosaicos datan de la segunda mitad del siglo III.

Palabras clave: antigüedad tardía, *paideia*, imagen.

Introduction

Over the past few years, there has been a trend in the field of ancient history produced in Brazil, in particular the history of Greece and Rome, which is the growing and irreversible incorporation of data from material culture to research projects run by Brazilian Romanists and Hellenists, what actually does not represent a great novelty, even though our understanding of what is ancient history still retains certain peculiarity in the presence of other schools of interpretation.

In fact, the discipline does not hold, in some universities and foreign research centers, a specific position, and, in some cases, is diluted in units, departments and institutes devoted, on the one hand, to 'Classical Studies' and, on the other, to

'Classic Archaeology', sometimes occurring a not very productive bias between the knowledge about past obtained by the sum of data extracted from the textual sources and data extracted from material culture, including those imagery in nature. In Brazil, a country were the formation of the historian, including those studying Antiquity, is left in charge of the departments of and graduate programs in History, and Archaeology still struggles to obtain a more expressive participation in universities, the dialogue between Ancient History and Archaeology has proved to be an indispensable resource in order to stimulate the incorporation by historians of materials and visual sources to explanations that elaborate on the past, which, however, is no easy task, quite the opposite.

According to Schmitt (2007), we cannot ignore the fact that the so called scientific History, i.e. the one that emerges from the work of 19th century positivists, later enriched by contributions of historical materialism and the School of *Annales*, from the beginning demonstrated an excessive attachment to written documents, notably the official sources, incidentally replicating a millennial tradition according to which History, made on the basis of texts, would solve itself in a text, in a literary composition. As a corollary of this authentic ' textual ' fetish, the systematic study of the works of art and archaeological remains do not contemplate, except in rare occasions, the training curriculum offered in Brazil to undergraduates and graduate students in History. In the face of a situation like this, it is necessary to recognize the effort of Brazilians hellenistis, romanists and orientalists, seeking to enrich their methods of analysis, have increasingly resorted to material culture, not only with the purpose of validating their working hypotheses, but also of trying new explanatory models and establishing new lines of research. As a result, performing the connection between History and Archaeology, textual and material sources, in order to interpret the rhythms of everyday life in Antioch, the metropolis of the province of Syria under the roman Empire, is the challenge that confronts us in the research project *The city and the uses of the body in the Roman Empire: a comparative study of the Christianization of Antioch (4th and 5th centuries AD)* (Silva, 2015), performed with the support of the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), through which we intend to follow, on the one hand, the process of Christianization of the city during the late Antiquity and, on the other, the resilient presence of Greco-Roman culture in urban and rural areas. Faced with the need to extrapolate the literary sources in order to capture the dynamics of cultural practices connected to Pagan traditions, especially those with places and urban monuments as background, we add to this legacy information from the mosaics of Antioch by authors as John Chrysostom, Libanius and Julian, whose collection is the most extensive of all the Near East.

In view of such considerations, we intend first to develop some reflections about the mosaic as *techné* or *ars*, i.e. as a technique of interior decoration that was supposed to carry a high level of expertise. It is worth noting that the mosaics were certainly utilitarian pieces, though above all decorative, since their use aimed to add aesthetic value to constructions. In this sense, it is impossible, or at least not advisable, investing in the reading of the mosaics *per se*, as it was done in the past, in other words, without reference to the locations where they were installed, as researchers such as Sheilla Campbell (1988) have emphasized. Once established the general the procedures employed in the production of mosaics, we will try to demonstrate how certain particular techniques of handling of rustic materials, dominated by illiterate individuals whose memory is practically lost, was mobilized in order to express themes and motives connected with the *paideia*, the cultural training granted to members of the Greco-Roman elite. By means of the mosaics, *techné* and *sophia*, practical knowledge and knowledge acquired through study are hinged to express the *ethos* of Antioch's elite, jealousy of the ancient traditions of which it considered itself the rightful heir and that was distinguished not only as a social group, but as holder of a knowledge worthy of being immortalized in stone. As case study, we will take two mosaics found in the so called House of Menander, a *villa* situated in the District of Daphne, South of Antioch. The first is the mosaic of Menander (Figure 1), which gives its name to the construction. The second is the mosaic of Apollo and Daphne, which alludes to the mythical narrative of the Foundation of Antioch (Figure 2). The construction of the House of Menander and the installation of the mosaics date from the second half of the 3rd century.

Figure 1. Mosaic of Menander and Glykeria. *Opus tessellatum* from the House of Menander (3rd century) in Antioch, representing, from left to right, Comedy, Glykeria and Menander, who is lying in a *klinai*, suggesting a banquet scene.
Source: Cimok (2000, p. 181).

