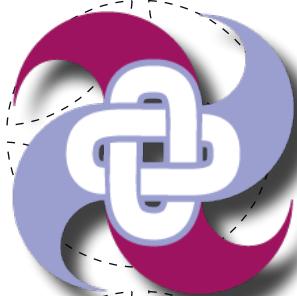


The Pelta

A geometric motif

on mosaics

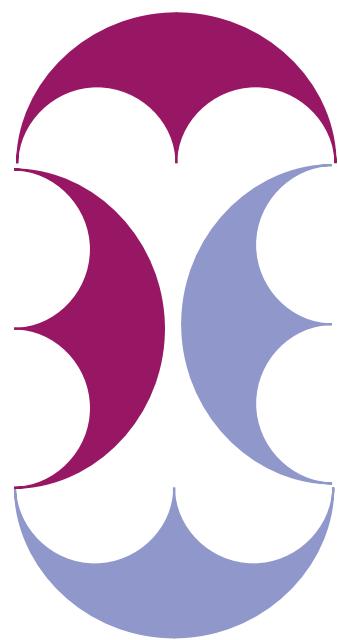
in Greece



from Alexandra Kankeleit

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## Observations about the pelta as geometric motif

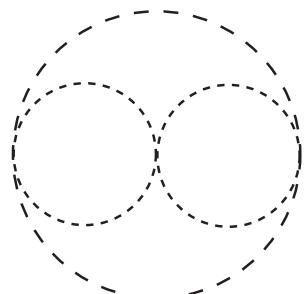


Fig. 1

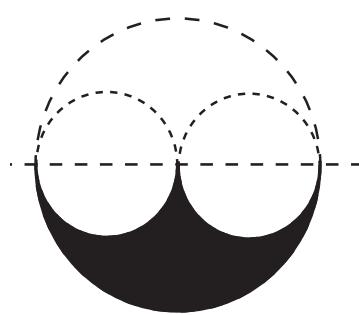


Fig. 2

This study concerns itself with the pelta motif on Roman mosaics in Greece.

The aim is to show in what form and in what repeat patterns the pelta is to be found on Greek soil.

Naturally, the analysis can only concern itself with those pelta mosaics that have already been published and made known to a broad specialist audience. It can't be ruled out that there are other variations in Roman Greece and the Greece of Late Antiquity that aren't dealt with here. In any case, the material introduced here provides information about preferences concerning the use of the motif in different regions and eras.

The pelta form used for repeat patterns is a purely geometric decoration (Fig. 1–2).

In spite of the term „pelta“ and the apparent similarity to real Amazon shields, there is no clear link between the decoration and the weapon. Likewise, representations of pelta-shaped shields on Roman mosaics show no connection to the geometric pelta decoration.

## The main form of the pelta

In its typical form, the pelta resembles a half moon or a small epsilon. One large semi-circle has two concave indentations in its straight side in the form of smaller semi-circles. In this way three points arise which may be shaped in various ways (Fig. 3).

The middle point (the so-called apex or middle ending) stands out visually in comparison to the two external points (so-called „handles“ or „endings“), not least because it features the most ornamentation. For this reason, the shape of the middle ending will be the starting point for the following classification. Other criteria are the colour and shape of the main pelta body, though these show relatively little variation. The inner surface („belly“) and convex surface („back“) are very seldom the object of ornamentation.

The most common pelta type found in Greece features three upwardly tapered points and appears in a dark colour (usually blue or black) on a white background. It's unusual to find light peltae on a dark background (Fig. 4).



Fig. 3

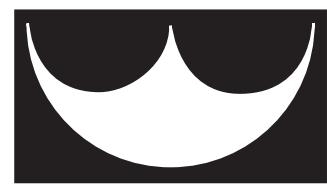


Fig. 4



Fig. 5

Frequently the peltae are framed by a dark contour line, left blank white within or filled with a light colour (Fig. 5).

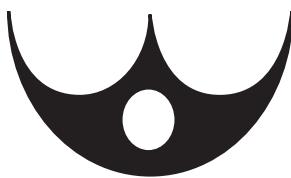


Fig. 6

On a mosaic from Sparta a small, lightly coloured circle is situated in a dark pelta (Fig. 6).  
It wasn't possible to investigate and compare the exact dimensions of pelta ornaments on mosaics. This might have provided information about whether certain formats and diameters were prescribed by templates or written guideliness.

## Pelta variations

Peltae with a pointed apex and volute-shaped, turned-in endings mostly appear in Greece on pavements dating from Late Antiquity (Fig. 7).

On the longer side of a mosaic in Eleusis the peltae feature a pointed middle ending and inward-folding handles (Fig. 8).

Not all pelta endings are pointed. On some pavements they appear slightly thicker or even spread out in a V-shape at the centre. Such variations are mostly found in Kos and may be representative of a Dodecanese workshop (Fig. 9–10).

In another example from Kos the apex is also stretched out, while the narrow handles turn inwards in a spiral shape (Fig. 11).

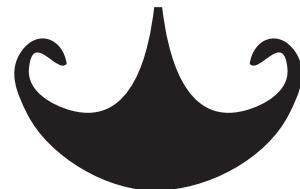


Fig. 7

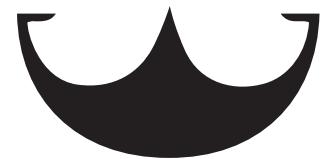


Fig. 8

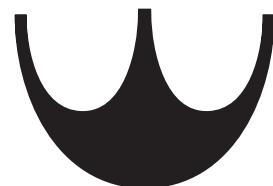


Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13

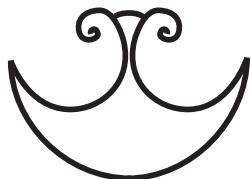


Fig. 14

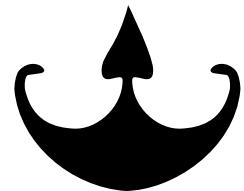


Fig. 15



Fig. 16

Sometimes the expanding apex has a small indentation at the top, giving it the shape of a heart or ivy leaf. On a mosaic in Dion the heart-shaped apex is flanked by two inward-turning, spiral-shaped handles (Fig. 12).

On another pavement from Kos all three handles feature heart-shaped endings. The central „heart“ is a little larger than those on either side (Fig. 13).

On a mosaic in Patras that's unfortunately received insufficient publicity it's possible that peltae with an apex in the form of a volute were depicted. Additionally, the expanding crown features two outward-turning spirals (Fig. 14).

The idea also arose to turn the tips of the „ivy leaf“ outwards. Such a crowning feature has so far only been identified on a mosaic floor in Eleusis (Fig. 15). Comparable, however, is another pavement whose peltae possess small triangular tips (Fig. 16).

On another example the middle ending features a small beam consisting of three tessellae with touching edges (Fig. 17).

In rare cases an apex consisting of three cubes assembled in a V-shape can also be found (Fig. 18).

More frequent is a small cross featuring four cubes. (Fig. 19). Only on a single mosaic, which probably dates from early Christian times, were the tessallae that made up the cross laid out in reticular style (Fig. 20). Otherwise they lie on a line with the parallel rows of small stones in the background and consist of four coloured tessellae in a cross-formation around a single white cube. The apex ornamentation sometimes features differently coloured stones to the rest of the pelta.

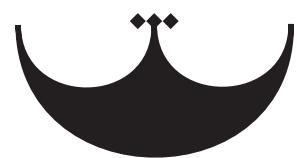


Fig. 17

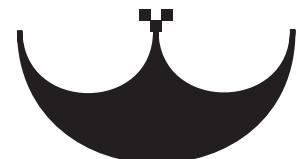


Fig. 18

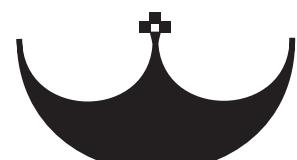


Fig. 19

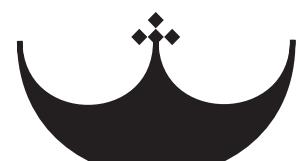


Fig. 20

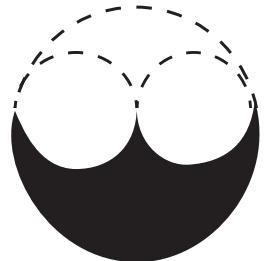


Fig. 21

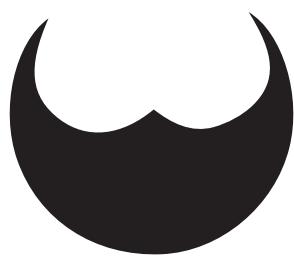


Fig. 22



Fig. 23

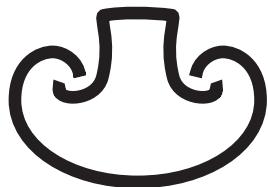


Fig. 24

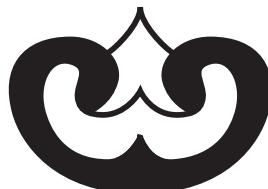


Fig. 25

On some mosaics the canonical semi-circular form of the peltae was extended, resulting in a round-bellied body with short or long handles (Fig. 21–22).

Beyond these relatively simple variations on an established motif, more complicated creations can also be found in Greece. Two unusual pelta types could be observed on a mosaic floor in Olympia.

In the somewhat simpler version an expanding apex is flanked by two rounded, inwardly curving handles (mushroom form). Similar peltae forms can be found on a mosaic from Melos (Fig. 23–24).

The other pelta type is divided into three differently coloured parts. Again here the two outer handles curl inwards and frame a small volute. The apex consists of a triangle with a staircase-like border, and flows into two pointed, outwardly curving leaves (Fig. 25).

## Patterns featuring four peltae

In Greece all designs featuring peltae follow a quadratic pattern based around the centres of circles. There is a basic formula consisting of circles which are each shifted by one radius. The especially common cruciform pattern arises when a circle is inserted into every second point of the pattern (Fig. 26).

