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The Unwelcome Guest: Envy and Shame Materialized in a Roman Villa [preprint]^{*}

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SUMMARY: A third-century C.E. inscribed mosaic from Skala, on the Greek island of Kefallonia, has greatly expanded our knowledge of envy’s evil eye in the Roman Mediterranean. Yet its inscription has not drawn the attention it deserves. Paying heed to the literary, affective, and material dimensions of this and other mosaic texts, I explore how the Skala poem, in tandem with the imagery it accompanies, mediates encounters between guest, host, and house. In so doing, it forms part of a decorative program materializing envy as actor in a drama celebrating a householder’s fortune while exposing the envious to general scorn.

KEYWORDS: Roman villa, Kefallonia, Skala, mosaics, epigraphy, emotion, envy, shame, evil eye, materiality

Visitors entering a third-century villa at Skala, on the Greek island of Kefallonia, will have been greeted by a ghastly image, that of a young man gasping for breath while beasts tear at his flesh. Who is the young man and why is this happening? The accompanying poem tells us that he is *Phthonos*, “Envy,” punished thus for casting his malign gaze upon human prosperity. The image would, then, seem to be apotropaic. Embedded into the very pavement upon which the newly arrived stood, it sought to protect the villa and its owner from the kind of havoc that envy’s evil eye was believed to wreak; such are the findings of a host of studies. Indeed, this mosaic, especially its imagery, has proved central to discussion of the evil eye in the ancient Mediterranean,

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but what about the poem? Past work sheds considerable light on the mosaic's iconography but has yet to probe deeply into its text. As for Envy, the mosaic's protagonist, as a source of harm, he has received ample attention. As a human emotion, he has not.

In what follows, I explore poem and image as coequal partners in a complex but focused endeavor. Working together, they seek to materialize envy as actor in a drama involving the villa, its owner, and visitors, a drama celebrating the villa holder's success while exposing envious visitors to the social as well as physical costs of their envy. I start with an overview of the evidence, its context, and past scholarship. I then turn to less noticed aspects of the Skala *phthonos* inscription and related texts: first, their poetics and rhetoric; then, the Skala poem's treatment of envy not simply as a quasi-magical force but as a complex emotion. One recurrent theme in envy scripts is the shame associated with being envious. I maintain that in the Skala villa's entry hall, text and image script shame into the affective experience of envious visitors. Their shame, once disclosed, casts them as an excluded "other."

Still, the humiliation of having one's envy called out may not have sufficed to deal with *baskania*, envy's evil eye. To deepen our understanding of how the Skala entry hall mosaic sought to counter that threat, I suggest we consider its materiality, how its presence in the villa "mattered" to residents and guests. Viewed through the lens of technical mediation, the artwork reveals the ways in which it intervened visually, physically, and cognitively in the structure's comings and goings, thereby scripting a drama in which a variety of stakeholders—villa owner, artists, visitors, even Envy himself—had a part to play in arousing admiration and in thwarting admiration's toxic side effects.

EVIDENCE, SCHOLARSHIP

On the outskirts of what is today the town of Skala, on the island of Kefallonia, lie the remains of an early third-century seaside residence. Excavated by V. Kallipolitis in 1957,¹ those remains were classified by their excavator as a Roman villa,² a type of “lavish country retreat” that proliferated across the Roman world from late Republican times into late antiquity. Though villas did not always come with extensive agricultural holdings or associated infrastructure, often, they did (Rothe 2018: 44–45), and similar likely held true for the Skala property.³

¹ Kallipolitis plausibly dates the original Roman structure and its mosaics to the age of the Severans, ca. 200 C.E.: 1961/62: 4, 10, 28; cf. Rathmayr and Scheibelreiter-Gail 2019: 186; Dunbabin and Dickie 1983: 28 and n140 (first half of the third century). After destruction by fire (later fourth century) and a period of abandonment, a church was built on the site; there evidently was no continuity between villa and church: Rathmayr and Scheibelreiter-Gail 2019: 186; Kallipolitis 1961/62: 4, 7, 10. To that church likely belonged the apse attached to the east wall of Room III: Rathmayr and Scheibelreiter-Gail 2019: 186; Kallipolitis 1961/62: 7.

² Goodisson 1822: 141–42 refers in passing to the site as a bath with adjoining temple. According to Kallipolitis, the structure was, in its earliest phase, a ρωμαϊκή ἔπαυλις, a “Roman villa” (1961/62 *passim*), though one possibly in possession of heated baths (below, n4). Subsequent scholarship accepts Kallipolitis’ interpretation.

³ *Villae rusticae*: Marzano and Métraux 2018: 11–12. Kallipolitis 1961/62: 30 refers to the Skala structure as a πλουσία ἀγροτική ἔπαυλις, a wealthy *villa rustica*, and comments on the religious-agricultural theme of the Room 2 mosaic. Neira Jiménez, 2014: 78 characterizes the villa as “dedicada a la agricultura.” Rathmayr and Scheibelreiter-Gail 2019: 185 suggest that “the location of the house away from a larger settlement on a plot by the sea” argues for a *villa rustica* dedicated to agriculture and leisure. For possible identification of the original villa owner, below, n20.

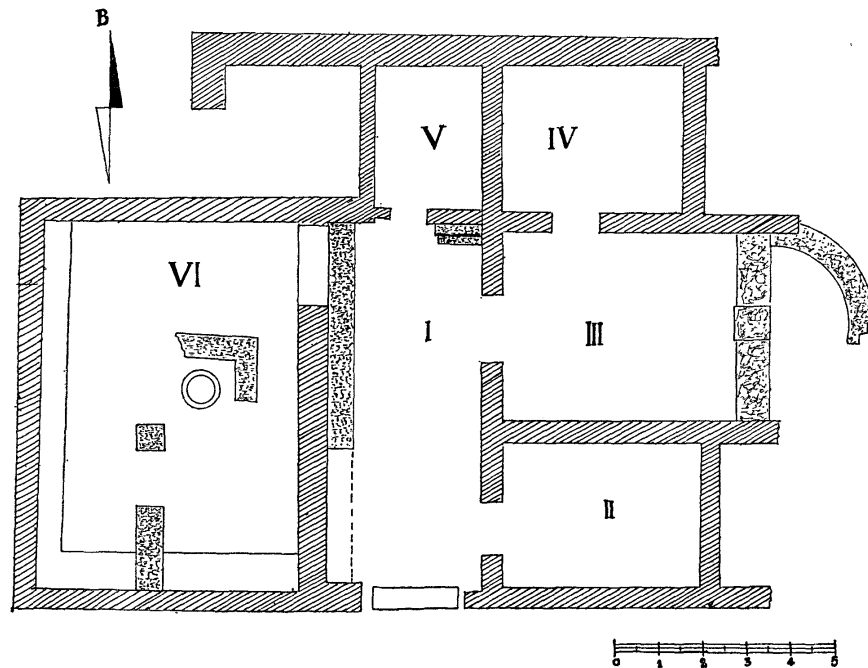


Fig. 1. Skala villa, plan. Kallipolitis 1961/62: 2 (fig. 1).