Figure 2. Mosaic of Apollo and Daphne. *Opus tessellatum* from the House of Menander (3rd century) in Antioch, representing the mythological scene of the meeting between Apollo and Daphne, when the nymph is a turned into a bush.
Source: Cimok (2000, p. 185).

Beautiful works by anonymous hands

In Latin, the adjectives *museum* and *musivum*, used in the expressions *opus museum* or *opus musivum* to designate the mosaic, are derived from the Greek noun *mouseion*, where dwell the Muses (*Musae*), considered therefore as patrons of the art of mosaicists (Manãs Romero, 2007-2008). To designate the floor mosaics, the most common types, the Romans used the term *opus tessellatum*, while the wall and dome mosaics belonged to the category of *opus musivum*. The technique of mosaics was not at all a Roman invention, with the first examples dating back to almost 3000 years BC, from Mesopotamia. Made with colored stones, shells and fragments of ivory, they were part of the decoration of Mesopotamian temples and palaces and, later, Hittites, Egyptians and Cretans buildings. However, it fell to the Greeks of the Hellenistic era to refine the technique by using different colored pebbles, able not only to provide variety and subtlety to the compositions, but also to enable the reproduction of geometric and figurative motifs, apparently with the intention to equate the mosaic art to painting, where some authors defend the affiliation between the two, and it is not by chance that several compositions that were originally paintings were soon transposed to mosaics (Ling, 1998). In Alexandria, during the 3rd century BC, the pebbles were replaced, although not completely, by the *tessellae* or *tesserae*, small cubes of stone, terracotta or glass, which became the main components of the mosaics, from where comes the expression *opus tessellatum*, i.e. panel composed by tessellae that identified floor mosaics, though the same procedure was used for *opus musivum* (Bustamante, 2009). Since then, and until the late Antiquity, the art of mosaic pieces remained virtually unchanged, with one or another variation depending on local conditions, in particular with regard to the quality and diversity of raw material available. Being them wall, dome or floor mosaics, they faced, under the Roman Empire, a rapid spread through all the provinces following urbanization, however with an evident distinction: while in the Gallic and Iberian provinces predominated black and white mosaics, perhaps by influence of the ateliers of the Italian peninsula, incidentally quite reputable in North Africa, Anatolia and Syria-Palestine, the preference fell on polychromatic mosaics, in particular the figurative ones, which soon acquired quite complex contours.

The pieces had a regular pattern, between 4 and 5 cm. Sometimes, they were cut into even more reduced dimensions (3 or 4 square mm) and juxtaposed to form a variant of *opus tessellatum*: the *opus vermiculatum*, whose name derives from *vermiculus* (worm, in Latin), due to the minuscule pieces that composed it. In the case of the *tessellatum* and even of the *vermiculatum*, the pieces were often made of stone or terracotta. It is assumed that granite, marble, limestone, slate or any other sturdy stone was cut into strips, which were divided with hammer and chisel on a wooden support (Dunbabin, 1999). The terracotta pieces were obtained from fragments of vessels or tiles. The range of colors available to the craftsman was variable, with predominance of black, grey, white, yellow and red. Blue and green tones were more difficult to obtain, which required the craftsman to use glass, a material that presented a double inconvenience: in addition to being more expensive than stone and terracotta, was less resistant and, therefore, unsuitable for floor tiles, which explains its most frequent use in wall and dome mosaics (Bustamante, 2009). In addition to mosaics of tessellae, we can also note, during the imperial era,

the flourishing of the *opus sectile*, the 'patchwork mosaic', made of larger pieces of glass or marble cut in the form of lozenges, squares, triangles and polygons, which explains its high cost when compared to the others (Bernardes, 2008). Although more expensive than *opus tessellatum*, *opus sectile* presented some limitations because its aesthetic effects were not as close to those of painting (Ling, 1998).

As for the installation, we know the mosaicists used to follow *mutatis mutandis* the guidelines contained in *De architectura*, by Vitruvius (2009, VII, 3, 4). Between the mosaic and the natural soil, a base, 45 cm thick, should be built, though that could vary depending on the availability of the budget and the lay of the land. This base was, in general, three layers prior to the settlement of pieces, the visible face of the mosaic (Figure 3). The first of these, in direct contact with the soil, was the *statumen*, a 12 cm shoe made up of vertical stones without mortar, which gave stability to the pavement and favored water seepage. Then came the *rudus*, a middle layer of sand, gravel and ceramic fragments joined with lime, whose minimum thickness was 22 cm. The *rudus* was settled by a team of men (*decuria*), certainly slaves, with the aid of wooden sockets. The top layer, the *nucleus*, with approximately 11 cm, consisted of ground terracotta mortar (Bernardes, 2008). Over the *nucleus* was settled, in accordance with the work schedule, lime mortar thin enough to allow drawing and marking the insertion of pieces, step that required the use of a ruler or level. This last layer was called *supranucleus* (Mansour, 1994). In a mosaic floor, the parts should be perfectly leveled, because any rebound could lead to the disintegration of the set, indispensable demand in the case of *opus musivum*. Completed the operation, the surface was covered with grout and polished with a brush. Finally, wax was applied to highlight the brightness (Manãs Romero, 2007-2008).