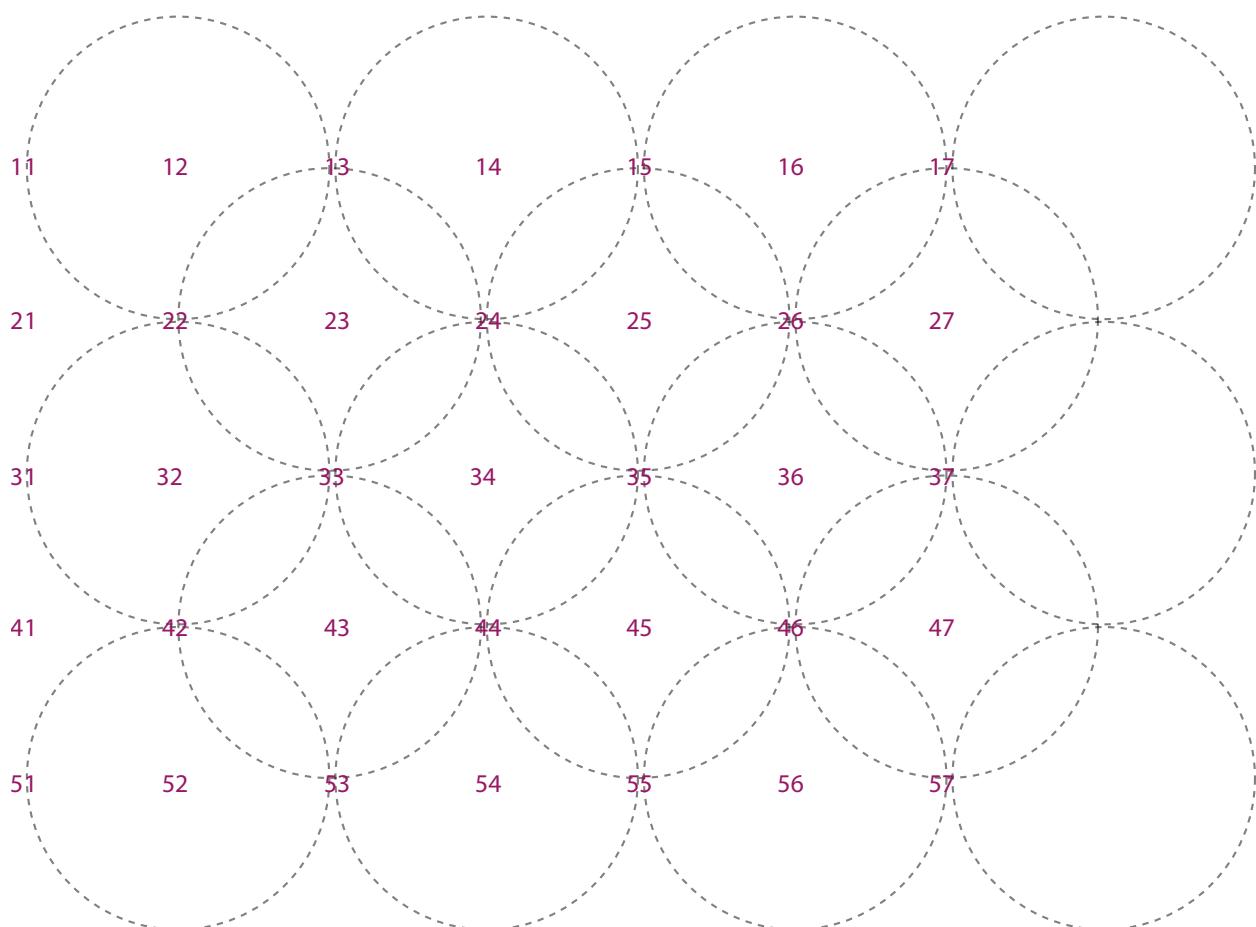


Fig. 26

# Compositions

The peltae patterns are somewhat more complicated as generally the circles aren't drawn with completely solid lines and small semi-circles are added (Fig. 27).

Generally the peltae are arranged in groups of four. Two standing and two lying peltae touch one another with their external tips. Thus heart-shaped fields arise. In every fourth point of the pattern a semi-circle appears, in the first row alternating upwards and downwards, in the second row to the right and to the left. In this way a framework arises featuring forms that resemble scales into which two smaller semi-circles are inserted (Fig. 28).

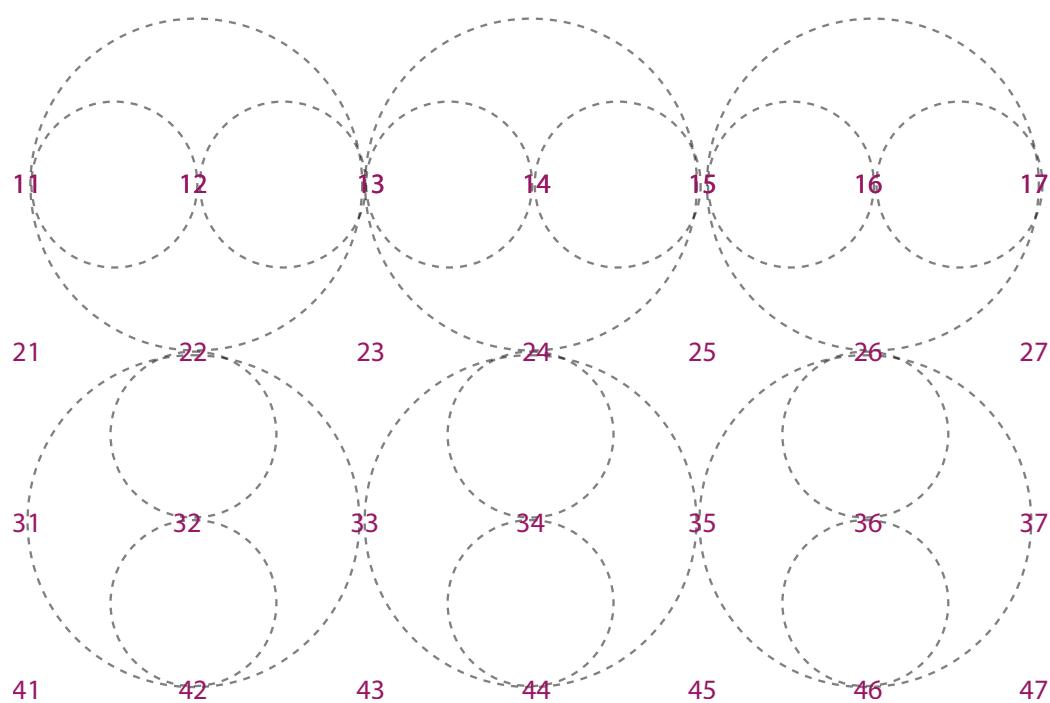


Fig. 27

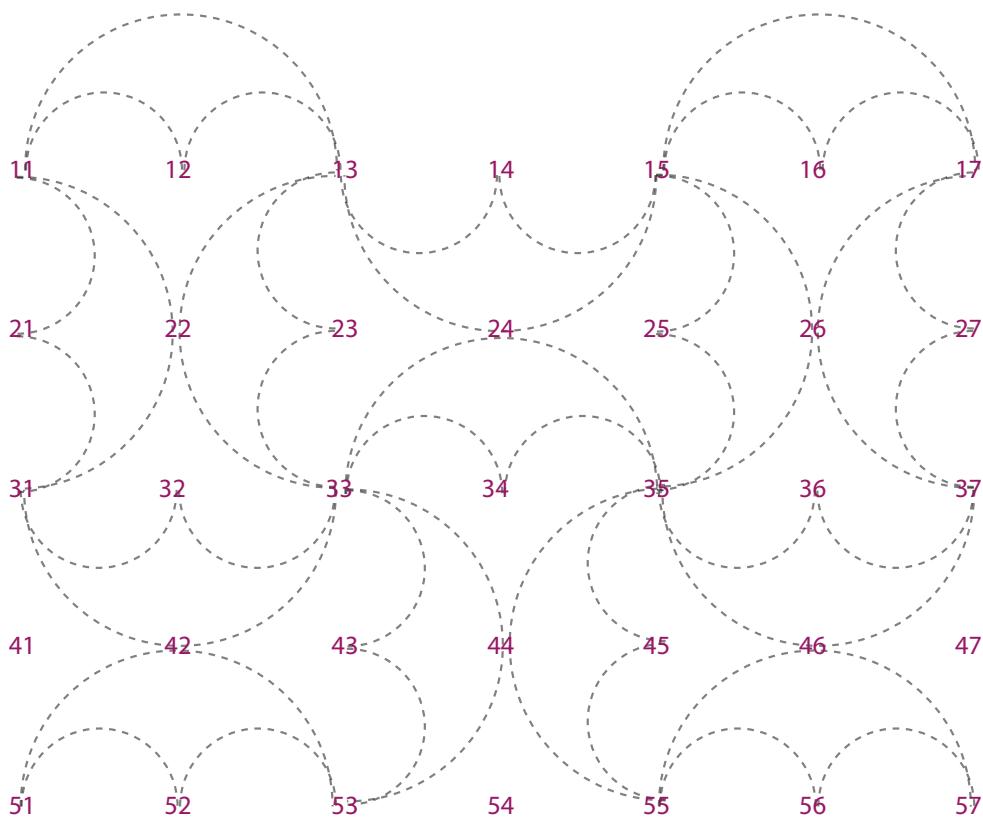


Fig. 28

Peltae in groups of four can appear as a repeat pattern on a larger surface or central area, or be limited to a smaller space. An isolated group of four as filler motif is very seldom in Greece. The pelta pattern was generally one of black or blue upon a white background (Fig. 29).

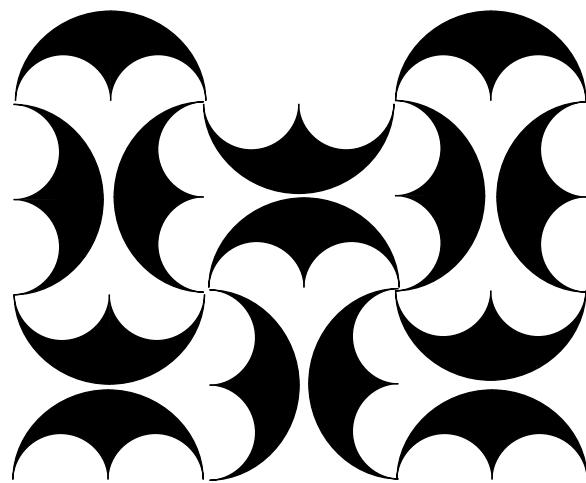


Fig. 29

The pattern's monotonous aspect was often offset by more brightly coloured, usually red peltae. In some cases the colour can no longer be precisely determined as only black-and-white photos or inexact drawings of the mosaics were published.

On several pavements groups of four dark peltae appear on a white background. In rare cases pink groups of four appear with a black contour around them.

Unique among mosaics thus far discovered is a composition in Olympia. Here a design of lightly coloured peltae surrounds a central area consisting of nine dark pelta pairs (Fig. 30).

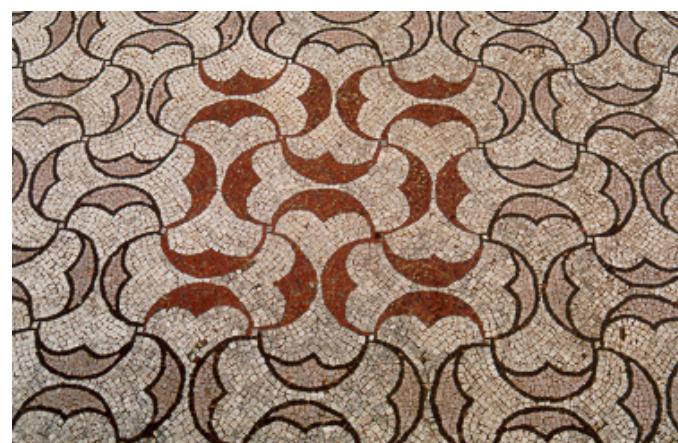


Fig. 30

An apparent speciality of Peloponnese workshops is the combination of red and black peltae. The design is such that two differently coloured peltae always lie opposite, or with their backs to one another. The surface pattern consists of simple pelta forms with unembellished endings (Fig. 31).