Though modest by comparison with any number of other, more sumptuous establishments of its type, the villa at Skala clearly would have served as a marker of its owner's prosperity and prestige. Consider its position, layout, and decoration. With a seaside beach some ninety meters from the house, residents and their guests doubtless will have found it a lovely place to be. Excavated remains—an entrance hall, five rooms, a courtyard, floor mosaics—are not extensive. Still, those remains, along with further vestiges of the original structure, help us appreciate that we are dealing with no humble dwelling.⁴ That it was also a site of hospitality and aristocratic display, two of the primary functions of such establishments (cf. Marzano and Métraux

⁴ Not having visited the site, I rely heavily on Kallipolitis 1961/62 and Rathmayr and Scheibelreiter-Gail 2019 for its archaeology. Kallipolitis 1961/62 *passim* identifies Room I as an entry hall (προθάλαμος), entered from the south. The villa structure clearly extended east of the excavated remains: Rathmayr and Scheibelreiter-Gail 2019: 186; Kallipolitis 1961/62: 1. Based on the discovery of a clay disk from a hypocaust support (πήλινος δίσκος ἐκ στυλίσκου

2018: 22–24), seems a reasonable surmise, and is perhaps supported by the layout of the Room II mosaic, which Kallipolitis identifies as a triclinium pavement.⁵

Of the Skala mosaics, by far the best known is the one gracing the villa's south-to-north-running entry hall, Room I in Kallipolitis' plan. Measuring 8.20 by 3.60 meters (Rathmayr and Scheibelreiter-Gail 2019: 187), the corridor, plenty wide for host or servants to greet guests, is paved by three rectangular panels surrounded by a border and arranged lengthwise. Two of those panels, those at either end of the passage, feature geometric patterns. Between them, and just shy of the entrance to Room III, lies a third panel, whose figural and textual decoration boasts a striking image, that of a nude male youth represented frontally. Attacking him from either side are a quartet of fearsome cats, male on our right (leopard, lion) and female on our left (panther, tiger). As blood flows from his side, he holds his hands to his throat, a clear sign that he is choking. Just beneath the image, and forming an integral part of the mosaic's whole, is a trio of elegiac distichs, to which we shall return. For now, suffice it to note two things: first, that this *emblema*, the

ὑποκάστου), Kallipolitis deems it probable (πιθανόν) that the villa included bathing facilities to the east of the excavated remains (1961/62: 1 and n4). Note that Goodisson, whose access preceded later construction disturbing the site, pronounced the structure a bath (above, n2). Evidence of wall painting has been observed only in Room IV (Rathmayr and Scheibelreiter-Gail 2019: 186; Kallipolitis 1961/62: 8). Rooms I–IV show mosaic floor decoration; mosaics in Rooms I–III combine figural and decorative motifs with inscriptions. Room III's text and imagery are nearly entirely illegible; for a tentative reconstruction, Rathmayr and Scheibelreiter-Gail 2019: 194. The Room IV mosaic is non-figural and without inscription. Scholars note similarities between the Skala mosaics and others found at Patras, perhaps home to the workshop whence came the Skala craftsmen (Rathmayr and Scheibelreiter-Gail 2019: 193, 95–96; Papapostolou 2009: 58–59).

⁵ Based on the layout of its mosaic decoration: Kallipolitis 1961/62: 22. According to Rathmayr and Scheibelreiter-Gail 2019: 193, the Room II sacrifice theme may indicate “a function . . . within a domestic cult.” We should also consider the possibility of multifunctional spaces within the villa; cf. Bowes 2010: 40–42.

focal point of the mosaic, is truly exceptional; second, that its poem identifies the pictured youth as *Phthonos*, “Envy.”⁶



Fig. 2. Skala villa, room I mosaic, central panel. Kallipolitis 1961/62: pl. 3.

Having identified the youth as Envy, we can now fit the pavement’s figural and textual decoration into its larger context. Compare the image of an eye under attack (the “all-suffering

⁶ Layout and decoration of the Skala entry-hall mosaic: Rathmayr and Scheibelreiter-Gail 2019: 186–87; Kallipolitis 1961/62: 12–18. For the distinctive character of the central panel, Mañas Romero 2014: 169: “Este mosaic es excepcional, tanto por su iconografía como por su larga y poética inscripción que incluye”; cf. Rathmayr and Scheibelreiter-Gail 2019: 188.

eye”) on an entry-hall mosaic from the “House of the Evil Eye,” just outside Antioch on the Orontes. There, envy’s eye “is pierced by a trident and dagger, and attacked by a scorpion, snake, dog, centipede, small feline, and raven, and by the phallus of a dwarf.”⁷ Note as well the legend, *kai su*, “You, too!” Hovering in the upper left corner of the panel, it recalls the opening of the Skala Room I poem: “O Envy, even yours (καὶ σοῦ), this image of baneful passion. . . .”⁸

What impact has this and related evidence (to which we shall return) had on scholarship? Publishing what would prove the basis for all subsequent work on the Skala mosaics, Kallipolitis showed keen interest in the villa’s entry-hall pavement, whose imagery has, ever since the publication of his 1961 article, loomed large in studies focused on the evil eye in ancient Mediterranean culture. Indeed, the mosaic’s image of *Phthonos*, “Envy,” under attack is central to Dunbabin and Dickie’s now classic study exploring, among other things, how the figure of a beleaguered *Phthonos* “is a recurrent topos in the literary accounts dealing with the theme of *phthonos/invidia*,” and underpins the iconography of a number of objects intended “to protect individuals and houses against the malice and evil eye of *phthonos* (1983: 9).”

As such, the mosaic can be classed with a broad range of items to which Christopher Faraone applies the term “amulet,” by which he means objects endowed with the power to protect or otherwise benefit people and their things (2018: 5, 107–11, 121–24, 128). As for the where and when of this evidence, Dunbabin and Dickie note that apotropaia like the above exhibit characteristics circulating broadly in the Roman Mediterranean. Visual representations of Envy himself seem, however, to have had a particular association with the Roman East (Dunbabin and Dickie

⁷ Dunbabin 1999: 312; Dunbabin and Dickie 1983: 32; Levi 1947: 32–34. The “all suffering eye”: Faraone 2018: 106–12; Hughes 2018; Dasen 2015: 182–83; Elliott 2015: 234–39.

⁸ *kai su* and its variants: Faraone 2018: 122, 343n24; Elliott 2015: 170–74; San Nicolás Pedraz 2014: 158–59; Dunbabin and Dickie 1983: 35–36.

1983: 9 n7, 27–29, 31). None of which is to say that we are dealing with phenomena lacking precedent; indeed, the proliferation and transformation of amulets (in the broader sense) are most likely due to changes in media and presentation, not to foreign influences or fundamental shifts in mindset under the Empire (Faraone 2018). Still, one wonders how these preoccupations, specifically, with envy and its physical toxicity, may have connected with other aspects of Mediterranean culture under Rome.

We shall return to that question; for now, let us consider how such objects work. When turned against the evil eye, they often operate through one or more of the following: humor to disarm the envious gaze; fascination with the grotesque to deflect or distract it; threat, often phallic, to deter it.⁹ More recently, Faraone has identified yet another mechanism at work in amulets, what he terms “persuasive analogy,” whereby “action scenes offer a persuasive visual analogy of triumph over the danger or disease that besets the patient” (Faraone 2018: 106–12). At Skala, the patient is the house and all that pertains to it, while the danger or disease is Envy, whose defeat the Room I mosaic dramatizes in vivid detail, though with a twist: the mosaic’s persuasive analogy highlights Envy as afflicted by his own malaise. Note the acute distress experienced by the figure of the naked youth. With his hands to his throat, he is clearly suffocating. Is he choking himself or merely choking? Whatever the case, we can assume that Envy is, ultimately, the author of his own asphyxiation, indeed, that he chokes on his own envy.¹⁰ Nor do his problems end there. In the inscription’s text we read of the *tēkedōn*, the physical wasting that, we are told, the

⁹ To that list Dasen 2015: 186–87 adds phallic regenerative power and shame. See further Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 681f–82a; Poll. 7.108; Clarke 2007: 64–67; Bartsch 2006: 147–48; Dunbabin and Dickie 1983; Slane and Dickie 1983.

¹⁰ The balance of the evidence favors self-strangulation: Sil. 13.584; Claud. *In Rufinum* 1.32–33; Faraone 2018: 111–12; Dunbabin and Dickie 1983: 12–14.

envious bear as the visible sign—the *deigma*—of their affliction.¹¹ Then there are the beasts portrayed as tearing at Envy’s flesh, a motif recalling images of the “all suffering eye” (above), and one to which we shall return.

