Roman, early Imperial. Near Seleucia Pieria, Syria

*Personification of the River Pyramos.* 2nd century A.D.
Mosaic, with stone tesserae, 56 x 57 in. (142.2 x 144.8 cm.)
Purchased, Drayton Hiller Fund (1938:14-1)

Provenance:
Excavated in Syria by the Committee for the Excavation of Antioch and its Vicinity; to Princeton University, Princeton, NJ; to SCMA by purchase

References:
Antioch (Syria -- Found at Seleucia Pieria, present day Turkey) 2nd c. AD
Mosaic Pavement: The River God Pyramos
Mosaic (colored stone tesserae)

- Possibly the best documented of the ancient objects in the collection. We know exactly where it came from and when.
- The few great cities of the ancient world were Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria and Antioch. The first three experienced extensive rebuilding during the course of the Middle Ages, but Antioch did not (Antioch was on the Mediterranean coast -- the area where Syria borders Turkey.) The ruins of Antioch were among the most accessible to archaeologists and in 1930 Princeton University undertook an expedition, teaming with the Musée Nationaux de France, the Worcester Art Museum, the Baltimore Museum of Art, and Dunbarton Oaks. Their excavations ended with the outbreak of World War II in 1939.
- There is a fragment of one of the mosaics uncovered in that period and was acquired by the SCMA in 1938. It formed a panel of a pavement decoration of a triclinium, or dining-room, of a Roman villa. Dining Roman-style was of course done on sofas lining a room -- the diners would have a view to the mosaic and across the vista. (incorrect Sugurt 1937)
- Because of erosion only a fragment of the original mosaic survived -- and this is only a fragment of that from what we can tell of the central panel it represented the personification of several ancient Roman provinces -- Cilica (which had survived and is identified by an inscription) and perhaps Mesopotamia, Syria, an Babylonia. In the four corners, separated by glometyi designs, were personifications of four rivers -- Pyramos (located in Cilica -- the SCMA piece); Tigre, Orontes and Euphrates.
- The mosaic is made of colored stones called tesserae. The figure is shown with leaves in his hair, a concentration to suggest the vegetation of the river banks' and also the crops produced by the nourishing waters.
- The only other river personification which has survived is that of Tigris -- now in the Detroit Institute of Arts.
Anonymous  
Craeco-Roman, Antioch region, Syria, 2nd century A.D.  

Pyramos  
Mosaic, 56 x 57 in. (142.2 x 144.8 cm)  
Purchased 1938:14-1  

Provenance  
Excavated in Syria by the Committee for the Excavation of Antioch and Its Vicinity, to Princeton University, Princeton, NJ, to SCMA  

Bibliography  
Payne, Elizabeth H. "A Mosaic from the Antioch Region", Bulletin of Smith College Museum of Art, June 1939, no. 20, pp. 10-16. Repro. on cover, fig. 4, 5, detail fig. 6, photo of gallery installation, page 14.  

Note  
The mosaic, a personification of the river Pyramos, was uncovered during excavations in Seleucia Pieria, the ancient seaport of Antioch, in present-day Syria. It is one of four corner medallions of a large pavement from the dining room of a Seleucian residence. Only one of the other three medallions is extant, that representing the river Tigris (preserved in the Detroit Art Institute). It is believed that the
other two rivers personified in the pavement mosaics were the Euphrates, and either the Orotes, the Saros, or the Kalykadnos. In the central panel of the pavement were representations of nearby provinces. Only Kilikia remains. There was certainly one other province represented, and possibly as many as three. Mesopotamia, Syria, and Babylon have been suggested.