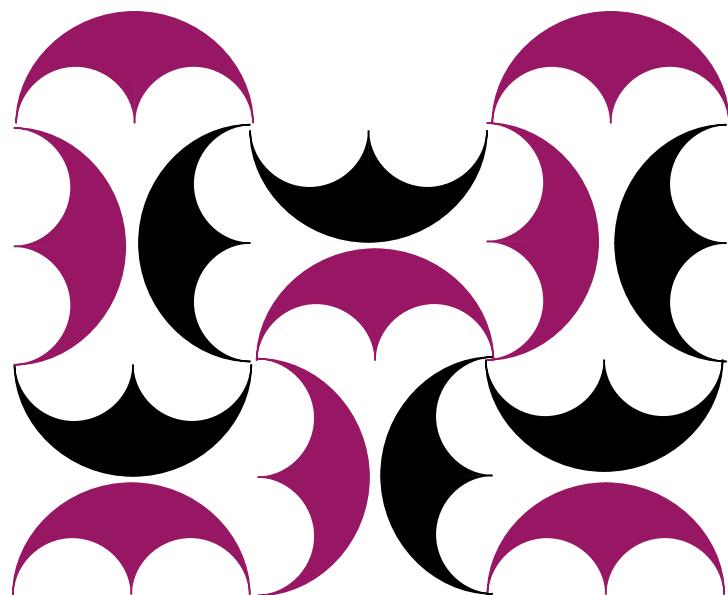


Fig. 31

On a mosaic from Corinth two differently coloured peltae feature an apex consisting of three tessallae arranged parallel to one another.

On another mosaic from Corinth groups of four black and red peltae also appear. Their apex is decorated by three tessellae arranged in a V-shape.

A strikingly similar pelta design can be found on a mosaic in Argos. Two black and two lighter peltae (probably grey or pink) make up a group of four. They feature a cross-shaped apex consisting of five tessellae.

A mosaic from Patras can also probably be classified as part of this group, though up to now only an inconclusive drawing of the mosaic has been published.

In this case it's possible that the peltae have only a single colour and a cross-shaped apex.

Unique up to now are the rather more complex pelta compositions in Eleusis and Kos. In Eleusis the groups of four appear in two colours (probably black and red), with handles that fold inwards and a heart-shaped apex. The decoration of the middle endings is absent from the peltae along the edges (Fig. 32).

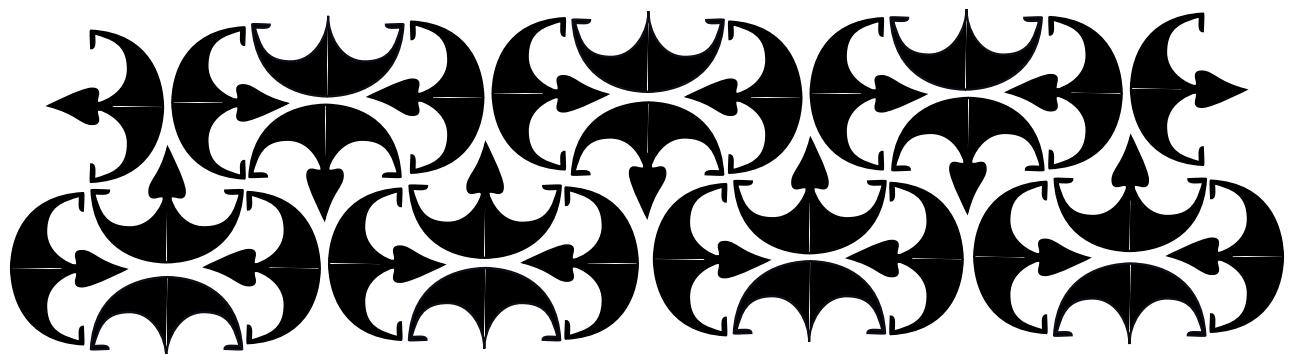


Fig. 32

The peltae on the pavement in Kos have a V-shaped apex. The pattern features three colours (blue, yellow and red) upon a white background. Dark blue peltae frame red and yellow pairs (Fig. 33). Around the edges small rectangles, also in different colours, appear between the peltae.

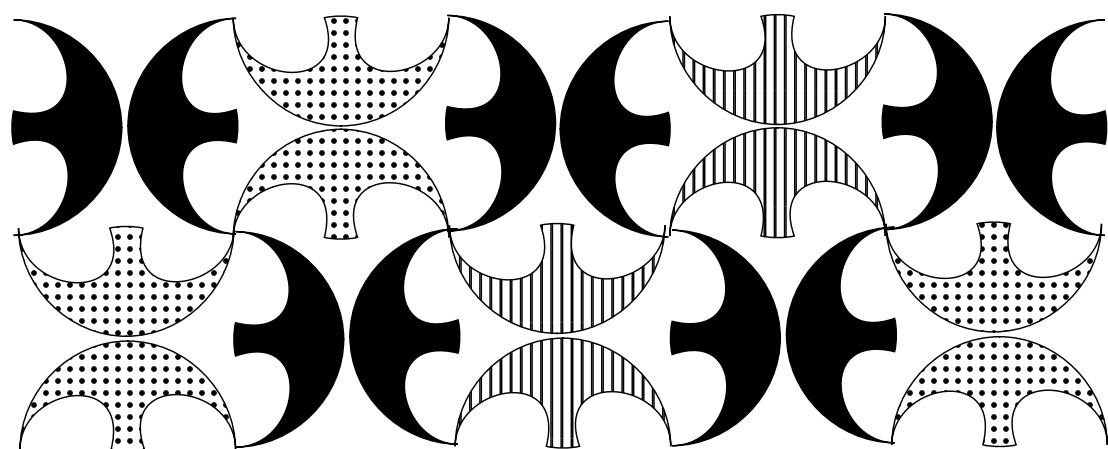


Fig. 33

## Scale patterns

Up to now there has been no proof of peltae forming a scale pattern on Roman-era mosaics in Greece (Fig. 34).

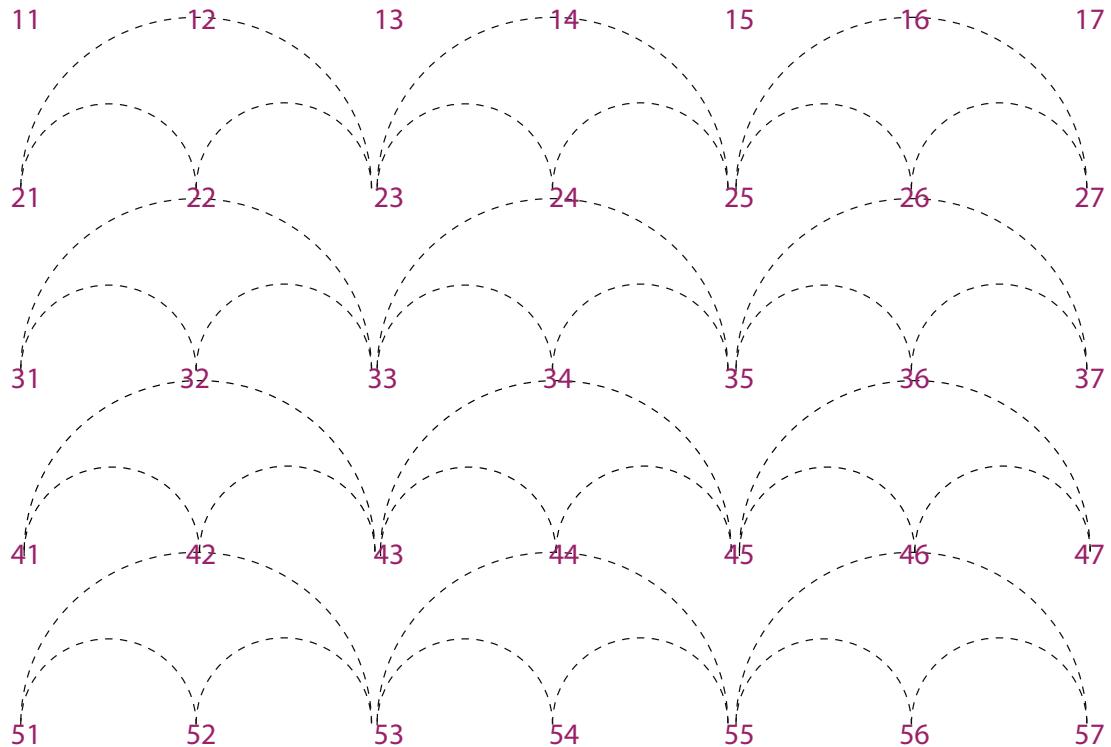


Fig. 34

## Designs featuring peltae and cruciforms

Occasionally a design featuring peltae and circle segments appears in Greece. The basic motif of this pattern is a rosette-like ornamentation formed by overlapping circles. Again the mosaic artists make use of a layout featuring quadratically-arranged points (Fig. 35).

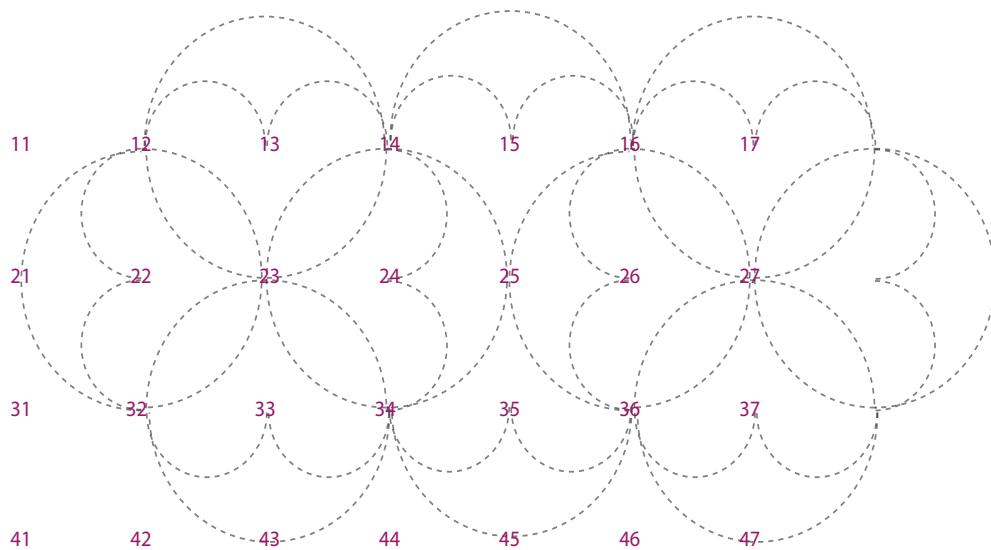


Fig. 35

Thus there is a fundamental difference to rosette forms in Pompeii and Herculaneum, which are derived from a triangular design and feature seven circles. A six-leaved, so-called „compass-drawn-rosette“ is in this case surrounded by six peltae (Fig. 36).