That concludes our overview of the evidence and relevant scholarship. This last, though it sheds considerable light on what had been one of the less visited corners of classical antiquity, leaves much unsaid, not least, with regard to the textual component of mosaic apotropaia at Skala and elsewhere.¹²

POETICS, RHETORIC

To deepen our understanding of those texts, I suggest we start with the elegiac distichs embedded into the Room I mosaic, just beneath the scene of Envy under attack¹³:

ὦ Φθόνε, καὶ σο[ῦ] τήνδε ὀλοῆς | φρενὸς εἰκόνα [γ]ράψε hedera

ζωγράφος, ἦν Κράτερος θήκα | το λαϊνέην, hedera

οὐχ ὅτι τειμήεις σύ μετ’ ἀνδρά | σιν, ἀλλ’ ὅτι θνητῶν hedera

ὄλβοις βασκ[α]ίνων σχῆμα τό | δε ἀμφεβ[ά]λουν· hedera

ἔστ[α]θ[ι] δ[ὲ] πάντεσσιν ἐνώπιος, | ἔσταθι τλήμων, hedera

τηκεδόνοσ φθονερῶν δεῖγμα | φέρων στύγιον hedera

¹¹ Wasting, psycho-physiology generally of envy and the evil eye: Ariston 13.3 Wehrli; Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 682f–683b; *De sera* 565c; Alexander of Aphrodisias *Problemata* 2.53; Bartsch 2006: 145–47; Dunbabin and Dickie 1983: 12–18.

¹² Though see Kallipolitis 1961/62: 17, 24 for literary aspects of the Skala texts.

¹³ Greek text as in Rathmayr and Scheibelreiter-Gail 2019: 187. Cf. Dunbabin and Dickie 1983: 8. With them I understand δεῖγμα as “evidence” of a thing (LSJ s.v. 1.a.). Marinatos 1958/9: 359–61 and Kallipolitis 1961/62: 15–17 take δεῖγμα as δῆγμα, “bite.” For φρήν as “passion,” below, n41. See Kallipolitis 1961/62: 17 on literary parallels.

O Envy, even yours, this image of baneful passion that a draftsman has sketched, and Krateros has set in stone, not because men honor you, but because you, who cast your evil eye on mortal bliss, have taken this form on yourself. Come stand before the gaze of all, stand, you wretch, bearing the vile mark of wasting that the envious bear!

Consider the poem's diction. With forms like θήκατο ("set"), λαϊνέην ("in stone"), and τειμήεις (i.e., τιμήεις, "honored," "esteemed"), the epigram deploys the language of poetry generally and that of Homer specifically. That in itself will be unsurprising, as it merely replicates what Peter Bing characterizes as the "formulaic" style of inscribed epigram (2002: 47). Still, our poem, through its stylistic choices, associates the house and its owner with the kind of *paideia*, "learning" or "urbane sophistication," that conferred prestige on aristocrats of the Severan age, the age that gave birth to the house and its mosaics.¹⁴

This is not, however, the only mosaic with images and text to emerge from the Skala site. Of three such assemblages, one other allows us to do more than guess at its visual and verbal content.¹⁵ That other mosaic, located in Room II, just inside and to the right of the entrance, depicts a *trittus*—a "triple" sacrifice (in this case, of a bull, ram, and boar)—about to take place. Like its companion piece, it boasts a verse inscription¹⁶:

Παλλάδι καὶ Μ[οίρησι μά]λ' εὖ | πλοκάμοισι Τύ[χη] τε]

¹⁴ Poetry, *paideia*, inscriptions, prestige: Whitmarsh 2013: 137, 2005; Dickie 2003; Dunbabin 1999: 322.

¹⁵ For the much-damaged mosaic in Room III, above, n4.

¹⁶ Greek text as in Rathmayr and Scheibelreiter-Gail 2019: 189, with the exception of the supplement to line one. With Kallipolitis 1961/62: 23, I read Μ[οίρησι]. Others read Μ[ούσησι]: Rathmayr and Scheibelreiter-Gail 2019: 189; Marinatos 1958/9: 360. Kallipolitis finds either supplement plausible; I find his parallel apt (Δὲ Καπετωλίνῳ καὶ Μοίραις καὶ Τύχῃ καὶ Χάρισιν καὶ Μούσαις καὶ Μνημοσύνῃ κτλ., *BCH* 1888 p. 272 num. 59, from Panamara in Caria). See further, n18. Still, any supplement must be highly conjectural. For the Room II scene as Hellenized *suovetaurilia*, Rathmayr and Scheibelreiter-Gail 2019: 192–93; Kallipolitis 1961/62: 31.

Φοῖβω τε Ἀπόλ[λωνι καὶ] Ἑρ|μῇ Μαιάδος υ[ῖῳ]
 αὐτῷ σὺν βω[μῷ Κρά]τερος | καὶ τοῦδε φίλ[ος παῖς]
 ταῦτόν τε κρει[όν] | τε ἡδὲ φριξ[α]ύχε|να κάπρον |
 λεπτῇσιν [λιθά] | δεσσι συ[να]ρμός|σαντες [ἔθ]ηκαν
 τέχνης δαιδαλέ|ης ἀναθήματα | καὶ μερόπεσσι
 εἰκόνας εὐσεβί|ης ἐσορᾶν ἧς λώ|ϊον οὐδέν hedera

Krateros and his (dear son?) have fashioned a bull, a ram, and a boar with bristling neck, together with an altar, in honor of Pallas and the very fair-tressed Fates and Fortune and Phoebus Apollo and Hermes, son of Maia. They have pieced it all together in delicate stone, as offerings wrought with cunning skill, and as images of piety, than which nothing is better for mortals to gaze upon.

Note the poem's meter (hexameters) and use of epithets,¹⁷ which, along with associated imagery (an altar piled with first fruits, barefoot human figures, sacrificial victims), seem to locate this scene of sacrifice in a quasi-mythic space. If Kallipolitis' supplement to line one is correct (Μ[οίρησι] "Moirai," see n16), then we have before us a striking use of the epithet *euplokamos*, "fair-tressed." The *Moirai* or "Fates," divinities whose remit overlapped with that of goddess Fortune (*Tukhē*, also invoked in the poem), did not simply dole out banes and blessings. Unlike Fortune, they conferred divine sanction on human destiny, whose course they set, so to speak, in stone (cf. Henrichs 2006). Assuming, again, that those are Fates, we note how the poet

¹⁷ Cf. Kallipolitis 1961/62: 24 on epic diction.

innovatively flatters them with the epithet *euplokamos*, “fair-tressed,”¹⁸ presumably, to supplicate or thank them for favorable treatment of the villa’s owner, whose prosperity they secure against Fortune’s whims and, reading this poem in tandem with the entrance hall inscription, Envy’s malice.¹⁹



Fig. 3. Skala villa, Room II mosaic. Kallipolitis 1961/62: pl. 6.

¹⁸ This pairing of epithet and god(s) is, to my knowledge, unparalleled in literature or epigraphy. That of the epithet with Μοῦσα, perhaps less unexpected, also appears rare: schol. vetera in Pind. *Pyth.* 1.12.

¹⁹ Kallipolitis 1961/62: 23 states that the poet employs the epithet “euphemistically” (κατ’ εὐφημισμὸν).

However we supplement the inscription's first line, it is, in any case, highly plausible that each of the gods invoked in the Room II poem is expected to play a role in securing the wellbeing of the house and its residents. But the real point of it all is to shine a light on the attentive performance of ritual and on the artistic representation of same. For we are dealing with an assemblage of images (εἰκόνας) wrought in "delicate stonework" (λεπτῇσιν λιθάδεσσιν), a product of "cunning skill" (τέχνης δαιδαλέης) whose purpose is to depict piety (εὐσεβείης), "than which nothing is better for mortals to gaze upon (μερόπεσσιν . . . ἐσορᾶν)." Whose piety? Here, I defer to Dunbabin, who, in referring to the poem, notes that "praise of this sort is reserved for patrons." For the role of patron, Dunbabin has in mind the named individual, one Krateros. Others disagree,²⁰ but whatever the case, I would suggest that poem and image seek to make a statement about whoever will have commissioned the artwork.²¹ Similar applies to the *phthonos* mosaic, whose inscription decries Envy's malevolent gaze fixed on the success of mortals, including, one assumes, that of the householder. Note, too, how both poems stage-manage the viewer's gaze. Viewers of the piety mosaic are to "admire" the virtue that is its theme (LSJ s.v. εἰσορᾶω 2.). Envy, by contrast, deserves nothing but scornful looks ("stand before the gaze of all, . . . you wretch").