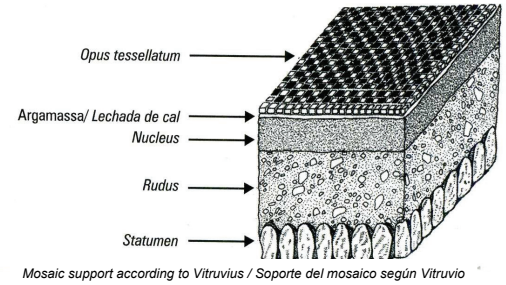

Figure 3. The installation of a mosaic according to Vitruvius.
Source: Bernardes (2008, p. 12).

The mosaics were not at all one of the more accessible ornamental features. Although the black and white mosaics were, in principle, less costly than the polychromatic ones, that is not to say that such decorative solution was within the reach of the general public. The *opus tessellatum* and *opus musivum* versions of mosaics could certainly be used, although sparingly, by the average urban strata. However, its preferred clientele were the families of the elite, the only ones with conditions not only to acquire an *opus sectile*, the most luxurious type of mosaic, but also to coat the quarters of their homes with these authentic 'rugs of stone' that were the mosaic panels of the late phase of the Roman Empire. One of the factors responsible for the rise of mosaics was certainly the working time required, as a mosaic decoration of an elite *villa* could last two to three years, depending on the number of workers involved (Manãs Romero, 2007-2008). Another not negligible factor was the cost of the raw material, because although the material came, with some exceptions, from the area, the amount of necessary pieces to produce a mosaic was not negligible, ranging from 500 thousand to 2 million pieces (Bernardes, 2008).

The mosaicists, in most cases, worked *in situ*, installing the pieces directly on the base of stone and mortar. However, we know that some panels, called *emblemata*, were produced in advance and then transported to the site, including the possibility that some of them were manufactured in series and put up for sale (Dunbabin, 1999)[1]. Before the installation of the pieces, a professional named *pictor*, *pictor imaginarius* or *zographos* was charged with the preliminary outline drawings (*sinopie*) by incisions or led strings inserted into the mortar, while the *tessellarius* or *musearius*, the craftsman, was responsible for the filling (Mansour, 1994), whose remuneration, in the 4th century, varied between 50 and 60 dinars per day [2]. Since in antiquity it was not common to keep the memory of those involved in the production of monuments and artifacts, we have very little information about the mosaicists. In fact, the identity of the vast majority of these artisans remains anonymous to us, hidden by the beauty of the work or by the lavishness of the patron, sometimes considered to be the true author of the

[1] Although *opus tessellatum* and *opus musivum* were, in general, installed directly on the mortar or plaster, in the case of *opus sectile*, some of its parts could be prepared with the technique of reversal, when the pieces were glued on cloth or similar material containing the chosen motif. Then, this panel was turned upside down and installed in situ. After the removal of bracket and glue, the area received the final finishing (Dunbabin, 1999; Bustamante, 2009).

[2] Based on the Edict of Diocletian on Maximum Prices, which stipulated the payment of 60 dinars per day to the *musearii*, in contrast to the 50 dinars that were paid to the *tessellarii*, some authors, such as Ling (1998), identified the first as the craftsmen responsible for producing the *opus musivum*, while the second would be specialized in *opus tessellatum*. Dunbabin (1999) suggests that the *musearii* were the ones who crafted decorated mosaics, unquestionably the most expensive, while the *tessellarii* would be responsible for the smooth floor mosaics.

mosaic, to the detriment of the craftsman (Bustamante, 2009). The one about who we know some details is Sosos of Pergamon, mosaicist of the middle of the 2nd century BC, mentioned by Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History*. About eighty signatures of *tessellarii*, *musearii* and *pictores* were preserved in the mosaics themselves, with the repetition of only one name on the floor mosaics from a house in the Roman Province of Africa (Dunbabin, 1999).