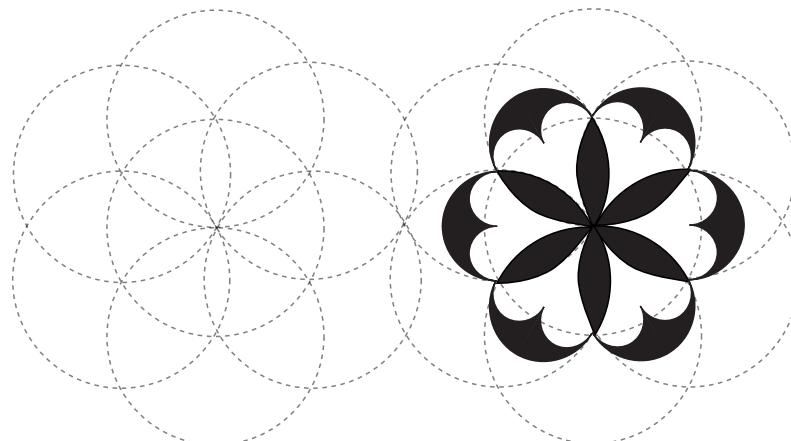


Fig. 36

The rosettes on Roman-era mosaics in Greece consist of a cruciform and four peltae. The rosettes are lined up in a row, and between them arise heart-shaped or rectangular fields with indented, concave sides (Fig. 37). The preference is for simple geometric forms without extravagant decoration. In only two cases is the pelta apex decorated with a cross.

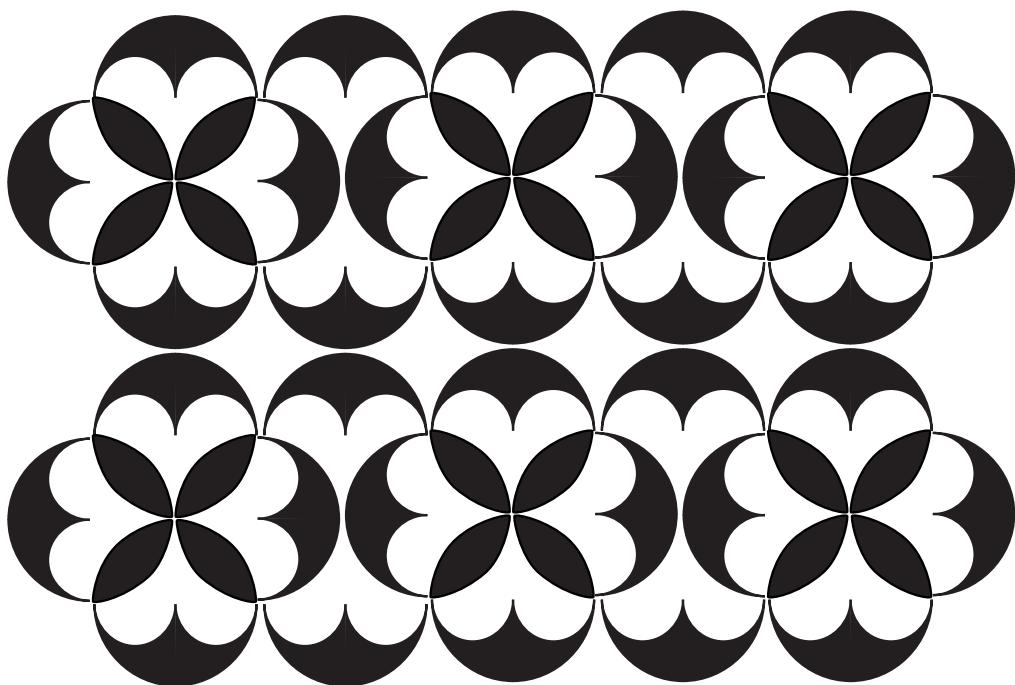


Fig. 37

The combination of peltae and cruciforms was first established in Greece in Late Antiquity. Of nine pavements, seven can almost certainly be dated to early Christian times. Probably only two mosaics, in Patras and Thasos, date from the 3rd Century AD.

The design appears very rarely on large surfaces or framing areas. Only in Gortyn does it decorate the broad borders of a mosaic floor. Mostly it's limited to a relatively small segment of the floor and is either complimentary or subordinate to the neighbouring surface designs.

It appears as a filler motif in the quadratic area of a diamond-star mosaic in Thessaloniki dating from Late Antiquity.

In four cases the design appears in black and white.

Another colour (probably red) was used for a mosaic in Patras. According to the published drawing, in each repetition of the pattern two differently coloured peltae lie opposite one another. Between the rosettes are pairs of peltae that touch one another with their convex sides.

The pavement in Gortyn is constructed on the same principle. Here black peltae contrast with lightly coloured cruciforms featuring dark borders.

Only fragments of the pelta design survived in Nikopolis. The mosaic was created by a less talented artist, who was clearly remiss in his use of compasses and stencils. The peltae and cruciforms are irregular in shape, and as a result accidental gaps as well as cases of overlapping arise. Despite the poor condition and inferior quality of the pavement, it's possible to reconstruct the pattern. In contrast to the mosaics from Gortyn and Patras, in this case cruciforms were apparently set between the rosettes.

There are also repeat patterns featuring cruciforms and peltae that don't form full four-leaved rosettes (Fig. 38). In two cases the cruciforms are framed by peltae on only three sides. On a mosaic in Thessaloniki cruciforms alternate with back-to-back peltae. Due to a lack of space on an Athenian mosaic, the cruciforms are surrounded by peltae on only three sides.

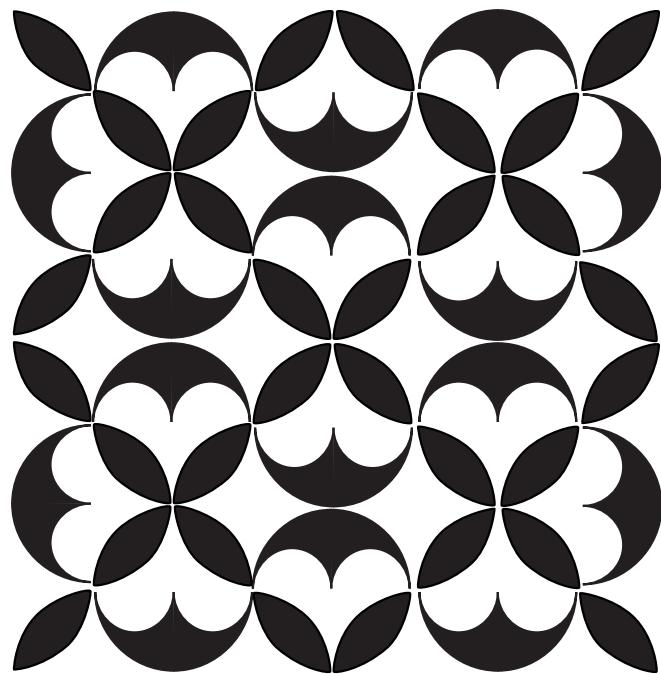


Fig. 38

Two mosaics in Argos und Thessaloniki show some similarities in the form of their pelta pattern. Unlike in the previous examples, the rosettes consist of eight, rather than four, intersecting circles (Fig. 39).

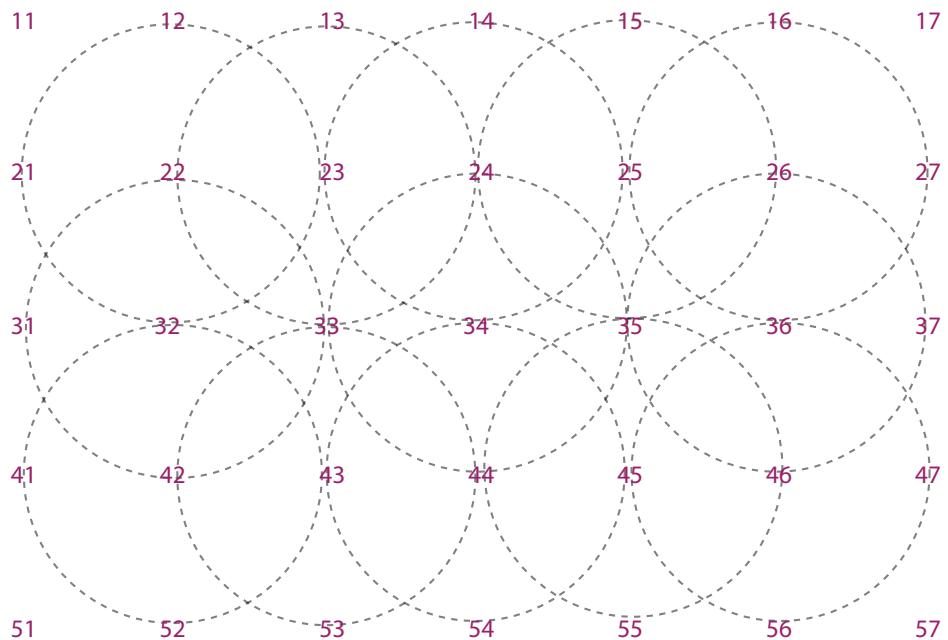


Fig. 39

In the centre is a cruciform whose tips reach the middle of the circles and there run into the surrounding peltae. The peltae have long, pulled down endings that connect to one another (Fig. 40).