We have explored the poetics of these inscriptions; we turn now to their rhetoric. I would start by suggesting that at Skala, the wedding of images and text serves a fundamentally rhetorical purpose. Simonides, Plutarch tells us, described "painting as silent poetry, and poetry as painting that speaks." Expanding upon Simonides' dictum, Plutarch adds that the aim of both

²⁰ Krateros as patron: Dunbabin 1999: 324; cf. Rathmayr and Scheibelreiter-Gail 2019: 184, who identify Krateros as "Lucius Pompeius Krateros Cassianus, . . . known from inscriptions found in Olympia." Krateros and [?] as mosaicists: Neira Jiménez 2014: 79–80 (though she prefers Krateros as householder); Kallipolitis 1961/62: 16 (ἀναμφιβόλως).

²¹ Cf. Dunbabin 1999: 317–26 on domestic mosaic decoration as prestige-enhancing.

painting and historical narration is *enargeia*, “vivid description” (*De glor. Ath.* 346f–347c). According to Quintilian, this quality, which he calls *evidentia*, lends persuasive power to narrative. For it makes audiences feel as if they are witnesses to truth. According to the author of the *De elocutione*, this vividness comes from attention to detail.²²

Note, then, how the two Skala poems, pointing out details as to scene and execution, add a dash of *enargeia* to their descriptions of the images they accompany. As such, they recall certain “declamatory” epigrams in the *Greek Anthology*, not to mention the miniature “word paintings” in Lucian’s *De domo*.²³ To that ecphrastic element our *phthonos* poem adds a heavy dose of *psogos*, “blame.” For it explicitly seeks not to honor its addressee but to pour scorn on him. Compare its closing two lines with an epigram from the *Greek Anthology*. This last bids its addressee, a spear, to “stand there . . . proclaim the bravery of Cretan Echekratidas.”²⁴ In similar yet reverse fashion, the *phthonos* poem at Skala, likewise bidding its addressee to “stand there,” seeks to amplify the visual impact of torments and humiliations to which viewers-readers are to bear witness.

How to understand our Skala texts in relation to the larger corpus of Greek poetic inscriptions likewise embedded into pavements that they both praise and protect? We cannot, to be sure, confidently speak of an unbroken tradition linking the Skala texts to later examples, separated, as they are, by more than a century.²⁵ On the other hand, if we include mosaics with inscriptions in Latin in our corpus, pavements dating to the earlier and later fourth century, we begin to detect

²² Quint. *Inst.* 4.2.64–65, 6.2.32; Demetr. *Eloc.* 209; Ginzburg 1988: 6–11.

²³ Cf. thumbnail ekphrases in Luc. *Dom.*, described there as ἡ γραφή τῶν λόγων, “word painting” (21); also, ecphrastic epigrams in *Anth. Pal.*, for which, Squire 2011.

²⁴ ἔσταθι . . . ἄγγελλ’ ἀνορέαν Κρητὸς Ἐχεκρατίδα, *Anth. Pal.* 6.123.

²⁵ The Skala villa remained in use well into the fourth century; the next such example of apotropaic mosaic text in Greek is the one from Anemurium; see below.

broader patterns. Kim Bowes, noting that “the traditional locus of elite competition and distinction in the Roman world was the home,” describes *domus* and villas as “machines for competition,” “physical sites of social rivalry” (2010: 89, 95–98). She is referring to late-antique domestic architecture, but her larger project is to challenge the notion of a public/private divide, and with that, a “sharply periodized view” of domestic architecture, third through sixth centuries C.E.²⁶

With those broader continuities in mind, consider a pavement, probably fifth- or sixth-century C.E., from Sheikh Zuweid in the eastern Sinai. Combining images and text, its textual component seeks to make a direct connection with viewers²⁷:

ΝΑΟΙΣ Νέστορα τὸν φιλόκαλον κτίστην.

[Figural panel: Phaedra, Hippolytus, et al., with captions]

δεῦρ' ἰδὲ τὰς χάριτας χαίρων, φίλε, ἄστινας ἡμῖν
τέχνη ταῖς ψήφοις ἔμβαλε πηξαμένη,
τὸν φθόνον ἐκ μέσσου καὶ ὄμματα βασκανίης
τῆς ἰλαρῆς τέχνης πολλάκις εὐξάμενος.

[Figural panel: Dionysian procession, with captions]

εἴ με φιλεῖς, ὦνθρωπε, χαίρων ἐπίβαινε μελάθρων
ψυχὴν τερπόμενος τεχνήμασιν, οἷσιν ποθ' ἡμῖν
πέπλον ἱμερόεντα Χαρίτων ἡ Κύπρις ὕφανεν,
λεπταλέῃ ψηφίδι χάριν δ' ἐνεθήκατο πολλήν.

²⁶ Public/private: Bowes 2010: 89, 46–52. Periodization: back cover *et passim*.

²⁷ Text as in Bernand 1969: 483–88, no. 122. Cf. Olszewski 2013: 2–7; Dickie 2003: 239; Dunbabin 1999: 324 and n35; Clédat 1915: 22–28. Dunbabin dates the mosaic to the fifth or sixth century C.E.; Bernand 1969: 484 and n1, to the fourth century C.E..

May you praise (?)²⁸ Nestor, the sponsor and a lover of beauty!

Friend, look this way, rejoicing in these joyful things. For art has laid them in for us, fixing them in place with mosaic stonework. Do so praying often that envy (*ton phthonon*) and eyes jealous of joyous art (*ommata baskaniēs tēs hilarēs tekhnēs*) be gone!

You there, if you love me, tread upon these premises gladly, rejoicing in your soul at the artistry that Cypris once deployed in weaving for us her lovely robe of the Muses. For he (Nestor?) has wrought great delight in delicate stonework.²⁹

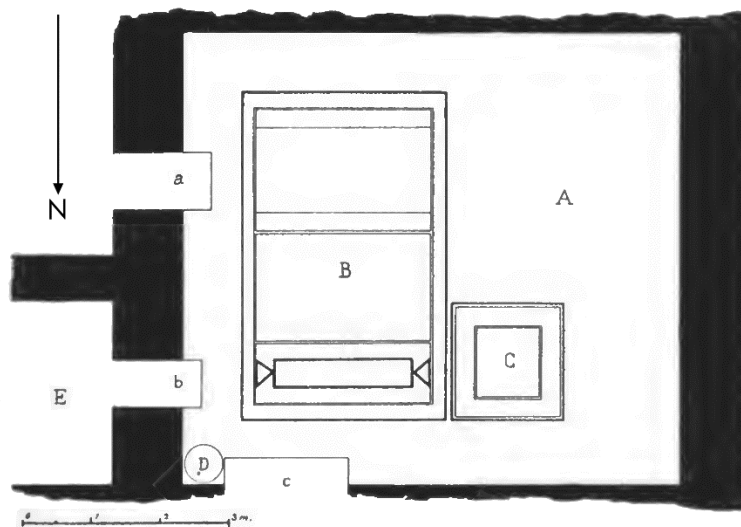


Fig. 4. Sheikh Zuweid, plan of room with Nestor mosaic. Clédat 1915: 23 fig. 4.