Even in the face of such restricted information, one conclusion seems certain: the practice of the profession was not lonely, depending on a teamwork under the leadership of a more skilled or experienced craftsman. Today, we usually use the word workshop, an approximate translation of Latin *officina*, attested both in literary texts and in epigraphs (Manãs Romero, 2007-2008) to designate a group of mosaicists acting together, though workshop may not be the most appropriate word to translate the reality of Greco-Roman mosaic art, as teams of mosaicists, by all indications, were itinerant, moving to the construction sites where their services were required and, from time to time, employing local labor in less qualified stages, such as land preparation, transport of materials and the cutting of pieces (Mansour, 1994). This associative tendency of the profession is attested in an inscription from Rome, of the year 19, dedicated to the *genius* of the *collegium* of the *pavimentarii*. Granted that the term *pavimentarii* means "floor constructors', it is reasonable to conclude that the mosaicists had a habit of grouping in *collegia*, professional associations and funeral homes, as well as the practitioners of other crafts (Dunbabin, 1999). The regular status of the profession is confirmed by a law of Constantine issued in 337 and conserved in the *Codex Theodosianus* (Pharr & Davidson, 1952). In it, the Emperor includes the mosaicists (*musearii* and *tessellarii*) among the professions exempted of *munera*, i.e., the provision of compulsory public service, in order to allow the improvement of the technique and its transmission to any heirs, which indicates the hereditary character of the craft, as well as the existence of family workshops.

Much has been discussed about the manner in which the themes of the mosaics were appropriated by the craftsmen, since the motifs belonging to the same repertoire often appear in several provinces. Undoubtedly, a good part, if not all, of learning would be practical, and the aspirant should serve a period of training in the construction site, under the supervision of a master, when he could become familiar with geometric and figurative basic models, the *schemata*, adapted according to the availability of materials, the mosaic type chosen and, naturally, the whims of the owner (Kondoleon, 2001). However, some authors, such as Dunbabin (1999), believe in the existence of 'books' or boards of molds that circulated freely through the Mediterranean basin, instructing the mosaicists and providing their art with a certain procedure unit. Made, it seems, of parchment, papyrus or wood, highly perishable materials, none of these books got to us, although an Egyptian papyrus from the 3rd century BC mentions a standard sent from Alexandria to guide the work of a craftsman who was installing a mosaic in the Fayoum region (Bustamante, 2009). Moreover, it is important to add that the mosaicists often migrated and, with them, their techniques and motifs, which were then disseminated to other regions, also a plausible explanation for the similarities observed in the works of different workshops (Dunbabin, 1999).

In all periods of Classical Antiquity, the mosaics exhibited geometric and figurative compositions, including the fauna and the flora. However, we know that the choice of the motifs was, in many circumstances, subjected to the nature of the quarters to be decorated, because the mosaics did not exist by themselves, but were part of an architectural structure. Although there were no major restrictions to their use, mosaics were somewhat rare in temples, basilicas and curies, being, conversely, quite common in baths, where *opus tessellatum*, resistant to moisture and vapors, was an excellent choice of floor (Dunbabin, 1999). On the other hand, the *opus musivum* was less frequent, being employed, in general, in monumental buildings, such as palaces and churches of late Antiquity (Bustamante, 2009). There are also mosaic records seated in necropolises, where they assume the function of a tombstone placed over the grave or of coating to the bottom. However, most of the available Roman mosaics come from private residences, with predominance of *opus tessellatum*, for a very simple reason: what is left of these buildings is restricted almost always to foundations and to the floor, preserved when the walls collapsed. Although they could be installed in less frequented quarters, as the sleeping rooms (*cubiculi*), the largest and most sophisticated mosaics were part of the decoration of the environments intended to guest reception, i.e. the *triclinia* (dining rooms), the *oeci* and the *exedrae* (reception rooms). Essential components of domestic architecture, mosaics were managed as symbols of social prestige, while they feedbacked the values and beliefs connected with the lifestyle of the owners and visitors, who, on feast days, passed through the collective spaces of the house (Bustamante, 2003; Kondoleon, 2001).

A 'techné' on the service of 'paideia'

We do not have information on the existence of a local mosaic tradition on the territory of Syria-Palestine, assuming that mosaic art has been implemented there during the hellenistic period, although the archaeological record is quite discontinuous. In reality, the mosaic collection of Syria-Palestine is inaugurated with the imperial-era mosaics recovered from Antioch and surroundings (Daphne, Yakto, Kaoussie and Seleucia Pieria), in the course of the expedition led by Princeton University between 1932 and 1939. The oldest examples of *opus tessellatum* come from the Atrium House, residence of ample proportions in the center of Antioch, and are dated of the late 1st century and early 2nd century, prior to the earthquake of 115 that devastated the city and in which Trajan almost lost his life. The last copies are located between the earthquake of 526 and the Persian invasion of 540 (Dunbabin, 1999). The collection has approximately 300 mosaics, almost everyone included in the celebrated work of Doro Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*, published in two volumes in 1947. Many mosaics are still *in situ*, but many others were split between European and North American museums or collected by the Museum of Antakya, the current name of Antioch, which no longer belongs to Syria nowadays, but to Turkey. The mosaics closely follow the Hellenistic canons, especially the mythological themes, the naturalistic representation of the human figure and the sophistication of polychromy. At first, somewhat modest, with dimensions not exceeding 2 square meters, the mosaics became increasingly extensive, coating entire house quarters, accompanying *pari passu* the enrichment of the owners and the development of the city that, in the late season, followed in course (Huskinson, 2004). A distinctive trait of the mosaics of Antioch from the 3rd century is the use of inscriptions to identify the characters, perhaps due to the reproduction of allegorical figures, as Bios (life), Soteria (health) and Apolausis (joy, entertainment), which appeared more often in the compositions (Kondoleon, 2001).

