

An Ancient Mosaic



VISIT THE BMA
and see Tethys and Cupid in
the Antioch Court.

Count the number of small
stones in one small area, then
estimate how many stones
are in the entire mosaic. The
mosaic weighs 1440 pounds!

Bust of Tethys Antioch Mosaic

A sea goddess rising out of the water with a sea dragon draped around her neck is not something one sees every day. Neither is a Cupid with a fishing pole riding over the waves on the back of a dolphin.

These were the imaginings of people who lived about 1800 years ago near a river brimming with fish and sea life. According to myth, the goddess named Tethys was the wife of the sea god Oceanus. They had 3,000 sons who became the spirits of rivers and 3,000 daughters who became spirits of streams and springs.

The Antioch Mosaics

Tethys, Cupid, a shrimp, oyster, spotted eel, and assorted fish are all part of a large mosaic made of countless small pieces of colored stone. Today the mosaic is mounted on the wall at The Baltimore Museum of Art, but long ago, it was a floor pavement in a fine house in the ancient city of Antioch, on the Orontes River near the Mediterranean Sea. In hot summer weather, people sprinkled water on their mosaic floors to make them feel cool underfoot. They may have poured even more water over the surface of this mosaic to make the sea creatures appear to be swimming.

Challenge for Students

Use squares of colored paper to make your own mosaic of sea life, with creatures real or imaginary.

Find Antioch (modern Antakya) located on the Orontes River in Turkey near the border of Syria at <http://www.sacred-destinations.com/turkey/antioch.html>. Under "City Guide," click on "Maps of Antakya."

Print the image on page 2 for your students.

THE BALTIMORE MUSEUM OF ART



Antioch, Daphne. *Bust of Tethys*. 3rd century. Naturally colored stone tesserae. 76 x 54 inches. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Antioch Subscription Fund, BMA 1937.118