²⁸ ΝΑΟΙΣ has caused scholars much headache. I very tentatively understand it as a misspelling of optative αἰνοῖς, “may you praise.” Other conjectures in Bernand 1969: 484, 86–87.

²⁹ The first poem presents us with elegiacs; the second, with somewhat irregular hexameters. Both employ epic-Ionic diction. Scholars differ on how to parse the syntax of the second (contrast Bernand 1969: 484 with Olszewski 2013: 3). My translation more or less follows the contours of Bernand’s.

The assemblage in question is arranged in panels that originally extended southward from the room's northeast entrance.³⁰ Its "top" register, the one most distant from the door, sets the tone, proclaiming the mosaic's sponsor, one Nestor, a *philokalos*, a "lover of beauty." Bearing witness to Nestor's good taste are the mosaic's figural panels, to whose beauty the longer texts make reference. As at Skala, so here, the mosaic's poetic content seeks to stage-manage the viewer's gaze, highlighting not simply the mosaic's artistry but, in effect, the patron's *paideia*, his learning, or at least his appreciation of same. Like the Skala entry-hall inscription, both of the Sheikh Zuweid poems seek to enlist the viewer's help in banishing envy's evil eye. The first does so explicitly, enjoining the viewer to delight in the mosaic while "praying often that envy and eyes jealous of joyous art be gone!"; the second, implicitly, declaring, ". . . if you love me, tread upon these premises gladly (*khairōn*),"³¹ which is to say, not resentfully or enviously.

³⁰ Olszewski 2013: 3 identifies the room as a triclinium in a private residence. Clédat 1915: 24, uncertain about the room's function, identifies its context as a fortress (possibly a temple within that fortress) and notes that the entire floor was paved in mosaic. Figural-textual decoration (B in Clédat's plan) covered much of the eastern half. The rest of the floor was geometric (C) or plain (A). B currently resides in the Ismailia Monuments Museum in Egypt.

³¹ Most scholars take ἐπιβαίνει in the sense simply of "enter," which is perfectly plausible for later Greek. Still, in context and with the viewer-reader's focus trained on the mosaic on which they are about to tread, the more usual sense of ἐπιβαίνω as "set foot on, tread, walk upon" (LSJ s.v. A.I.1.) becomes operative.

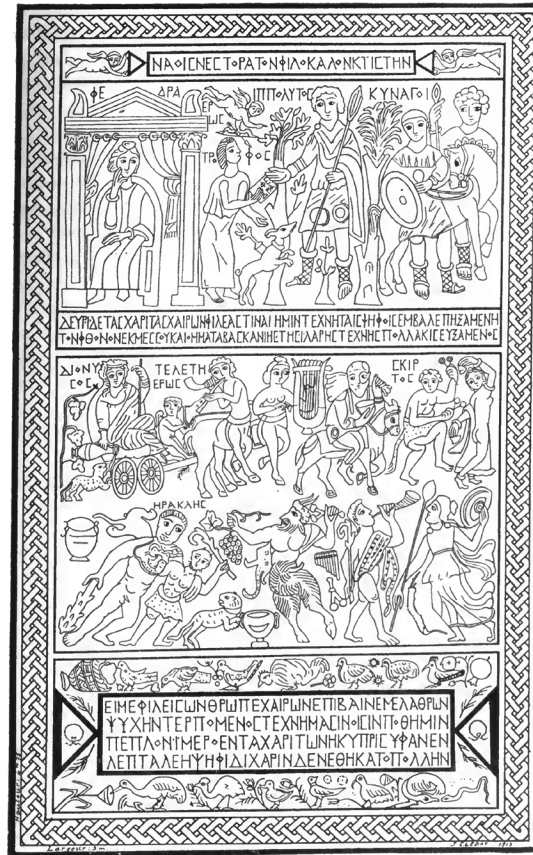


Fig. 5. Sheikh Zuweid, Nestor mosaic. Clédat 1915: 25 fig. 5.

The overall tenor of the two poems is, then, less apotropaic than supplicatory, but what about the pavement's imagery? Marek Olszewski plausibly argues that the panel depicting the myth of Phaedra illustrates the very thing deprecated in the inscription just below it. Thus Phaedra, vengefully destructive when denied the object of her desire, serves as deterrent to those who would cast an envious eye on the splendid pavement.³² As for the panel representing a Dionysian procession, the pavement captions it as a *teletē*, a religious initiation, lending an air of exclusivity to revels one presumes were held in the room.³³ Compare the image to the hexameters just below

³² Olszewski 2013: 9–10.

³³ Dionysian motifs, evocation of mystery cult, late Roman dining rooms: Parrish 1995.

it. There, the poet recalls the “lovely” garment (*peplos*) of the Muses, woven for “us” by Cypris (Aphrodite), a weaving whose artistry this mosaic is said to replicate. Bernand (1969: 488) rightly sees there an allusion, but to what? Whatever its source,³⁴ the allusion has the effect of highlighting a privileged “us” (ἡμῖν) as appreciative of Aphrodite’s gifts, of Nestor’s good taste, and, not least, of the poem’s learned if somewhat mysterious allusiveness. Note as well the hope that appreciation of the mosaic be predicated on *philein*, “love” (εἰ με φιλεῖς, . . . χαίρων ἐπίβαινε μελάθρων, “. . . if you love me, tread upon these premises gladly”). Unmentioned there, but implied, are those whose envy relegates them to the status of an unappreciative “them.”

We can, then, view the mosaic’s threshold decoration as broadly apotropaic in intent, and its textual component as rhetorical in both intent (encomium of patron and artwork, *captatio benevolentiae* of viewers) and approach (description of the stonework, evocation of mythological comparanda). As such, it shows affinities with the Skala mosaics, but also with a late fifth-century C.E. mosaic inscription from the changing room of a small bath complex in Anemurium, in Asia Minor.³⁵ Located just beyond the midpoint of the room’s pavement, “its four lines of legend [were] arranged to confront the visitor as he entered the dressing-room from the west.”³⁶ Highlighting the *kharis*, the “delight” or “charm” inhering in the building, along with the patron’s sponsorship and general worthiness, and bidding “Envy steer clear of the excellence of the stonework” (Φθόνος τ’ ἀπέστω τῆς ἀρετῆς τῆς ψη[φί]δος), this poem, like those from Skala and

³⁴ Possible resonances include *Il.* 5.338 (so Bernand 1969: 488); 14.214–217 (*kestos himas*); Sappho fr. 1.2 (“wile-weaving” Aphrodite); Diod. Sic. 4.66.3; Ach. Tat. 2.11.4. Bernand 1969: 488 suggestively notes that sculptures likely representing Aphrodite were found not far from the mosaic; cf. Clédat 1915: 28–29 and plates VI–VII, VIII3.

³⁵ Russell 1987: no. 7, 39–49. The text consists of four of trimeters.

³⁶ Russell 1987: 39. *Comparanda*, Russell 1987: 43, 46–47.

Sheikh Zuweid, seeks to dispose readers favorably to the structure and its sponsor, and to intervene in the well-being of the structure and in the subjective experience of visitors.

We shall come back to this last topic, that of intervention, but not before considering one other mosaic inscription that, for sheer swagger, stands apart. I am referring to a pair of Latin elegiacs with closing tag, from Aïn Témouchent, in northwestern Algeria³⁷:

invida sidereo rumpantur pectora visu
cedat et in nostris lingua proterva locis
hoc studio superamus avos gratumque renidet
aedibus in nostris summus apex operis. Feliciter.

Let envious breasts be made to burst by his (Ocean's) divine gaze, and let the impudent tongue give way in this, our place. Through these exertions we outdo our forefathers, and pleasing is the thing—a masterpiece!—that lies resplendent in our house. May it turn out happily!