In Antioch, the mosaics were employed to decorate baths, tombs and churches. Again, most of the collection consists of floor pavements, installed in large urban and rural residences, although it is very difficult to identify the social status of the owners, in addition to the assumption that they were members of the local elite or delegates of the imperial power. Nonetheless, what the mosaics of Antioch appear to disclose clearly throughout their existence, even in the *villae rusticae* of late Antiquity, is the attachment of the inhabitants of Antioch to a lifestyle connected with hellenism and cultural activities of the urban environment, among which the theater stands as one of the most important. Through the mosaics we are able to understand how mosaic art was employed in Antioch to give visibility to the values and the religious convictions of the urban population, or its upper strata, once the mosaics, as mentioned above, were not decorative artifacts in the reach of all, especially in the case of the polychromatic and figurative ones profusely found in the city and its outskirts. Examples of how the mosaics fulfilled the role of expressing the *ethos* of the antiochene elite come from the House of Menander, a *villa* of the second half of the 3rd century located in Daphne, a suburb 8 km south of Antioch, much appretiated as summer resort, due to the excellent climate and the abundance of natural sources[3].

Despite the precarious state of conservation, since practically nothing was left of the building's walls, the House of Menander (Figure 4) had three major areas for banquets and entertainment, which were distributed in about eight *triclinia*, i.e., dining rooms containing three-seat sofas whose disposal marked the location reserved for guests, employees and actors, musicians and dancers (Dobbins, 2001). The existence, in the House of Menander, of multiple *triclinia* is strong evidence of the central role played by the *symposium* on maintening sociability networks of the Antiochene elite. In the *triclina,* the host received hi guests at sunset for supper, and then to entertain themselves, which corresponds to two moments in which the feast used to be divided.[4] In the first, the *symposium* itself, there was consumption of food, while in the second, named *comissatio*, there was recitation of literary works and appreciation of music, dance and theatre performances, all this accompanied by copious glasses of wine (Fernández Vega, 1999). In one of the *triclinia* of the House of Menander, certainly one of the most important, because of the excellence of decoration contained therein, we have a polychromatic *opus tessellatum* representing Menander, the Greek author of comedies, on a couch, accompanied by Glykeria and an allegory of Comedy (*Komodia*)[5] herself. The three

[3] In Daphne and Antioch, the 1932-1939 excavations brought to light a number of houses that has called much attention to the present moment (Dobbins, 2001), one of which includes the so called House of Menander.

[4] Although the Latin term *convivium* is employed as synonymous to *symposium*, it is worth mentioning that *symposium* expressed, above all, the act of eating and drinking together, while *convivium* highlighted the coexistence during the banquet, its condition of sociability, whose cornerstone was the art of conversation (Fernández Vega, 1999).

[5] Menander, who lived approximately in the period between 342 and 292 BC, was the most famous representative of the so called New Comedy. A native of Attica, he would have written about 100 plays, many of which we know only through fragments and subsequent authors quotes. Judging by Quintilian's appreciation of

figures are identified with inscriptions. Menander is girded by a crown of laurels, attribute of artistic and sporting competitions winners, while Comedy holds in her hands a mask and a staff, with another mask placed on a box at her feet. Concerning Glykeria, although she is the protagonist of one of the plays of Menander, *The Girl with the Shaved Head* (*Perikeiromene*), it is assumed that the image is that of his concubine, homonymous to the character.

The scene seems to contain certain erotic appeal due to the physical strength of Menander and the exchange of glances between him and Glykeria, which is quite convenient for a venue characterized by intake of wine and, as such, conducive to the enjoyment of sensual pleasures.

Figure 4. Ruins of the House of Menander. Photo of the Southeast wing of the House of Menander (3rd century).
Source: Dobbins (2001, p. 56).