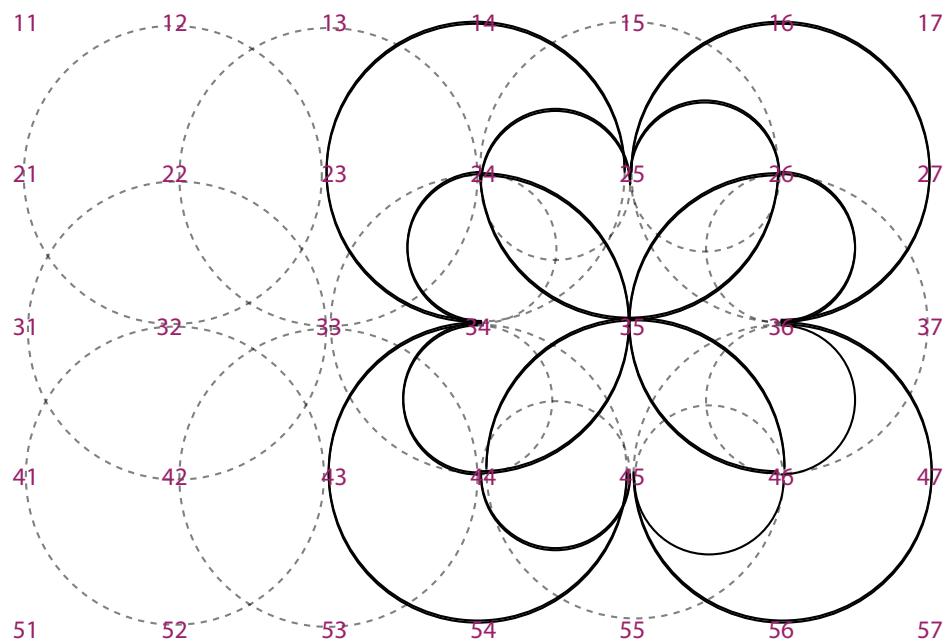


Fig. 40

In both cases the cruciforms and peltae are left white, while the heart-shaped fields are filled with colour. In Thessaloniki two red and two blue „hearts“ are situated opposite one another in each segment. In every second rosette there's a plaited knot, rather than a cruciform, surrounded by four white peltae. The rosettes have dark contour lines, which lends clarity to the pattern. Small squares with a staircase-like arrangement („diamonds“) decorate the rectangular fields.

The mosaic in Argos has a similar construction. In this case, however, the design isn't enriched by additional motifs. Each rosette consists of four cruciforms and four peltae. In the rectangular fields small rosettes with V-shaped leaves appear. The peltae are somewhat rounder-bellied than in Thessaloniki.

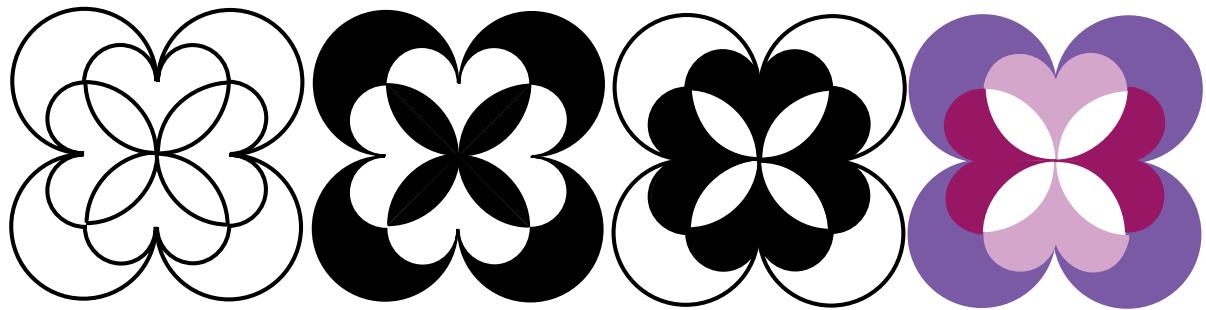


Fig. 41

It's possible that a design featuring peltae and cruciforms layered on top of one another also appears in Greece. A small mosaic fragment in Thasos features three touching peltae and lancet leaves which bear no resemblance to an ornamental rosette.

## Designs consisting of peltae and plaited bands

In Greece it's not uncommon to find so-called pelta vortices which consist of four peltae with touching tips. The basis of the motif is a pattern featuring four overlapping circles. The peltae are arranged in a cross, while their curves hint at rotation (Fig. 42). As a result the pattern appears more dynamic and less rigid than, for example, the groups of four peltae und rosettes.

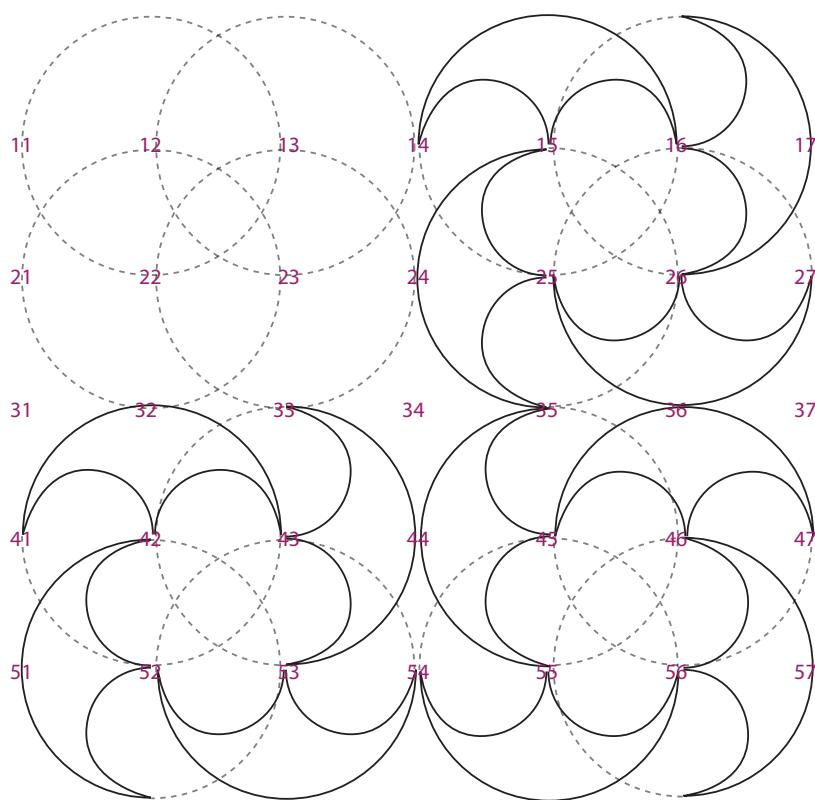


Fig. 42

Although the motif known as a pelta vortex is a self-contained entity, it appears only rarely as an isolated motif. As a rule, parallel rows of pelta vortices cover a larger area.

In the examples that have so far been discovered in Greece the design is arranged so that the direction of the pelta vortices changes. To a certain degree this symmetrical arrangement cancels out the motif's inner dynamism (Fig. 43).

Heart-shaped and four-sided figures (or triangular around the edges) with concave sides arise between the decorative figures. In the concave rectangles small motifs can often be found: squares with staircase borders, rosettes or crosses.

An important component of the pelta vortex is the so-called Solomon's knot, which occupies the cross-shaped field between the peltae (Fig. 44).

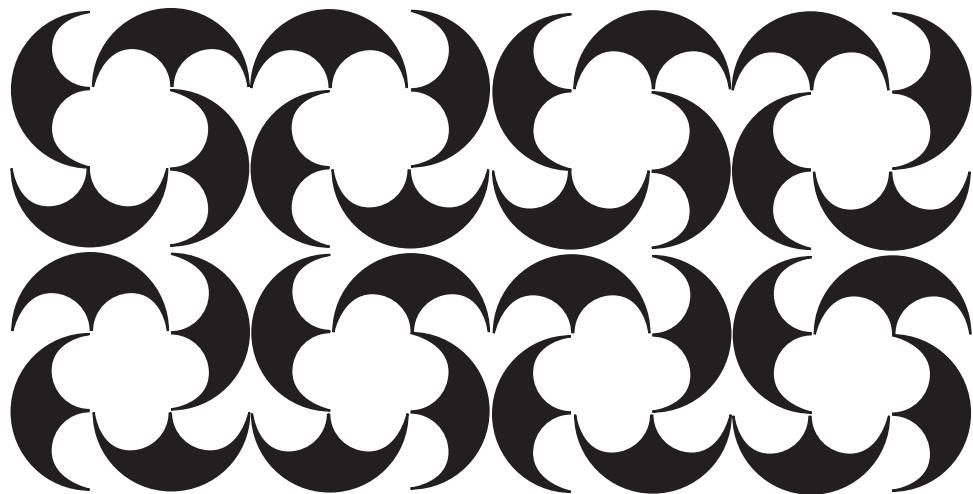


Fig. 43



Fig. 44

The pelta vortices aren't usually connected to one another. Only on the mosaic from Nikopolis are they chained together by means of black tessellae between the pelta backs and inward-rolling sides. The outer sides of some pelta curves touch each other on a mosaic in Melos, but this could be a mistake by the artist.

The decoration frequently appears around the edges. In two outer corners on a mosaic in Sparta four pelta vortices can be found. The external friezes of two mosaics from Melos and Nikopolis and the longer sides of a floor from Kastelli Kisamou are also decorated with pelta vortices. On the mosaics from Melos und Kastelli Kisamou only a single row of pelta vortices appears. In accordance with the baroque character of the mosaic in Nikopolis they are doubled.

On an oblong area of an Athenian mosaic four rows of pelta vortices appear eight times. Another mosaic in Athens couldn't be fully excavated, but it appears to have been filled with five times three rows of pelta vortices.

Generally the peltae are black, while the Solomon's knot is emphasised by rows of small red and yellow stones. Deviations from the classical pelta form are rare. On an example from Sparta a small, bright point appears on the black peltae. On three elegant pavements dating from Late Antiquity the peltae possess spiral-shaped, inward-turning endings.

## The single pelta as filler motif

The pelta appears in various contexts as an isolated motif. It can often be found within a repeat pattern or in the corners of a mosaic floor. The following descriptions aim to make clear how imaginatively and diversely the mosaic artists dealt with the pelta motif. No limits were set regarding pelta forms.

A pelta with a broad apex and spiral-shaped, inward-turning endings appears within a diamond-shaped field on a mosaic from Kos. The diamond presumably serves as a frame for the surrounding images in which birds and fish are depicted.

In Olympia and Didymoteicho single peltae decorate the fields of a repeat pattern. The design of the mosaic in Olympia consists of circles joined by broad bands, forming octagons with four concave sides. Solomon's knots can be found in the four central circles, while composite or eight-leaved rosettes are depicted in the concave octagons. In the external semi- and quarter-circles parts of rosettes or single peltae appear. The pelta colours are less emphasised than the other filler motifs, which attain a special luminosity by means of yellow and red tones on a black background. Their white inner surface is surrounded by a row of small grey and pink stones. They possess the usual shape with pointed endings. Amazingly, they aren't arranged parallel to the edges of the semi-circles, but instead touch the upper arc of the latter with their tips.

On the mosaic from Didymoteicho a pattern of octagons and rectangles surrounds a black image field. The octagons are embellished with decorative motifs. Fine astragal bands, diamonds, toothed semi-circles, volutes and small „arrows“ cover the surface like a net. The motifs are either black or appear as an outline drawing. A Solomon's knot or cruciform is situated in the rectangles. Triangles appear in the external borders. The trapeze-shaped areas that surround the central image field („emblema“) are decorated with single, blank white peltae. Their forms are quite typical. The tips point inwards towards the figurative depictions.

On four other mosaics individual peltae appear in small gaps at the edges of the repeat pattern, while in larger spaces they are doubled.

There's a large black-and-white mosaic from Kastelli Kissamou that's divided into four square and five rectangular patterns. In the corners are squares containing diamond stars. In two cases a star made up of eight diamonds is surrounded by four peltae and cruciforms. The black peltae have a decorative form with a slim body and pointed endings.