Combining praise of the mosaic's artistry with abjurations against envious breasts and shameless tongues, the mosaic's textual component accompanies figural decoration featuring an enormous head of Ocean "with huge, staring eyes."³⁸ These last are, one gathers, meant to overpower the envious eye with their own, piercing stare: "Let envious breasts be made to burst by his divine gaze." Still, is that declaration purely apotropaic? Dunbabin, preferring an active translation for *visu* (i.e., Ocean's own gaze, not his being gazed upon), would seem to privilege such a

³⁷ Late fourth-century or later: Dunbabin and Dickie 1983: 13; Dunbabin 1978: 151–52, Plate 43. Cf. the inscribed mosaic, early fourth-century, from Al Huwariyah, below, n60.

³⁸ Dunbabin 1978: 151. Dunbabin comments that the "enormous head of Ocean" will have dominated the space like a "Byzantine pantokrator" (151–152).

reading, though she acknowledges that *sidereo . . . visu* could be “deliberately ambiguous,” that is, it could also refer to a divinely beautiful sight as trigger for envious breasts to burst.³⁹ Whatever the case, one wonders what arouses envy in the first place. It is, of course, the visual beauty of the object and the credit it brings to whoever commissioned it. Envy thus can be viewed as an index of this object’s excellence. Add to that the poem’s evocation of *aemulatio*, “emulousness” or “competitive spirit” (“through these exertions we outdo our forefathers”),⁴⁰ and it becomes difficult if not impossible to disentangle the artwork’s apotropaic aspects from its overall bid for glory.

To sum up so far, the Skala *phthonos* inscription, considered together with its companion piece in Room II, does more than caption the imagery it accompanies. A finely wrought artifact in its own right, it features poetic and rhetorical touches calculated to enhance the villa owner’s prestige, to impress and flatter the mosaic’s audience, and to pour scorn on Envy and the envious. Should we, though, regard those as discrete elements in the villa’s overall decorative scheme? Other evidence suggests not. Take, for example, the Phaedra panel from Sheikh Zuweid and the elegiacs just beneath it. The poem bids us enjoy the image and pray that envy’s evil eye leave the artwork alone. But embedded within the panel’s imagery lies a thinly veiled threat to those who envy, that “this” could be “you.” As for the Latin verses from Aïn Témouchent, they proudly call attention to figural decoration whose excellence resides in its power both to please and, just as important, to defeat the very thing that one’s pleasure in the object arouses, namely, envy.

³⁹ *visu*, Dunbabin 1978: 152. Envy and bursting, Dunbabin and Dickie 1983: 12–13.

⁴⁰ Cf. Sthenelus’s boast, *Il.* 4.405–6. For emulousness (Latin *aemulatio*, Greek *zēlos*), Dickie 2003.

I maintain that we see a similar complementarity, even synergy, between aesthetic and apotropaic functions in the Skala entry-hall mosaic, whose image, visual and verbal, of Envy is beautiful and appalling, attractive and repulsive, all at once. Still, if we focus solely on aesthetic, literary, and apotropaic aspects, then we ignore a key element of this and similar artifacts. For *phthonos*, “envy,” is, if nothing else, an emotion.

EMOTION

We begin by noting how, already in its first line, the Skala entry-hall poem highlights *phthonos* as an emotion, indeed, as a “baneful” emotion: “O Envy, even yours, this image of baneful passion (ὄλοῦς φρενός).”⁴¹ That *phthonos* is an emotion is obvious; the question is, how to approach it as such at Skala and elsewhere. To be sure, *phthonos* as emotion has not gone unnoticed for our mosaic, but where it is noticed, scholars tend to focus on it as a kind of self-debilitating malice, harmful to the emoting subject as well as to external targets.⁴² Unexplored is the role of envy and affect generally as factors mediating a visitor/viewer’s experience of the thing or place visited or viewed.

Phthonos, what is it? For our purposes, we can define it as a kind of pain resulting from rivalry, real or perceived, and affecting both body and soul, a pain triggered by the thought or knowledge of another’s pleasure, luck, success, happiness, anything good that, because someone else has it, triggers resentment in oneself.⁴³ Aristotle limits *phthonos* to resentment felt toward

⁴¹ Cf. φρήν in the sense of “heart, as seat of the passions”: LSJ s.v. I.2.

⁴² See especially Dunbabin and Dickie 1983: 10–19.

⁴³ λύπη μὲν γὰρ ταραχώδης, a “pain causing disturbance” Arist. *Rh.* 1386b18; cf. 1387b23. Envy as one of the “rivalrous emotions”: Konstan and Rutter 2003. In Hellenistic and later Greek, *baskania*, the evil eye’s “malign influence” (LSJ s.v. βασκανία 1.), often served as a synonym for *phthonos*.

equals (*Rh.* 1386b18–20; 1387b22–28), and although that is not how *phthonos* always works in the evidence,⁴⁴ it hints at something elemental about the emotion: a diminished sense of self at the thought of another’s good fortune.⁴⁵ It matters for us that *phthonos* was viewed as fundamentally antisocial, a bane to friendships, households, even cities.⁴⁶ Yet there was as well something banal about it. In several of our sources, it is normal for envy (*phthonos*, *baskania*) to target neighbors, siblings, and friends.⁴⁷ I would argue that the Skala mosaic not only concretizes this sense of envy as routinely targeting the well-off and nearby, it also brings that sense of things into contact with the villa’s comings and goings.

How would it have done so? Through what I shall term scripted intervention in a visitor’s emotions. What are emotion scripts? They are, writes Robert Kaster, “the narratives that we enact when we experience any emotion,” the cognitive playbook, one might say, for how emotion happens.⁴⁸ They are not the determinants of emotion. Rather, they are a way to tie together various strands—situational, psychological, cultural, social—into a network of relationships giving complex form to how a given emotion event is lived, understood, and communicated. Seeking to tie those strands together for our Skala mosaic, I start with Kaster’s base-level envy script, which runs more or less as follows: “Upon contemplating your good, I feel distress, not with reference to a principle of ‘right’ (i.e., I am not concerned that you do not deserve this good), but simply

⁴⁴ *Phthonos* toward those higher on a given scale: Eur. *Supp.* 240–241; Isoc. *Antid.* 142; König 2011: 287–88. The reverse: Aesch. *Pers.* 362; Hdt. 1.32.1; Plut. *Comparatio Lysandri et Sullae* 2.3–4.

⁴⁵ The envious seek to curtail as much of another’s glory and brilliance as casts a shadow on themselves: Plut. *De invidia et odio* 538e.

⁴⁶ Plut. *De capienda ex inimicis utilitate* 91e (diverting contentiousness, envy, jealousy to enemies, thereby sparing friends); *De frat. amor.* 484c; *An seni* 788e–f.

⁴⁷ Aesch. *Ag.* 831–832; Xen. *Mem.* 3.9.8; Plut. *De invidia et odio* 538e; Alciphron 1.18; Lib. *Declamationes* 30; Basil. *De invidia* 31.373.27–31.

⁴⁸ Kaster 2005: 85; cf. Sanders 2014 *passim*.

because it is a good.”⁴⁹ Applying that to the Skala mosaic, “you” are the villa owner, and “I” am either Envy himself or an envious visitor to the house.

We can fill in further detail by considering how another script, one concerned with the kindred emotion *nemesis*, “righteous indignation,” plays out in a context similar to what concerns us here, namely, that of a guest’s reaction to his host’s house, to the amenities therein, and to the host himself. Thus Galen tells of how Diogenes, evidently, the Cynic philosopher from Sinope, once was visiting the house of a wealthy man. Feeling the need to spit, Diogenes spat on none other than his host. Why did he? According to Galen, it was because the philosopher (*Adhortatio ad artes addiscendas* 51–57),

could find nothing as derelict in the house as its owner. For the walls had been adorned with remarkable paintings, and the floor laid in costly mosaics, wondrously (<θ>αυμαστῶς) imprinted with images of the gods. . . . From what he could see, only his host had been overlooked, and it was normal, he said, to spit on whatever least deserved honor in one’s surroundings.