However, according to Janet Huskinson (2002), a mosaic has a deeper meaning, since, under the Roman Empire, the plays of Menander - or at least excerpts of them - used to be recited at the end of supper. Menander, himself a member of an imaginary feast, would be introduced at a meeting in which his plays were declaimed, what gives the scene a remarkable dramatic effect, establishing a direct association between the mosaic, the room in which it is installed, the activity that takes place and the 'readers' of the image. By virtue of mosaic representation, past and present intertwine, because an old author has his memory preserved, while at the same time becomes a spectator of his own plays, setting up a complex interaction between material artifact, constructed environment and social practice. 'Read' in the context of *symposium*, a mosaic, more than passively standing a reality imposed on it, becomes an artifact capable of interfering with the behavior of the audience. This properties of mosaics depicting the *ludi theatralis* to influence ideas and emotions of others through their presence in a domestic enclosure that reproduces the atmosphere of the theater is defined by Huskinson (2002-2003) as 'theatricality', stimulating us not only to interpret the manifest content of the mosaic, but to understand it in global terms, trying not to considerer form alone, but also its function or functions.

We know that, in Antioch, the *ludi theatralis* were quite appreciated, information that is transmitted by authors in open disagreement, as John Chrysostom and Julian, unanimous in censuring the excessive attachment of the inhabitants of Antioch to theatre[6]. Dependent on the generosity of patrons to finance the contests of mimi and pantomime, so popular in the imperial age, the theatrical spectacles become a veritable emblem of urban *modus vivendi*, which explains the continuous investment in the construction of theaters, so that every town, no matter how small it was, should count on at least one such building (Barnes, 1999)[7]. In the case of Antioch, the 1932-1939 excavations have brought to light two theatres, also mentioned by the chroniclers, as the example of John Malalas (2009). The oldest of these was the so called Theatre of Dionysus, located at the foot of Mount Silpius and whose construction or reconstruction dates back to the time of the arrival of Julius Caesar to Syria, in 47 BC, during the campaign against Pompey (Downey, 1961). The second was in Daphne, near the Olympian Zeus stadium, and would have been erected by Vespasian's decision shortly after the war in Judea (Kondoleon, 2001). It was in these buildings that the city's population gathered to honor their favorite actors, breaking into noisy ovations, which occasionally battled in the public square, to the irritation of municipal authorities (Browning, 1952). Due to the popularity achieved by the theater in Antioch, the maintenance of networks of euergetism, whereby the shows were financed, surely favored the prestige of the patrons, who often wanted to exalt their own generosity. This seems to be a plausible explanation for the making of the mosaic of Menander, i.e. the interest of the owner of the residence in perpetuating the memory of theatre festival - or festivals – sponsored by him. Another explanation would be the desire to provide a proper reception to guests, who, when entering the room, would be involved by a

Menander, the plays of the latter had wide circulation in latin aristocratic circles of the imperial era (Harvey, 1998).

[6] For more details on this topic, refer to two recent articles of our authorship: Silva (2011) and Silva (2013b).

[7] In the 3rd century, comedy takes the form of mimi, improvised sketches and often with erotic content, in which men and women acted in common, ordinary outfits, which of course distinguished it from the classical comedy, of which Menander was the main exponent, though without ignoring the affiliation between both comic modes (Traina, 2001).

Dionysian atmosphere, as Dionysus, the god of spree and party, was at the same time the protective deity of theater and banquet, with a clear nexus between both (Huskinson, 2002-2003).

In view of this finding, it is plausible to assume that the mosaics depicting the theater reflected a lifestyle in which public and private spaces were interpenetrated, sometimes being difficult to establish boundaries between them. Although the house was, in ancient times, the abode of the *paterfamilias* with his wife, children, other relatives and slaves, in many situations, notably among the higher strata of society, it was also an intense social environment, a meeting place for the notables, many of them holders of public authority in its different levels (municipal, provincial and imperial). With that, a bond was constructed between the family residence and the civic identity embodied in the experience of the *polis* or *municipium*, as the city constituted, under the Roman Empire, the headquarters of political-administrative, cultural and religious activities. (Fernández Vega, 1999)[8]. Among such activities, one of the most important was the theater, taken here not so much in the sense of a comic or dramatic spectacle bringing together actors, musicians and dancers, but as a place suitable for such performances, because, as Easterling and Miles (1999) state, in ancient times, few built environments held, with such efficiency, the urban social network as the theater, where people would surely go to see, but also to be seen.

