Learning from Past Interventions: Evaluation of the Project to Conserve the
Orpheus Mosaic at Paphos, Cyprus

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Abstract

In 1988-1989 a project to lift and relay the Orpheus mosaic at Paphos, Cyprus was undertaken by the Getty Conservation Institute and the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus. The project was evaluated in 2004 to determine whether it had met its intended goals and contributed to the field of mosaic conservation. This paper presents the methodology for evaluation of the project as a whole, poses the main issues and questions raised during the in situ assessment, and provides an overview of results and the three main lessons learned, which relate to the importance of values in decision-making, the critical role of documentation, and necessity of effective management for sustainability.

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Introduction
In 1988-89 an exceptional figural mosaic of Orpheus and the Beasts, dated to the late 2nd/early 3rd C AD, was lifted and re-laid in situ on a new support in Paphos, Cyprus. The technique and materials used—rolling of the mosaic and re-laying on a lightweight honeycomb aluminum support (Aerolam® panels)—had been employed in the detachment of mosaics, but on a smaller scale and mainly for preservation in a museum context (1). The restored mosaics were protected with what was intended to be a temporary shelter, pending the construction of permanent shelters by the Department of Antiquities over all the mosaics of the Paphos site.

The project to lift and relay the mosaic was a joint undertaking by the Getty Conservation Institute (GCI) and the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus and constitutes one the GCI’s earliest field projects. As part of a larger initiative of the GCI to assess some of its past projects, it was decided in 2003 to evaluate the Orpheus Project. The purpose of evaluation is to determine whether a project has met its intended goals and contributed to the advancement of the theory and practice of conservation (and if not, why not?). Evaluation may be thought of as an interface between the past and the future, since it involves a systematic investigation of a past activity in order to inform and improve future activities. It is all about trying to learn lessons, both the lessons of success and those of failure.

This paper presents the basic methodology developed for evaluation of the project as a whole, poses the main issues and questions raised during the in situ assessment, and provides an overview of the results obtained and the three main lessons learned from the assessment.

The project to lift and re-lay the mosaic
The Orpheus mosaic (4.25 by 5.10m) was excavated in 1984 by one of the authors under the auspices of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus (2).
in a few large lacunae and dislocation and loss of tesserae along the top part of the mosaic, destruction of its edges from ancient robbing of the walls of the room, subsidence caused by the presence of earlier structures below the mosaic, which became more pronounced as the subsoil dried out following excavation, and lack of cohesion of the mortar of the bedding layer (fig. 1) (Michaelides 1991)

For these reasons, in order to preserve the beauty and coherence of the mosaic, the Orpheus mosaic was to be conserved through lifting and relaying. The technique of rolling the tessellatum on a large wooden cylinder (or drum) was selected because the mosaic was largely intact, without structural cracking, was accessible to large machinery, and most importantly, the technique would allow the mosaic to be lifted as a single intact, pictorial composition. The project began in 1988, under the general direction of Paolo Mora, as consultant to the GCI, and entailed 3 main components: lifting and relaying of the mosaic; training of conservators in the technique; and temporary sheltering of the mosaic (see Stanley-Price 1991 for details of the project implementation, participants, and costs).

Lifting of the mosaic using the rolling technique and relaying it on an isolating support of Aerolam panels with epoxy adhesive and fiberglass sheets constituted the core of the project. Other aspects included analysis of tesserae and mortars and a year-long environmental monitoring of the site. Lifting and relaying took place over two years, 1988-1989, but since the details of the technique are not what is being evaluated, we will compress the complexity and technicalities of the undertaking into a very brief review of the steps involved:

- Documentation and preparation (facing and consolidation) of the mosaic;
- Detachment of the tessellatum from the bedding layers and rolling it on a wooden cylinder as it was detached;
- Cleaning of mortar from the back of the tessellatum while on the cylinder (and again after it was laid face down);
- Transport of the rolled mosaic by bulldozer to its temporary storage where it was unrolled face down (fig 2);
- Application of new mortar to the back of the tessellatum and also on the panel (Aerolam) with epoxy adhesive and fiberglass sheets;
- Construction of the new support consisting of an Aerolam panel (with aluminum honeycomb core), adhered to the prepared mosaic with epoxy;
Notes

(1) Aerolam panels are more commonly used for exhibiting detached mosaics in a museum and rolling is generally done with smaller cylinders; for a recent review of the history of lifting and current trends see Podany 2006, 115-128.

(2) Demetrios Michaelides, Archaeological Officer in Paphos at the time. See Michaelides 1986 for discovery and excavation of the Orpheus mosaic.

(3) For a journalistic overview of the need for a master plan at Paphos and the origins of the World Bank project, see Wigg 1994, 1-24. For a more recent description of the plan, from the perspective of the Cypriot authorities, see Hadjisavvas 2003.

(4) For the IUCN methodology, part of their Global Monitoring and Evaluation Initiative, see Woodhill 2000. The methodology was selected based on research carried out by David Myers (Project Specialist, GCI).
References


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Figure Captions and Credits

1. Orpheus mosaic (foreground) prior to being lifted in 1988, with the Amazon and Heracles mosaic (background) already partially lifted and relayed. Photo: Guillermo Aldana, ©J. Paul Getty Trust

2. Mortar being removed from the back of the Orpheus mosaic while it is rolled on the drum. Photo: Paolo Pastorello, ©J. Paul Getty Trust

3. Orpheus mosaic on the Aerolam panel relaid back in its original position, but before final cleaning, filling of lacunae, and rebuilding of the surrounding walls of the room. Photo: Guillermo Aldana, ©J. Paul Getty Trust

4. The ‘hexashelter’, a modular system designed as a temporary protection for the Orpheus mosaic, as seen from the exterior (above) and interior (below). Photos: Martha Demas, ©J. Paul Getty Trust

5. Loss of tesserae that had been embedded in polyester resin soon after the relaying; loss of infill mortar is visible on the right. Photo: Vassos Stylianou, ©J. Paul Getty Trust

6. The covering materials of the hexashelter had severely degraded by 2004, 15 years after the shelter was erected. Photo: Martha Demas, ©J. Paul Getty Trust

7. Orpheus mosaic after relaying on its new support in 1989 (before infilling lacunae) retains aspects of artistic and historic value--artistic composition, iconography, and attribution--that are most prized in mosaics. Photo: Guillermo Aldana, ©J. Paul Getty Trust

8. Graphic recording of the condition of the Orpheus mosaic in 2004, used for comparison with documentation undertaken in 1988 before the relaying, and in 1989 after the relaying. Photo: Neville Agnew, ©J. Paul Getty Trust

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Damas Fig. 1

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Demas Fig. 2
Black & white

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Demas Fig. 1 [couleur]

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