I would draw attention to how Diogenes’ richly symbolic act expresses not simply contempt but indignation, *nemesis*, envy’s righteous twin.⁵⁰ In Galen’s telling, Diogenes does not use the word, but the judgmental tenor of his explanation leaves little doubt.⁵¹ Galen’s larger point—the value of education—does not concern us. What does is the script, the situational framing of the visit as an emotion event: a guest, in this case, Diogenes, arrives and, faced with

⁴⁹ A close paraphrase of Kaster 2005: 86. Kaster refers to the *phthonos* script for (Latin) *invidia*, though that is as well one for (Greek) *phthonos*.

⁵⁰ *Nemesis* splits off from *phthonos* insofar as it self-righteously resents the undeserved possession or enjoyment of a good: Kaster 2003: 258.

⁵¹ In the anecdote, Diogenes does not resent his host’s material possessions *per se*; he resents the fact that his host cares more about them than about his own betterment.

the splendor of his host's abode, feels *thauma*, admiration or wonder (mosaics “wondrously”—<θ>αυμαστῶς—fashioned). The next step in the script could have been envy, a recognized side-effect of admiration,⁵² though in Diogenes' case, and to his host's surprise, indignation, *nemesis*, takes its place.

We note again that this scriptedness is not itself a determinant of emotion, but a way for students of emotion to grasp and synthesize the various factors contributing to a given emotion event, factors that include the interventions of stakeholders in the affective experience of visitors/viewers. Take, for example, the mosaic from Sheikh Zuweid. Its inscription does not simply script love and joy in, and envy out, of a reader/viewer's experience. Entreating visitors to pray that envy's evil eye steer clear, the mosaic seeks to intervene in their emotional response to the artwork, to connect them emotionally to its wellbeing.

Returning now to the Skala *phthonos* mosaic, our account of it would not be complete without consideration of an additional emotion embedded into its stonework, one that can, at times, figure into envy scripts: shame. “Envy,” writes Sanders, “. . . is deemed both morally wrong and socially disruptive. . .”; thus “ ‘it is the only emotion we do not want to admit to others or to ourselves.’ ”⁵³ Or as Plutarch puts it, *phthonos* and the kindred passion of *zēlotupia* (“jealousy”) are “indeed shameful illnesses (*aiskhista nosēmata*), banes not just for households but for cities” (*De frat. amor.* 484c).

It will help to narrow down what *aiskhunē*, “shame,” was for Greek speakers in the ancient Mediterranean. Aristotle offers the following: “Let us understand shame to be a certain kind of pain or disturbance relating to those misdeeds, past, present, or future, that seem to bring

⁵² Envy as (explicitly or implicitly) concomitant to admiration: Aesch. *Ag.* 832–833; Pind. *Nem.* 4.39–41; Aristaenetus 1.1.51–55; Cairns 2011: ¶ 5.

⁵³ Sanders 2014: 17, quoting Elster 1999: 164.

disgrace” (Arist. *Rh.* 1383b12–14). Important is the fact that shame leaves an impression or appearance, a *phantasia*, stemming from disgrace (*Rh.* 1384a22). Thus, we feel ashamed when others see our disgrace (1385a8–10).

Or, for that matter, when they detect our envy, as when Basil of Caesarea describes how those in envy’s grip, when asked what is wrong with them, blush to tell the truth: that they are envious, bitter, and put out by others’ good fortune.⁵⁴ Similar applies to the Skala Room I mosaic, where text and image leverage shame (a) to alert visitors to the inappropriateness of envy, and (b) to script social exclusion into the affective experience of visitors, should they envy. Thus, the poem, even as it highlights envy as emotion, pointedly states that the mosaic exists *not* “because you are honored among men.” Rather, its purpose is to disclose to the world the spectacle that Envy and, by extension, the envious make of themselves, and in the process, humiliate them: “Come stand before the gaze of all, stand, you wretch, bearing the vile mark of wasting that the envious bear!” “Wasting” (τηκεδών) here stands for the physical torments depicted in the image, but it also expresses the mortification associated with the disclosure of what the envious so desperately want to hide.

For further insight, we can consider similarities between our mosaic’s figural decoration and that of other pavements, ones depicting criminals thrown to the beasts. As Shelby Brown writes, criminals so punished

were, at least in theory, outcasts from Roman society, or people who not only had never belonged to it but actively opposed it . . . Their deaths were public executions,

⁵⁴ Basil. *Homilia de invidia* 31.373.26–34. Blushing as outward sign of shame: Aeschines *In tim.* 105; Arist. *Cat.* 9b13; *Eth. Nic.* 1128b13; Adamantius *Physiognomica* 2.35; Sassi 2001: 52n55. Reluctance to reveal one’s envy: Plut. *De invidia et odio* 537e.

occasions . . . for a public to witness, and by its approval to justify and participate in, the annihilation of opponents of the ruling powers and of the social good.⁵⁵

Depiction of *damnati ad bestias*, prisoners exposed to ravenous beasts in the arena, forms part of the decorative program of floors at El Djem (Tunisia) and Zliten (Libya), and similarities to the scene represented on our floor—the ferocity of man-eating felines leaping upon passively immobile victims, blood streaming from the latter—bear noting.⁵⁶ But so do dissimilarities. According to Brown, the “patterned repetition” of such motifs on North African mosaics “tends to diminish” their impact (1992: 195). That offers a contrast to the Skala entry-hall pavement, which features but one figured scene: Envy’s turn with the big cats.⁵⁷ In any case, the Skala mosaic, like mosaics from Zliten and El Djem, evokes *damnatio ad bestias* by treating Envy as outcast, his torments as a kind of social if not physical death,⁵⁸ and the entire scene as spectacle, an occasion for the householder to impress admirers and intimidate the spiteful. Given the epideictic character, the “show” dimension, of the villa’s mosaics, whoever commissioned them, most likely, one Krateros, must ultimately be the protagonist of the drama scripted therein: his is the piety extolled in Room II; his is the victory over envy in the vestibule. Envy, then, despite whatever threat he/it posed, will have been accessory to the householder’s prestige.

Or to quote Herodotus, “Better to be envied than pitied.”⁵⁹ Which is not to say that envy was, in and of itself, desirable. Rather, it posed a challenge. Consider an inscription, in Latin and

⁵⁵ Brown 1992: 185. I thank Amy Richlin for pointing out the connection and for the reference.

⁵⁶ Rathmayr and Scheibelreiter-Gail 2019: 184, 88; Dunbabin and Dickie 1983: 34–35.

⁵⁷ *Damnatio ad bestias* on mosaics at Zliten and El Djem: Brown 1992: 194–97; Dunbabin 1978: 66–67.

⁵⁸ Notes Faraone, *probaskania*, countermeasures to the evil eye, repel but do not destroy it. As in the case of illness, its threat can be contained but never fully eliminated: 2018: 108.

⁵⁹ φθονέεσθαι κρέσσον ἐστὶ ἢ οἰκτίρεσθαι, Hdt. 3.52.5; cf. Pind. *Pyth.* 1.85.

on mosaic, from Al Huwariyah, in Tunisia, one that revels in having defeated the envy of naysayers doubting that the surrounding structure could ever be built.⁶⁰ As Theon Rhetor puts it, “Fine actions are . . . those that earn the living praise and overcome the envy of the many” (110.10–14). Fine also, and for much the same reason, is the artwork adorning the Skala villa.

MATERIALITY, MEDIATION

We have seen how, in the Skala villa’s entry hall, poem and image script envy, and the shame that goes with it, into the cognitive “radar” of visitors to the house. By exposing envy’s torments to the world, whoever commissioned the mosaic stages a defeat enhancing the sponsor’s prestige. Yet in so doing, the sponsor plays a dangerous game. Envy was, for that time and place, a redoubtable foe, capable of much harm to persons and things. Why, then, activate so hazardous a passion in the first place? Yet on reflection, envy’s presence is a foregone conclusion. The villa is a display piece; as such, it beckons admiration. And, as we have seen, anything admired is liable to be envied. Still, if envy, however unwelcome a presence, is present all the same, what to do about it?

