

# *Ipsa deae vestigia...* Footprints divine and human on Graeco-Roman monuments

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## Introduction

The upper terrace of the sanctuary of Demeter and Kore on Acrocorinth is occupied by a row of 3 small square buildings, of which the central one is decorated with a mosaic floor (fig.1).<sup>1</sup> Its basic elements are simple: a surround of trellis pattern, and a carpet of intersecting octagons within a plain black frame.<sup>2</sup> Within this, near the north edge where the entrance must have lain, is a figured panel, and in front of it a black *tabula ansata* with the dedicatory inscription Ὀκτάβιος Ἀγαθόπουλος νεωκόρος ἐψηφοθέτησε ἐπὶ Χαρῶς ἱερείας Νεωτέρως. Behind the panel, slightly off-centre, is the impression of a round object set into the floor, an altar or a base.<sup>3</sup> The panel itself shows 2 wicker baskets around which snakes are wrapped, and between them the impression of a missing object. Nancy Bookidis described it as “the impression of an object which had been worked separately — undoubtedly in another material — and embedded in the mosaic. Only the outline remains, straight sides finished with 3 scallops at the top and 2 V-shaped points at the bottom. Although the identification of the object is not immediately obvious, it probably depicted some implement of the cult”.<sup>4</sup> Examination of traces in the mosaic shows that there were not originally 3 scallops at the top but 2, a line of tesserae down the left-hand side having been displaced by the removal of the object. The missing object can then be reconstructed as a pair of footprints, toes pointed down towards the inscription, rounded outline of the heels at the top.

The mosaic accordingly takes its place among the representations of feet and footprints studied in a well-known article by Guarducci.<sup>5</sup> This covered a wide range of different categories of object: among them models of feet, bare or shod, in a variety of materials (sculptures large and small, of stone, terracotta, or bronze, lamps, clay perfume bottles, etc.). The largest category consisted of representations of the imprints or outlines of bare or sandalled feet, some simply incised on a pavement or natural rock, some carefully rendered on a separate slab or base. Such monuments have been found in large numbers and in most parts of the Mediterranean world, though they are especially common in Egypt; since Guarducci, they have been studied also by Manganaro,<sup>6</sup> and the Egyptian examples in a series of articles by Castiglione.<sup>7</sup> Their meaning, as will be seen, is variable and at times obscure; but (with the exception of votives which, like those of other parts of the body, commemorate the healing of a diseased foot by a deity<sup>8</sup>) the others may all be

1 N. Bookidis, *Hesperia* 43 (1974) 278-85, pls. 56-57. The date was not established with certainty; the building appears to have been constructed in the mid to 3rd quarter of the 1st c. A.D., but the mosaic probably belongs to a later phase: Bookidis suggests the late 2nd-early 3rd c. (by letter). The building was destroyed in the last quarter of the 4th c.

2 C. Balmelle *et al.*, *Le décor géométrique de la mosaïque romaine* (Paris 1985) pl.169c.

3 The marble fluted stand found on its side on the floor (Bookidis [supra n.1] 281-82, no.1) is, as she points out, too small to have fitted into this circle, unless it stood on a slightly larger plinth.

4 Supra n.1, 280.

5 M. Guarducci, “Le impronte del *Quo Vadis* e monumenti affini, figurati ed epigrafici,” *RendPontAcc* 19 (1942-43) 305-44; eadem, *BullCom* 72 (1946-48) 14-16.

6 G. Manganaro, “Ricerche di epigrafia siceliota,” *Siculorum Gymnasium* n.s.14 (1961) 182-90; id., “Nuove dediche con impronte di piedi alle divinità egizie,” *ArchClass* 16 (1964) 291-95, pls. LXIX-LXII.

7 L. Castiglione, “Vestigia,” *ActaArchHung* 22 (1970) 95-132, pls. VI-XXI, and articles cited below, nn.19, 21, 27.

8 Even here the question arises whether the very high proportion of feet (with or without legs attached) in some votive deposits refers only to the healing of the part concerned, or has some other purpose such as a wish for success in a journey: cf. M. Fenelli, “I votivi anatomici di Lavinio,” *ArchCl* 27 (1975) 226 n.79; P. Pensabene, M. A. Rizzo, M. Roghi, E. Talamo, *Terrecotte votive dal Tevere* (Studi Misc.25 [1978-79, Roma 1980]) 269. Cf. also F. van Straten, “Gifts for the gods,” *Faith, hope and worship* (ed. H. Versnel) (Leiden 1981) 144-45.