The peltae on a mosaic from Thasos create a much more powerful impression. As on the Late Antique pavements from Argos and Thessaloniki, the mosaic artist expanded the usual semi-circular form so that the peltae take up almost three quarters of a circle. The thick bodies possess short endings. On the mosaic from Thasos six peltae frame a so-called shield composition made up of concentric circles with equilateral triangles at their edges. On two sides of the shield are three peltae, arranged side-by-side without touching each other. The middle pelta lies with its tips pointing towards the shield and is framed by two standing, outwardly facing peltae.

Peltae in combination with circular compositions also appear on a mosaic floor in Dion. In a thermal bath's large „recreation room“ at least three different kinds of shield designs were discovered. In the corners, between the circle and the square frame, are peltae or plant motifs. Emphasis was placed on variation. In one case brown peltae appear on a white background. They have stretched, non-pointed endings. On another composition a black pelta with a heart-shaped apex and turned-in endings decorates a brown corner. The corner motif of the third circle composition is highly original. Here two black peltae with triangular points flank a double-headed axe.

Peltae can also be found in the triangular corners of diamond compositions. On a mosaic (probably from Kos) in the Palace of the Grand Master of the Knights of Rhodes, four black peltae with heart-shaped endings frame a diamond containing a polychrome shield. The peltae face each other in a rigid symmetrical pattern. They attain a particular gravity through the absence of other decorative motifs and the dominance of the white background.

The composition on a mosaic from Patras makes a less static impression. The courtyard mosaic is divided into nine sections with various geometric patterns. Directly bordering the north east corner is a square field containing a diagonally positioned rectangle. Peltae with an apex in the form of a volute decorate the corners. They have black borders and are filled with a light colour (probably red).

## Filler motifs with two peltae

Filler motifs featuring two back-to back peltae appear relatively often (Fig. 45).

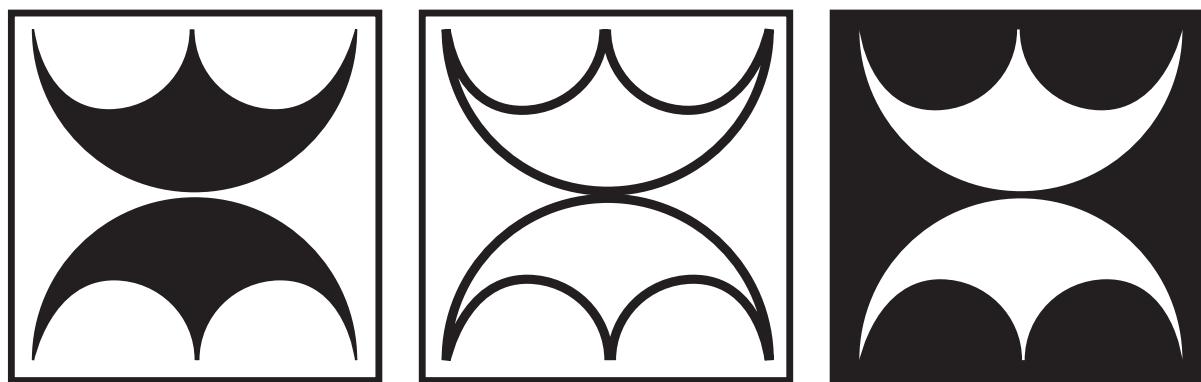


Fig. 45

As with other geometric decorations (e.g. cruciforms, Solomon's knots, four-pointed stars etc.) it usually serves to decorate square-shaped fields. The peltae's external curves are very close and separated by nothing more than a background row of small stones. Their width is determined by the side length of the framing squares. Their handles point towards the outer corners.

The motif appears three times in diamond patterns. On a mosaic from Chios black peltae appear on a white background. For the remaining filler motifs on the floor (plaited bands, diamonds, circle segments etc.) red, yellow and grey tessellae were also used. The two other pavements from Skala and Olympia also possess rich polychrome. However, here the peltae are blank white upon a dark background. Clearly a classic black-and-white contrast was chosen for the peltae decoration.

Only on a pavement in Samos were pairs of light brown peltae set against a white background. In this instance the motif decorates the larger fields of a square-shaped pattern.

Back-to-back peltae appear within a chessboard pattern on a mosaic in Thessaloniki. They are blank white and arranged alternatively lying or standing. In every second square a Solomon's knot appears as a contour drawing, like the peltae themselves. The chessboard pattern is surrounded by a black-and-white wavy band and a black stripe. It forms a clear contrast to the rich polychrome of the remaining parts of the mosaic. In Patras a concentric mosaic surface is surrounded by a broad border consisting of squares in a row. In each square is a small motif. In addition to bucraenia, kantharoi, rosettes and stars, peltae also appear. The colours of the pavement are unknown, as up to now only a miniaturised drawing has been published.

In Amphipolis two polychrome image fields surrounded by a black-and-white swastika meander pattern with enclosed squares were found. Within the squares white cruciforms on a black background alternate with pelta pairs on a white background. The black-and-white meander frame has the effect of a calming pole between the polychrome, three-stranded plaited band of the image fields and the external cruciform pattern. Again here the preferred style of pelta decoration was black-and-white. This is also the case for a motif that appears less frequently in Greece, the so-called double pelta, which consists of two peltae whose tips touch. At first glance it looks like a circle containing two smaller circles (Fig. 46).

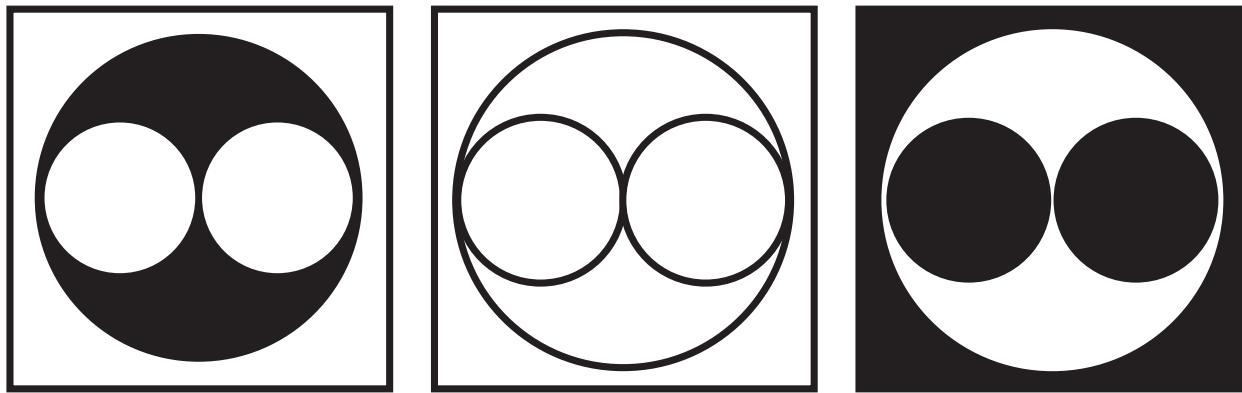


Fig. 46

Double peltae usually appear in smaller areas of surface patterns. In Olympia a white double pelta decorates the square of a diamond-star pattern. On a mosaic in Argos blank white double peltae appear in the diamonds of a meander or Greek key-pattern. The colour of a further mosaic from Argos is unclear as only a technical drawing of the design is available. In this case a double pelta can be found in the diamond-shaped field at the edge of the pavement (Catalogue 9, Room E).

## Filler motifs made up of several peltae

In the Odeon of Herodes Atticus four different motifs consisting of several peltae appear. In the fields of an octagon pattern a rosette consisting of a cruciform and four framing peltae can be found (Fig. 47). Here the peltae possess cross-shaped middle endings.

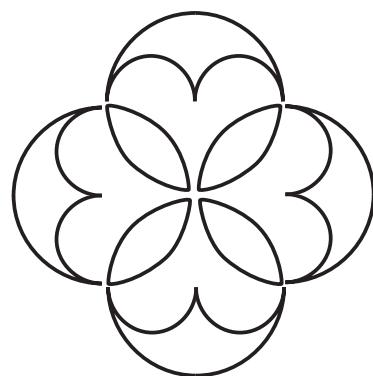


Fig. 47

A decoration consisting of four peltae surrounding a circle has the same outline. It's made of nine overlapping circles (Fig. 48–49). In the centre is a concave rectangle containing a square or “diamond” with a staircase border. A group of two lying and two standing peltae appear in just one section of the design.

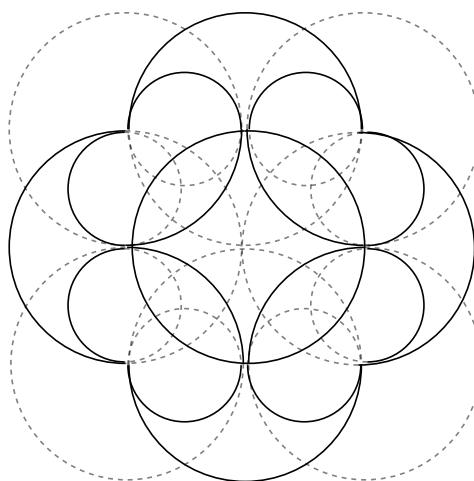


Fig. 48

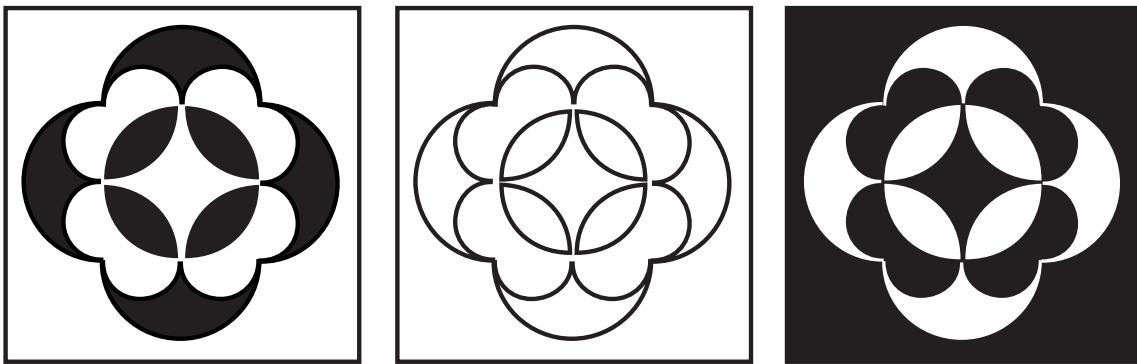


Fig. 49

Somewhat more frequently in octagons a motif containing four peltae with their backs to one another can be found. These peltae form a concave field at their centre that is often decorated with a small rectangle (Fig. 50). The middle pelta tip is often embellished with a small cross.