In Antioch, the intersection between *oikos* and *polis* can be detected in many areas, including the architecture, since the basic principle of housing construction resulted from the combination of three elements: the *triclinium*; the portico and the *nymphaeum*, a fountain with niches for statues positioned according to the angle of the reclined guests. In this case, both the portico, which gave access to the *triclinium,* and the fountain, point of convergence of the eyes, were aesthetic solutions borrowed from urban architecture, thus replicating, on a smaller scale, the Avenue of Colonnades, the greatest pride of Antioch, and the large *nymphaeum*, situated at the confluence of the North-South axis (Dobbins, 2001). Further evidence that owners fed the appreciation for a house decorating style based on urban architecture is provided by John Chrysostom who, in one of the homilies dedicated to the Gospel of Matthew (83,4) (St. John Chrysostom, 2004, p. 500), stated:

> When you see tables covered with carpets and couches encrusted with silver, as in the theatre, as we see in the disposition of the stage, what can equate to this nonsense? Because what kind of house looks more like a stage, and with the things on a stage? The house of the rich or the house of the poor? It is not evident that it is the rich's? This one is, therefore, full of inappropriate things. [...] When Christ was on the verge of entering the house of Zacchaeus, the latter did not latched on to neighbors begging for curtains, seats and chairs made of ivory, or brought to Laconian rugs his chambers, but graced his house with embellishments convenient to the Christ.

The presence, in the wealthiest homes, of decorative solutions inspired by the architecture and urban cultural manifestations would have intended to produce a *continuum* between public and domestic spaces, expressing the attachment of the elite to values of the *polis*, *grosso modo* comprehended in *paideia*, the cultural formation of the ancient man, since, through it, it was intended to provide individuals with knowledge and skills that allowed them, on the one hand, to intervene with competence in the political and administrative sphere and, on the other hand, to speak with confidence about matters that composed the stock of philosophical, artistic and even scientific knowledge of those who had received superior education. From this point of view, the *paideia* or *humanitas* was often confounded with the *urbanitas*, the behavior purified by culture, in opposition to the *barbaricum*, in which prevailed the rudeness inherent to inhabitants of the confines of *limes*, who would not display the refinement of the city. In addition to the visible signs of a comfortable and often luxurious life, the mosaics of Antioch can thus be interpreted as testimonies of devotion of the elite to the cultural universe of the *polis.* In another sense, however, the mosaics are able to express the links bonding individuals with the city: when they remember the founding myths, as we see in another mosaic of the House of Menander, in which the nymph Daphne appears courted by Apollo.

This mosaic, a polychromatic *opus tessellatum*, represents the moment when the nymph, priestess of Gaia, is pursued by Apollo to Daphne, who later will carry her name. To rid the nymph of the persecution, Gaia metamorphoses her into a bush

[8] We use the expression. *civic identity* to define everything that relates not only to the bodies of the citizens *stricto sensu* that, from the year 212, with the *Constitutio Antoniniana*, is quite extended, but traditional methods of urban living, including spaces and buildings that contain them, since it is impossible to dissociate urban activities from urbanism, i.e., the uses and procedures of the places where they happen, being worth ro remember that, as archaeological excavations have reiterated, urbanism was one of the most vigorous unity factors of the Roman Empire (Revell, 2009). In this way, the civic identity would be composed of all that referred to the city, understood as a territory in which the contacts between individuals were more frequent, where there was a greater flow of information, and so it was possible to imagine more favorable conditions to the emergence of shared opinions on subjects potentially significant to social actors, and it was not by chance that cities were, in the course of the imperial period, the stage of a plethora of uprisings, among which is the Riot of the Statues of 387, which seized Antioch for weeks on end.

(Cimok, 2000). The scene goes back to the Foundation of Antioch by Seleucus I Nikátor, in 300 BC. Alerted, in dream, about the sacredness of the place, the sovereign would have found, on the outskirts of the city, an arrow carrying the name of Apollo (*Phoebus*), concluding that the site was where the metamorphosis of Daphne occurred, as Libanius narrates in his *Antiochikos* (XI, 94-96), a panegyric delivered by the occasion of the Olympic Games of 356. According to Veyne (2005), under the Roman Empire, especially in the area of influence of hellenism, the sense of belonging of the individuals did not concern, in principle, the emperor or even the current political system, but the city of birth or adoption. Before being inhabitants of an *imperium sine fine*, a cross-cultural, multilingual and highly abstract entity, the individuals were inhabitants of their *polis*, thus highlighting their adhesion to the local reality, although this reality, at least in an urban scope, was always molded by Greek and/or Latin inflows, which in part explains the shortage, in mosaics found in Syria-Palestine, of references to native cultural elements (Dunbabin, 1999). While contemplating the scene of the encounter between Daphne and Apollo, the residents of the House of Menander evoked, in last instance, the founding act of the *polis* in which they lived, what made the mosaic a monument to Daphne and Antioch, motives of pride for the population, as Libanius exalted decades later in his panegyric of 356.

