

NOVEMBER 2013

## A Lion Made of Stones

Antioch Mosaic | *The Striding Lion*



### VISIT THE BMA

See *The Striding Lion* and 27 more mosaics from Antioch in the Antioch Court.

Detail, *The Striding Lion*. Syria (present-day Turkey). 5th century A.D.. Stone and lime mortar. 92 x 90 x 2½ inches. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Antioch Subscription Fund, BMA 1937.139

Sharp claws. Taut muscles. Thick, shaggy mane. This fierce lion is a true “king of the beasts.” He is the main attraction in a mosaic floor about 1,600 years old.

Set in concrete, this mosaic weighs about one ton (2,000 pounds) and is constructed with many thousands of flat stones called *tesserae*, less than ½-inch square. The stones were chipped off of rocks quarried in mountains near the ancient city of Antioch in the region known as Turkey today. The naturally colored stones were probably sorted into piles of brown, yellow, and orange as well as subdued tones of red, pink, mauve, tan, and gray. A master mosaicist constructed the lion one stone at a time, alternating streaks of light and dark on the lion’s head to suggest strands of hair in his disheveled mane. He made the lion’s powerful chest by setting down light-colored stones in curved rows near his belly then gradually introducing darker browns and oranges towards his back.

Fish, fruit, flowers, and birds occupy a latticework of tiny hearts behind the lion. This panel was originally the center portion of a much larger floor, and the mighty beast would have been surrounded by 70 more compartments filled with images of a fawn, rabbit, doves, pigeons, parrots, ducks, pheasants, quails, grapes, turnips, and even pumpkins. Tragically, the magnificent city of Antioch was destroyed by earthquakes in the sixth century A.D., and the entire *Striding Lion* mosaic remained buried underground until it was unearthed in pieces by archaeologists in the 1930s.

### CHALLENGE FOR STUDENTS

What does the black-and-white photograph of the entire floor reveal about the lion’s original pose? Why do you think he is called *The “Striding” Lion*?

This “carpet pattern mosaic” resembles the design of carpets woven in Persia (now Iran), Antioch’s neighbor to the east. The animals and fruits celebrate the ancient city’s abundance. Create a “carpet pattern” design that celebrates the place where you live. In each compartment, draw an animal, fish, fruit, flower, bird, tree, or insect that brings your city or state to mind.

Use small paper “tesserae” to create a mosaic of an animal. Cut or tear scraps of colored paper and glue them down so that they suggest the animal’s form and structure.



To comment or register for Art-To-Go, email [ebenskin@artbma.org](mailto:ebenskin@artbma.org)

For visitor information: [artbma.org](http://artbma.org)

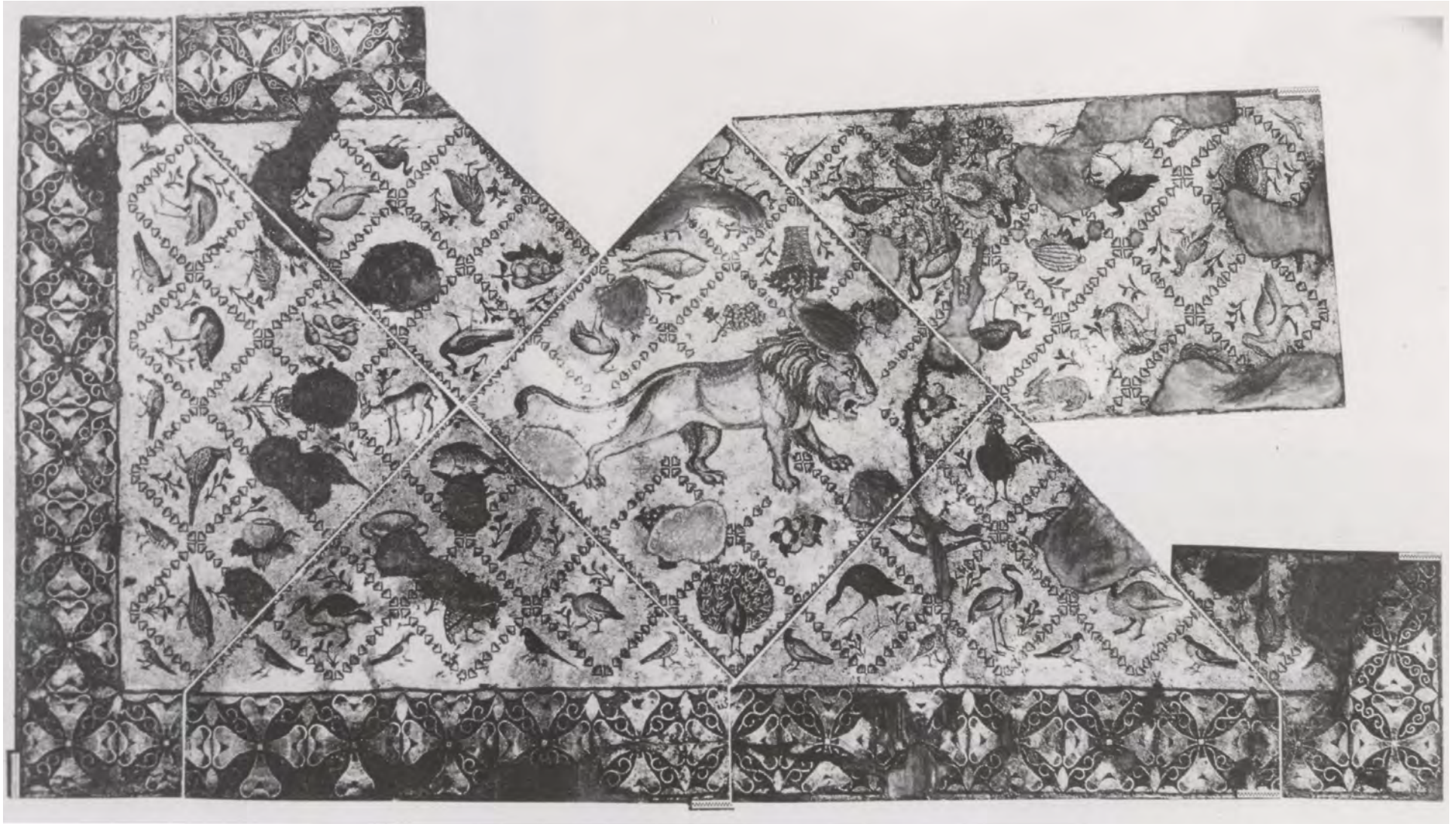
**PRINT THE IMAGE ON PAGE 2 FOR YOUR STUDENTS.**



**BALTIMORE  
MUSEUM OF  
ART BMA**

*The Striding Lion.*

Syria (present-day Turkey). 5th century A.D. Stone and lime mortar. 92 x 90 x 2½ inches. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Antioch Subscription Fund, BMA 1937.139



**BALTIMORE  
MUSEUM OF  
ART BMA**

### Striding Lion Floor, Sections A-G.

Syria (present-day Turkey). 5th century A.D. Stone and lime mortar. Approximately 14 x 28 feet overall. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Antioch Subscription Fund, BMA 1937.136-142