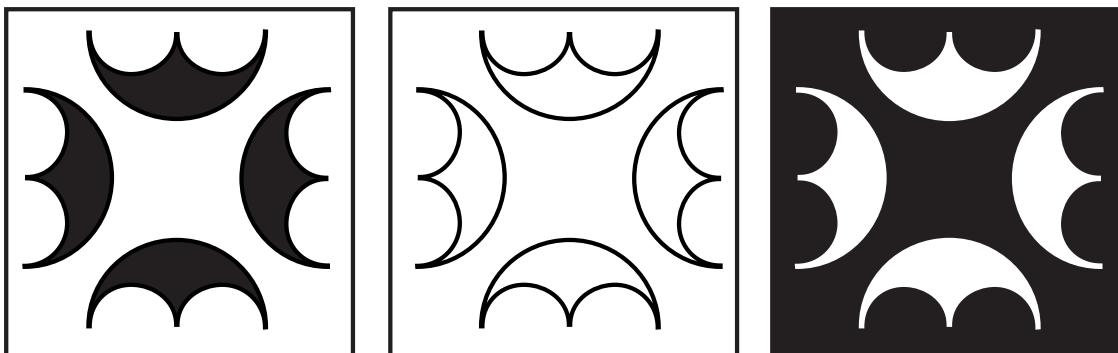


Fig. 50

This motif was used as decoration in square-shaped corners in Kenchreai. The peltae with their thickened endings touch the inner frame.

In Olympia the motif also appears in a square-shaped corner of a swastika meander pattern. The peltae have pointed endings, are alternatively green or red and surrounded by a white contour line. On the same mosaic are two more motifs made up of four peltae. Both the form and layout of the peltae would appear to be unique in Greece. It may have been an invention by the artist. A circle with a cruciform is contained within a square-shaped area of the meander frame. In each of the trapezes between the cruciform “leaves” is an outward-facing pelta. Its apex is greatly thickened, while the outer endings curve inwards (mushroom form). In another area four peltae with triangular middle endings face one another. Again here the handles curve inwards and form a small volute.

## Conclusion

This paper offers an overview of pelta patterns and motifs in Greece. Analysis of the repeat patterns shows that the mosaic artists always worked with a quadrilateral design. Not even the pelta rosette used a triangular scheme, unlike in Pompeii. One can assume that the pelta pattern was developed from the simple cruciform design, which has the same basic structure.

Many of the variations in Greece can already be found on pavements in Vesuvian towns. Patterns consisting of groups of four peltae and back-to-back pelta pairs appear during the 1st Century AD in Italy and later throughout the empire. In contrast, the Hellenistic rosette is limited to a fairly small time frame. Its characteristic pelta form, with long middle endings, is no longer in evidence on Roman mosaics in Greece.

Pelta forms with a heart-, cross- or V-shaped apex were not yet common in the Pompeii era. Creations dating from the middle years of the Roman empire were the four-leaved pelta rosette, the pelta-vortex and probably also the circular double pelta. Generally in Greece dark peltae were set against a light background. Less common are white on black or outline drawings. In repeat patterns peltae are granted a dominant position in relation to other geometric figures. Fields in the form of hearts, semi-circles, rectangles and triangles are regarded as a neutral background rather than something to be highlighted with elaborate decoration.

Analysis of pelta forms shows that over twenty types were known in Greece. In repeat patterns the simple form was usually preferred.

More demanding forms, including those in which the mosaic artists developed their own styles, are found in filler motifs. Especially common were peltae with elaborate endings which decorated the corners of a diamond or circular composition. These pelta forms don't demonstrate any connection to representations of the pelta as a defensive shield.

## Notes

The research on the pelta motif on mosaics in Greece is taken from my 1994 dissertation\*. In my work I was supported by the mathematician and Germanist Heinrich Siemens and the linguist Yannis Kakridis.

As a classical archaeologist I've concerned myself as closely as possible with pelta decoration, as well as the associated geometrical patterns, by collecting, categorising, describing and comparing as many examples as possible. In the case of some descriptions I've gone into close detail (perhaps even too much detail), in order to capture every distinctive feature. Now, more than 15 years later, I would probably approach the pelta patterns differently and concentrate more on the mosaic artists' reliance on the mathematical knowledge of the time. In recent years there have been many developments in this area (see the Wikipedia-Artikel on [wallpaper group](#), plane symmetry group or plane crystallographic group; [pattern in Islamic art](#), [Islamic geometric design](#)) and there is analysis by mathematicians which could also be interesting for archaeologists (e.g. [Tiling – Wolfram Demonstrations Project](#); research into [circle parts](#)). If time allows, I'll deal with this theme in a later study. This work would include a consideration of the psychological effects of geometric designs, layouts and rhythms in motif sequences.

\*Alexandra Kankeleit, [Kaiserzeitliche Mosaiken in Griechenland](#) (Dissertation Bonn, 1994) Vol. I pages 197–228. A precise bibliography for the mosaics dealt with here can be found in Catalogue Vol. II.

## Darstellungen von Pelta-Schilden auf Mosaiken

In Pompeji: Casa di M. Caesius Blandus, Schwellenmosaik vor dem Tablinum (VII 1,40).

In Elis: N. Yalouris, Mosaiken eines spätrömischen Gebäudes im antiken Elis, in: KOTINOS, Festschrift E. Simon (1992) 426ff. Farbtaf. 1,2. Taf. 91,5.92,2.

In Antiochia: Levi Taf. 123,1 („House of the Amazonomachy“).

Übereinstimmende Form von Schild und Ornament konnte bisher nur auf einem spätantiken Mosaik in Rumänien nachgewiesen werden: M. Koromila, Archaiologia 40, August–September 1991, 27 mit Abb.; Dies., The Greeks in the Black Sea from the Bronze Age to the Early Twentieth Century (1991) 105 mit Abb. (Mosaik aus Konstanza an der Schwarzmeerküste; vermutlich 4. Jh.n.Chr.); evtl. auch auf einem Mosaik in Patras, s. ARepLond 1976–77, 35 Abb. 61 (zwei Pelten zu Seiten einer Doppelaxt im Zwickel einer Schildkomposition).

Auf Mosaiken außerhalb Griechenlands treten „Pelten mit Ösen“ auf, die vielleicht an „Oscilla in Peltenform“ erinnern sollen; vgl. Donderer, Chronologie 71.

## Allgemein zum Pelta-Schild

St. Bittner, Tracht und Bewaffnung des persischen Heers zur Zeit der Achaimeniden (1985) Taf. 6.28;

F. Lissarague, L'autre Guerrier. Archers, Peltastes, Cavaliers de l'Imagerie antique (1990) 151ff. Abb. 85ff.;

Pompei 1748–1980. I tempi della documentazione, Catalogo della mostra (1981) 39;

N. und M. Janon – M. Kilmer, in: Spectacula-II. Le Théâtre antique et ses spectacles. Kolloquium Lattes 27.–30.4.1989 (1992) 158f. Abb. 7.9.10 (kämpfende Amazonen mit Pelta);

PPM II 612 Abb. 19; PPM III 127f. (gemalte Pelten); G. Bauchhenß, Germania inferior, Bonn und Umgebung. Militärische Grabdenkmäler. Corpus signorum Imperii Romani, Deutschland III 1 (1978) 22ff. Nr. 2 Taf. 7 (Pelta auf Grabmal im Bonner Landesmuseum);

PPM III 580; O.W. Vacano, RM 67, 1960, 73f. Taf. 24,1; J.–N. Andrikopoulou–Strack, Grabbauden des 1. Jhs.n.Chr. im Rheingebiet (1986) 101 Anm. 403 (zur Pelta auf Waffenfriesen);

M.I. Rostovtzeff u.a. (Hrsg.), Excavations at Dura–Europos. Preliminary report

of the ninth season of work 1935–1936 (1944) 187ff. Taf. 23,1; E.J. Dwyer, Pompeian Oscilla Collections, RM 88, 1981, 247ff.; J. Corswandt, Oscilla. Untersuchungen zu einer römischen Reliefgattung (1982) Taf. 35, 1–4.36–41 (zu peltaförmigen Oscilla).

### Zu Darstellungen der Pelta als Ornament in anderen Kunstgattungen

B. Andreeae u.a., Princeps Urbium cultura e vita sociale dell' Italie romana (1991) Abb. 358 (Grab in Ostia mit einem Fries aus Peltenpaaren);  
 D. Baatz – F.–R. Herrmann (Hrsg.), Die Römer in Hessen (1989) 203 Abb. 138 (Peltenornament in der Wandmalerei);  
 O. Falke, Kunstgeschichte der Seidenweberei (1936) Abb. 11 (Seidenstoff aus Antinoe).

### Zur Wahrnehmung von Ornamenten

Der Betrachter nimmt zunächst die Extremitäten und erst in einem zweiten Schritt die Innenfläche einer Figur wahr; vgl. J. Hoffmann, Die Welt der Begriffe (1986) 110.

### Schwarze Pelten auf weißem Grund

treten erstmalig in Pompeji und Herculaneum auf:  
 Pernice Taf. 25,2 (Casa dei gladiatori, V 5,3).45,1 (Casa dell' Orso, VII 2,45);  
 Blake (1930) Taf. 39,1 (Casa di Arianna, VII 4,31);  
 W. Ehrhardt, Casa dell' Orso (VII 2,44–46). Häuser in Pompeji II (1988) Abb. 47.245; PPM I 557 (I 7,2.3).

### Früheste Beispiele von weißen Pelten auf schwarzem Grund

finden sich in den Vesuvstädten:

Blake (1930) Taf. 32,1 (Casa di Meleagro, VI 9,2). 33,2 (VIII 5,16.38).36,3 (VI 15,5).

### Früheste Beispiele von ausgesparten Pelten

stammen aus Pompeji.

In Opus tessellatum: D. Michel, Casa dei Cei (I 6,15). Häuser in Pompeji III (1990) Abb. 181;

PPM I 439 (I 6,15); PPM II 51 (I 9,5); PPM III 583;

Blake (1930) Taf. 28,2;

Pernice Taf. 44,4 (Casa di L. Caecilius Icundus, V 1,26).

In Opus signinum:

Blake (1930) Taf. 5,4; Pernice Taf. 46,4 (VIII 2,13); PPM II 408 (I 10,7).488 (I 10,10).

## Farbig gefüllte Pelten

treten in den Kladeosthermen von Olympia bereits Anfang des 2. Jhs.n.Chr. auf.

In anderen Provinzen lassen sie sich offenbar erst seit dem 3. Jh. nachweisen; s. Gonzenbach 66. 269; Jobst, Salzburg 114 mit Anm. 413.

## Quadratisches Raster der Kreismittelpunkte

Dieses Raster wird in der Fachsprache als Schoenflies–Notation P2 bezeichnet. Anders verhält es sich mit einigen Mustern, die in Pompeji auftreten. Für die sog. hellenistische Rosette wurde ein dreieckiges Schema (Schoenflies–Notation P3) angewandt.