Final considerations

We know that, in Antiquity, the use of images was widespread, which somewhat contradicts a common place that only our civilization would be based on the intensive use of images, to the detriment of language codes. According to Schmitt (2007), such assumption just ignores the dependence of the western culture on societies of the Antiquity and the Middle Ages, in which the images constituted the framework of modalities of thinking and acting on the world. In Rome, as in the entire Ancient World, literacy levels were never expressive, evidence we tend to hide when emphasizing the cultural dynamics of urban centers, forgetting that large contingents of the population occupied the agricultural areas, often devoided of schools and thus lacking proper instruction. This compels us to give particular attention to what the material culture offers us, for if the texts, even in Christian circles that were marked by strong attachment to literary culture, had restricted circulation, certainly because of the costs of manufacturing and distributing books, the images, in turn, were everywhere, being transported from one side of the Mediterranean to the other by means of ceramic artifacts, low and high-reliefs, paintings, frescoes, coins, amulets and, of course, mosaics (Bustamante, 2003). It is not a question of advocating the precedence of image over text or vice versa, which is certainly a poor question, since text and images have distinct, though not excluding, functions, reason why linguistic and visual codes are sometimes combined in a single object, as we see in the Syrian-Palestinian mosaics of the late era, and recurrently in coins. In addition, it is necessary to reintroduce emphatically in the debate the insoluble dependence of images on their respective supports and the place or places where they were consumed, whether fixed or mobile images, since an image only takes place in space, being it the space of production (support) or their display/reception site (use), which restrains what can or must be represented in a peculiar way.

The examination of the images suggests, at least in the context of the Roman Empire, the existence of a particular care of the ancients to the decoration of objects and utensils, even those of common use, as lamps. If the Romans did not assign some special value to the images produced, it would undoubtedly be difficult to explain, for example, the caprice on the coinage of miniscule coins with illustrated verse and obverse. The profusion of images that the antique bequeathed us, some of them monumental, forces us to consider them an important source of information for the reconstruction of the historical processes, although, as highlighted by Meneses (2012), we should avoid the temptation to assume the existence of a History made through the exploitation of images that would be another story, distinct from that docked in the texts or artifacts. Otherwise, it would be more prudent to admit that any story, be it economic, social, cultural or political, can be enriched by the interpretation of the images, with no reason for historians to renounce this registration mode, thus overcoming the 'visual illiteracy' of which, on one occasion, they were accused (Burke, 2004).

When exploring the private mosaics of Antioch with the purpose of illuminating the aspects of the worldview of the elites, although, as abovementioned, it is not possible to determine with accuracy the social-professional category of the owners of the residences decorated with mosaics, what transpires is a lifestyle of which the *polis* is the epicenter, not being by chance that the locations chosen for the installation of the most exuberant mosaics, the *triclinia*, *exedrae* and *oeci*, reproduced, in their broad lines, the civic architecture. These spaces

of social interaction between hosts and guests, the playful exchange provided by the banquet, the entertainment mode designed to satisfy, at the same time, the body and the soul, happened in a built environment that continued the tracing of Antioch, famous for its wide avenues, squares and porticos, so that some of the urban atmosphere, the buzz and hubbub of the crowd in movement, as described by Libanius, was transposed into the microcosm of the *oikos* (Silva, 2013a). To places conceived as replicas of public spaces were assigned the mosaics whose themes fitted the urban *ethos*, as the theatrical performances and the mythological narratives about the foundation of the city. Immortalized in multicolor stone, the function of these themes were to consolidate and transmit to posterity a memory about the tastes, the inclinations and the beliefs of the consumers, thus becoming a *monumentum*, instead of individual and collective memory (Schmitt, 2007). However, the value of the images does not end in their mnemonic potential, since they must be taken as a key to access a past no longer lived, but one to be revived.

Contemporary studies, however, have insisted on the ability of the images in interfering with perception, attitudes and feelings of the spectators, raising the most varied types of reaction, such as fear, compassion, enthusiasm and devotion. In this sense, the images would be, at the same time, products and producers of real, arousing emotions, reinforcing beliefs, exhibiting signs of belonging, defining hierarchies, creating dynamics of use/occupation of space and so many others. The mosaics as the ones of the House of Menander had the role to reinforce the bonds that united the diners to their town, allowing them, in a venue decorated with motifs dear to the urban life and the *paideia*, to recognize themselves as members of the *polis* and, henceforth, as individuals with charisma, as opposed to people who did not know the urban experience. To this end, the will of the owner was crucial, but we must not overlook the skill of the craftsman, who had the task of extracting from stone, ceramic and glass their best aesthetic effects. By the hands of mosaicists, the coarsest materials were put to service of the finest designs, which, however, should not give rise to estrangement, since were not the Muses, precisely, these goddesses of knowledge and artistic skills, the patrons of the mosaics?

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