

### IMAGE 3

\*from Old tour



*Animals Hunting*, 5th-4th century BCE; limestone tesserae; Syria

This image is of a floor mosaic that was found in Syria in an ancient Roman hunting lodge. To make this mosaic, naturally colored limestone was cut into small bits called tesserae, which were carefully arranged to create these animals. Some were placed at angles to get the curves in the design, and the black tesserae were used to outline the images. The tesserae were likely laid out directly onto fresh plaster so that they would stay in place once dry. The tesserae are more easily visible in the detail to the right.



On your tour, your students will create a mosaic in the gallery and relate it to this artwork. This activity will address the following HCPS III Standards:

FINE ARTS: Standard 1: VISUAL ARTS

MATH: Standard 9: PATTERNS AND FUNCTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Floor Mosaic (#4672)  
Hunting Lodge at Daphne, suburb of Antioch-on-  
the-Orontes, Syria  
Purchase, 1937  
Limestone, tesserae

Spanish Court  
Roman  
Late 5th-early 6th cen.

ARTIST: Unknown

SUBJECT: A lion as king of beasts is in the center of the mosaic, surrounded by scenes of combat between animals. Apparently the designs are simply decorative, fitting ones for a hunting lodge, and have no symbolic meaning.

MEDIUM AND TECHNIQUE: The word mosaic is generally used to describe a surface decoration formed by the placement of flat bits of material called tesserae in a background. These usually are of an inorganic substance such as stone, glass, marble, terracotta, shell or the like.

In this instance, the tesserae are of limestone in different colors and were probably laid directly on fresh plaster so that when it dried they were held firmly in place. Note they are not always set in a straight line but can be placed at an angle to get curves in the design. Dark red and brown stones are interspersed with the white background tesserae in a random pattern. Black tesserae are used for outlining most of the shapes.

Background of mosaics: The origin of floor mosaics were probably the water worn pebbles used as a floor in Crete as early as the Neolithic Period (c. 9000 to c. 8000 BC) and on the Greek mainland, c. 1600 to 1000 BC. Greeks developed this practice of pebble mosaics for both representational and non-representational floors for private homes in 6th to 4th cen. BC. (Public and religious buildings had floors of cut stone.) Before the end of 3rd cen. BC small cubes cut from stone or glass (tesserae) replaced pebbles. Floor mosaics at Pompeii showed the introduction of Hellenistic mosaics to Italy, and during the 2nd and 3rd cen. AD these spread over the whole Roman Empire.

Floor mosaics from Antioch on the Orontes, dating from late 1st into 6th century, differed from those in Rome in the preference for poly-chrome (many colors) figured mosaics over black and white ones. There were a great variety of designs; hunting scenes and personifications were popular; animal and vegetable motifs were used either as the main design or as borders. These Antioch mosaics were important for showing the history of the pictorial style in the Roman east.

Antioch, in Syria, was the focal point of culture during the "dark ages," from the decline of Rome to rise of Byzantine Civilization at Constantinople. It was at its height from the 4th to 6th century, and at one time had a population of 400,000. Its officials had villas and baths at Daphne, a pleasure resort near by. This was destroyed by an earthquake in 526 and was never rebuilt, possibly because of capture of Antioch by Persians 14 years later.

Excavations began at Antioch in 1932, with this floor from a hunting lodge excavated in 1935 and bought two years later. Most of a wall and ceiling decorations were destroyed in the earthquake, but many floor mosaics were found intact.

## Floor Mosaic, cont'd

**STYLE:** In the center of this mosaic is a lion, king of beasts, with a superb mane. All around him are other animals in combat. On one side two ibexes are chased by a lioness. On the other side a tigress is leaping on the back of an antelope while another runs away. Beneath the tigress is her cub. We also see a leopard chasing an ostrich and a bear with a hump-back bull. Birds are used as space fillers, and the square is framed by bands of different colors. Originally the floor also had a border of flowers and vegetables with a female bust in the center of each side. Part of this was destroyed by the quake and what was left had to be separated from the main panel in order to raise the floor.

**INSTRUCTIONAL AIDS:** Note how the use of colored tesserae amongst the white in the design gives modelling to the shapes. Mosaicists had discovered, as pointillists and impressionists did centuries later, that spots of color placed next to each other blend in the eye. If one sits down close to the mosaic and looks across it, rather than down on it, the shapes of the animals are hard to define, but one can get the flow of lines and color.