Zu den mathematischen Begriffen vgl. Encyclopedic Dictionary of Mathematics I (1980) 316f. mit Literaturangaben;

B. Grünbaum – G.C. Shephard, Tilings and Patterns (1987); L. Balke, Diskontinuierliche Gruppen als Automorphismengruppen von Pflasterungen (1990).

Zu regelmäßigen Flächenmustern: H. Weitzel, Kristallographische Symmetrien in der bildenden Kunst, in: Symmetrie in Kunst, Natur und Wissenschaft. Mathildenhöhe Darmstadt, 1. Juni bis 24. August 1986 Bd. I (1986) 420ff.

Anm. 4.35 (mit weiterführender Literatur) Abb. 13.14; ebd. Bd. III 124ff. Abb. 1.9.

## Zum Kreuzblütenrapport

s. Salies 14ff. (Kreissystem II);

Früheste Beispiele des Kreuzblütenmusters auf Mosaiken finden sich in Pompeji: Blake (1930) Taf. 23,1 (VII 7,5); PPM III 125 (II 3,3) mit schwarzen Kreuzblüten. Blake (1930) Taf. 24,4 (VIII 2,1); PPM III 754f. (V 2,j) mit weißen Kreuzblüten.

## Viererpelten

lassen sich ebenfalls erstmalig in Pompeji auf Mosaiken nachweisen:

Blake (1930) 104 Taf. 32,1 (VI 9,2).

Zu Viererpelten s. auch Gonzenbach 269.284; Donderer, Chronologie 141 mit Anm. 1307; 219.

## Rosetten

Ein Rapport aus sechsblättrigen Rosetten findet sich auf mehreren Schwarzweißmosaiken in Pompeji;

z.B. Pernice Taf. 28,1. 33,4; Blake (1930) Taf. 22,3–4.

In der Casa dei Gladiatori ist eine sechsblättrige Rosette sogar in die Wand geritzt: PPM III 1091. Dieses Zirkelmuster liegt der sog. hellenistischen Rosette zu Grunde, die ebenfalls öfters in Pompeji auftritt: Pernice Taf. 19,2.20,3; PPM I 241.274ff. (Casa del Criptoportico, I 6,2);

Pernice Taf. 24,4; PPM III 1079ff. (Casa dei Gladiatori, V 5,3);

Pernice Taf. 20,5 (Domus M. Caesi Blandi VII 1,40);

Blake (1930) Taf. 22,1 (Casa dei capitelli figurati, VII 4,57);

Blake (1930) Taf. 23,1 (Casa di Trittolemo, VII 7,5); Pernice Taf. 27,6 (VII 15,2).

Von den kaiserzeitlichen Rosetten in der Casa del atrio a mosaico (Herculaneum) und in der Insula occidentalis (Pompeji) sind mir keine publizierten Abbildungen bekannt.

Die Auffassung von Donderer, Chronologie 127, dass die Pelten der hellenistischen Rosetten auf ein gänzlich anderes Motiv als die Pelten der kaiserzeitlichen Rapportmuster zurückzuführen sind, bedarf einer eingehenden Prüfung.

Auch in Pompeji sind die Pelten aus drei Halbkreisen gebildet und unterscheiden sich von späteren Formen lediglich durch ihre langgezogene Mittelendigung, die möglicherweise mit der dreieckigen Form der Felder, in die sie eingeschrieben sind, zusammenhängt.

## Peltenwirbel

Parlasca 132f.; Gonzenbach 156f.269; Donderer, Chronologie 49.112; La Mosaique Romaine Taf. 57,g.

Parlasca 132 hält die Bezeichnung „Peltenkreuzornament“ für treffender, da keine „Bewegungstendenz“ abzulesen sei. Meines Erachtens wird jedoch durch die Krümmung der „frei schwebenden“ Endigungen eine Rotation angedeutet.

In den konkaven Vierecken befinden sich öfters kleine Füllmotive: Quadrate mit abgetrepptem Rand, Rosetten oder Kreuze.

Normalerweise sind die Peltenwirbel nicht miteinander verbunden. Nur auf einem Mosaik in Nikopolis wurden sie durch schwarze Tessellae zwischen den Peltenrücken und den seitlichen Einrollungen miteinander verkettet.

Auf einem Mosaik in Melos berühren sich einige Pelten an ihrer äußeren Rundung, doch könnte es sich hier um einen Fehler des Zeichners handeln.

Das Ornament tritt relativ häufig in rahmenden Zonen auf. Auf einem großen Mosaik in Sparta befinden sich in zwei Eckfeldern der äußeren Bordüre jeweils vier Peltenwirbel.

Der äußere Fries zweier Mosaiken aus Melos und Nikopolis und die länglichen Randstreifen eines Bodens aus Kastelli Kisamou sind ebenfalls mit Peltenwirbeln geschmückt.

Auf Mosaiken von Melos und Kastelli Kisamou wurde nur eine Reihe von Peltenwirbeln verlegt. In Nikopolis wurde sie dem barocken Charakter des Mosaiks entsprechend verdoppelt.

Auf einem Mosaik in Athen wurden in einem länglichen Feld acht mal vier Reihen von Peltenwirbeln verlegt.

Ein weiteres Mosaik aus Athen konnte nicht vollständig ausgegraben werden, doch scheinen hier mindestens fünf mal drei Wirbelreihen das Feld zu füllen.

Die Pelten sind in der Regel schwarz gefüllt und kontrastieren zu dem Salomonsknoten, der durch rote und gelbe Steinchenreihen farblich hervorgehoben ist.

Auch bei diesem Muster wurde nur selten von der klassischen Peltenform abgewichen. Bei dem Beispiel aus Sparta befindet sich auf den schwarzgrundigen Pelten ein kleiner heller Punkt. Auf drei spätantik anmutenden Pavimenten weisen die Pelten spiralförmig eingedrehte Endigungen auf.

### Ornamente aus zwei Pelten

In Pompeji werden Rücken an Rücken gesetzte Pelten häufiger in länglichen Feldern aneinander gereiht.

In Schwarz: Pernice Taf. 25,2 (Casa dei Gladiatori, V 5,3); Blake (1930) Taf. 27,2 (VIII 3,8).31,3 (VI 19,20).33,3 (Casa del Centenario, IX 8,6); PPM II 15 (I 9,5); PPM III 983 (V 4,a).

In Weiß: Pompei 1748–1980. I tempi della documentazione, Catalogo dell' mostra (1981) 178 Abb. 41 (Casa di Fabio Rufo); PPM III 770 (V 2,1).

Kleine quadratische Felder mit einzelnen Peltenpaaren treten hingegen relativ selten auf.

In Schwarz: Blake (1930) Taf. 30,4 (Casa del Camillo, VII 12,23).

In Weiß: Blake (1930) Taf. 36,3 (VI 15,5).

## Roman mosaics with peltae in Greece

Alexandra Kankeleit, Kaiserzeitliche Mosaiken in Griechenland

(Dissertation Bonn, 1994) Bd. II: Katalog mit detaillierten Angaben zu den hier aufgelisteten Mosaiken\*.

**AMPHIPOLIS**, Römische Villa: E. Stikas, Prakt 1975, 70ff. Taf. 5 (Grundriss der Villa); Ergon 1975, 53ff. Abb. 54–57 Taf. 3; BCH 98, 1974, 678 Abb. 227–230; BCH 100, 1976, 680. 685 Abb. 232.233; Assimakopoulou–Atzaka, Katalogos 220 Nr. 5; Dies., Psiph. III. 416 Anm. 3; Ramsden–Waywell 138. 283ff. 543 Nr. 6; Waywell 294 Nr. 1; F. Brommer, Denkmälerlisten zur griechischen Heldenage III (1976) 121 Nr. 11; Ch. Bakirtsis, ADelt 33,1, 1978, Chron 319; LIMC I (1981) 744 Nr. 29 s.v. Amymone (E. Simon); E. Zahn, Europa und der Stier (1983) Nr. 246; Ph. Bruneau, RA 1984, 241ff.; J. Lancha, L'iconographie d'Hylas dans les mosaïques romaines. III Colloquio internazionale sul mosaico antico, Ravenna 6–10 Settembre 1980 (1984) 381ff.; LIMC IV (1988) 85 Nr. 152 s.v. „Europa“ (M. Robertson); BAssMosAnt 12, 1988–1989, 161 Nr. 1158; LIMC V (1990) 575 Nr. 15 s.v. „Hylas“ (J.H. Oakley).

**ARGOS**, Grundstück Chatzixenophon: G. Daux, BCH 92, 1968, 1039ff. Abb. 2–5; Ramsden–Waywell 60. 89. 122. 161. 177. 216 Nr. 15 Taf. 19; Waywell 295 Nr. 6; Assimakopoulou–Atzaka, Psiph. III. 366 mit Anm. 3; Syntagma II 48ff. Nr. 2 Taf. 3–7.

**ARGOS**, Odeon: Ginouvès 131ff. Abb. 58–73. 82–84; Ramsden–Waywell 60. 119. 183.224. 273. 547f. Nr. 10 Abb. 29,3; Waywell 295 Nr. 4 Taf. 45,5–6; Assimakopoulou–Atzaka, Katalogos 220 Nr. 6 Taf. 5,2; Dies., Psiph. III. 367 Anm. 2; 372 Anm. 7f.; BCH 92 (1968) 249 Abb. 1; BCH 1973, 377; Charitonidis–Kahil–Ginouvès 86 Anm. 4; Donderer, Mosaizisten 71f. Nr. A 29; Meinel 288ff. Abb. 85. 86.110; J.–Ch. Moretti, Théâtres d'Argos. École française d'Athènes, Sites et Monuments X (1993) 23ff. Abb. 23. 25. 26. 27. 28.

**ARGOS**, Odos Tripoleos: Ch. Kritzas, ADelt 29,2, 1973–74, Chron 230ff. Abb. 13–15 Taf. 159–166; S. Charitonidis, ADelt 21,1, 1966, Chron 127f. Taf. 123,2; ARepLond 26, 1979–80, 27 Abb. 47; Assimakopoulou–Atzaka, Katalogos 221 Nr. 7; Dies., Psiph. III. 372f. mit Anm.; Ramsden–Waywell 113f. 203. 206. 218f. 229 Anm. 1; 253. 291f. 550f. Nr. 14 Abb. 19,4.28,11;

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\* Extracts of the Dissertation from 1994

# Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Bibliography
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<b>Assimakopoulou-Atzaka, Psiph. III.</b>	P. Assimakopoulou-Atzaka, <i>Ta palaiochristianika psiphidota dapeda tou Anatolikou Illyrikou</i> , in: <i>Actes du Xe Congrès International d'Archéologie Chrétienne</i> , Thessalonique 28 Septembre - 4 Octobre 1980, Citta del Vaticano - Thessalonique (1984) 361-444.
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