For the Skala villa, part of the answer lies in the *phthonos* mosaic’s amuletic role, the protection it affords through physical contact with the villa’s structure.⁶¹ Another part has to do with a visitor’s engagement with the pavement on a visual, tactile, and cognitive level. Recent scholarship on ancient Mediterranean floor mosaic, emphasizing the horizontality and dynamism

⁶⁰ *invidē, livide, titula tanta que(m) adseverabas fieri non posse perfecte sunt dd. nn. ss. minime ne contemnas*. “Evil-eyed, envious person, so great a house, one that you asserted could not be made, has been completed for our masters. By no means disrespect it.” Probably first half of the fourth century. Dunbabin 1978: 152. For translation, cf. Mañas Romero 2014: 172.

⁶¹ Cf. Dasen 2015: 185 on amulets as things “that you have ‘on you,’ ” thereby transmitting “the properties of the charm to its wearer.”

of the viewing experience, explores how a viewer encountering such a mosaic *in situ* would have been “moved to become actively engaged in the narrative unfolding underfoot.” Rebecca Molholt calls that “phenomenological vision,” a “ ‘lived perspective of the visible world in relation to our living body.’ ”⁶² Consider a visitor’s initial encounter with the Room I mosaic and its setting: a hallway stretching before her, one paved in richly adorned stonework and featuring a curiously wrought scene at its center. Drawn forward to get a closer look, our visitor will have had first to process the mosaic’s fearsome *emblema*, then tread on it, to venture deeper into the house. Yet even if Room II, on the near side of the central panel, were as far as she got,⁶³ still, just to stand at the southern end of the hall, viewing the decorative patterns laid into its pavement, not to mention its central panel, from an oblique angle—all that will have heightened the drama of the moment.⁶⁴

But we need as well to reflect on our visitor’s experience of the pavement as a “tangible surface” (Molholt 2011: 287), one creating a sense of connection to the *emblema* and all that lay beyond. It will help to recall what the Room I poem says about the artwork’s central scene. Sketched by a draughtsman, it has been set in stone—why? Not to honor Envy, but to disclose to the world Envy’s “loathsome mark.” This is, in other words, an image whose physical embodiment matters, both in terms of its material composition (as stonework) and in terms of its agency, what it sets out to do.

⁶² Molholt 2011: 288, quoting Merleau-Ponty in Johnson and Smith 1993: 8. Cf. Franks 2018: 3–4.

⁶³ I.e., in the event that visitors had been invited to a festivity held in Room II, though without a tour of the villa’s interior space. I thank reader A for pointing this out.

⁶⁴ Decorative patterns (guilloches and three-dimensional cubes): above, Fig. 2. Cf. Molholt 2011: 292 on the drama of viewing a simple repeating pattern from an oblique angle.

To put that into sharper focus, I suggest we view the object's materiality, how the object "mattered" in the life of the villa,⁶⁵ through the lens of technical mediation. What is technical mediation? Peter-Paul Verbeek defines it as "the roles technologies play in human existence" (Verbeek 2016), specifically, with regard to the ways in which human beings interact with their environment. Those encounters are never direct; they are always mediated, often, through devices that people use to achieve some end. But our tools, our technologies, are not passive or inert. They are "[mediators] that actively [contribute] to the way in which the end is realized" (Verbeek 2005: 155).

How do we as scholars frame in words the mediation that objects perform? According to Bruno Latour, through scripts: "Each artifact has its script, its 'affordance,' its potential to take hold of passersby and force them to play roles in its story" (1994: 31). Latour illustrates with the example of a speed bump. Linking the activity of decision makers with those of engineers, road workers, motorists, vehicles, and pedestrians, speed bumps translate what is for drivers a more abstract goal, that of pedestrian safety, to a more immediate one, that of slowing down so as to avoid an unpleasant and potentially damaging jolt. And that, in sum, is the script that engineers have "inscribed," as Latour puts it, on this object, this speed bump, that they have designed (Verbeek 2005: 159–60; Latour 1994: 38–40).

Returning now to the Skala villa, just as speed bumps mediate between creators, users, and potential victims of technology, so will the *phthonos* mosaic at Skala have mediated between a variety of stakeholders: artists, poet, patron, visitors, house, even Envy himself. The mosaic's strategic placement in the villa's entry hall is significant: about half-way down the eight-meter-

⁶⁵ "Materiality" in the sense not simply of "material existence; solidity" (*OED* s.v. 2.a.) but of how things "matter," cognitively and socially, how they participate in human life. Cf. Law 2010: 173.

long corridor. Conspicuous amid the non-figural decoration of the rest of the pavement, it will have served as a kind of checkpoint for visitors, even those admitted no further than Room II. Here, physical contact with the pavement matters. Compare the mosaic inscription from Sheikh Zuweid. Seeking to ward off envy and the evil eye, it bids, “. . . if you love me, tread upon these premises gladly, rejoicing in your soul at the artistry that Cypris once deployed. . . .” In the Skala Room I, visitors to the house, through visual and physical contact with what lay underfoot, will have similarly found themselves drawn into its script and held there, arguably, for at least as long as they remained on site. Implicating viewers in a dangerous game, the artwork in effect bids them to tread gladly, yet warns them to beware lest they, by envying, share in the agonies afflicting the tormented youth. Who is that youth? He is, of course, *Phthonos*, “Envy,” but he is also “us,” should we, on entering the house, gaze spitefully at its splendor. We visitors are, then, actors and audience in a drama where we, witnesses to Envy’s suffering, are ourselves at risk of becoming Envy’s proxies. As we look at and tread upon the pavement, we materialize the torments depicted and described therein, but do we let them get to us? Do we envy? Whatever we do, Envy is inescapably there.

CONCLUSION

No mere apotropaic formula or image caption, in its day, the inscription adorning the *phthonos* mosaic at Skala would have played a variety of roles. Its poetics and rhetoric sought to enhance the householder’s prestige, while the assemblage as a whole mediated encounters between visitors and place visited, this last, the visible and enviable expression of its owner’s success. Like a talisman worn around the neck, the mosaic guarded against envy’s evil eye, yet its verbal and visual content also sought to expose the envious to the humiliating gaze of onlookers.

Why would this have mattered? In the Roman Mediterranean, interactions between guests and their hosts could be complex, fraught affairs. Igor Lorencin intriguingly views those interactions through the lens of liminality, with contact between guest and host happening in a socially fluid space, one in which relationships and status were always being put to the test (2019). Few of the passions are as tied to perceived status as envy and shame: one feels envy when another's success knocks one down, one feels ashamed when others notice. We can, therefore, view artworks like the Skala mosaics as interventions not simply in a guest's perception of a host's status but in the feelings that accompany those perceptions, feelings capable of cementing or poisoning ties between host and guest. Those encounters might go according to script or they might deviate from it; therein lay the drama of the thing.

Some might say that the approach taken here reads too much into the Skala *phthonos* poem and similar texts, that we should instead focus on their apotropaic aspects. Yet even these last are, to quote Faraone, "highly overdetermined" at Skala (2018: 111), nor do they offer a full account of what the pavement seeks to do. Indeed, for a more rounded appreciation of the Skala mosaics and similar artifacts, we would do well to expand our understanding of their pragmatics. Consider one last time the Skala *phthonos* mosaic, especially its inscription. We cannot very easily isolate that inscription's pragmatics, its role in evoking and combatting envy, from its poetics, or its poetics from its materiality. If poems as speech are things that do things (cf. Austin 1975), then both poems from the Skala villa must form part of an elaborate performance at once pragmatic and poetic, social, and aesthetic. Nor can we very easily abstract those poems from the medium, the pavement, wherein they reside. For they, in making sure we know that a mosaicist has set an artist's designs in stone, embed into their text the very stonework they describe.

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