Artists, workshops and schools of mosaic pavements, meaning a group or a team of artists and workshops, can be identified by the following means: inscriptions mentioning artists or builders who signed their work; analysis of stylistic and technical idiosyncrasy which may characterize an artist or a workshop; and examination of particular motifs and patterns.

The technical and artistic skills involved in the laying of the mosaic pavements indicate that the work was probably executed by workshops consisting of groups of artisans and artists based in large cities and working within schools, or by travelling groups of artists, consisting generally of a craftsman in charge of several less skilled workers or a single master-artisan supported by his assistants, his son or apprentice (Dauphin 1976a: 130-131, 141-145; 1978; Balmelle and Darmon 1986: 238-240; Hachlili 1988: 383-391; Donderer 1989: 40-50; Dunbabin 1999: 269-278). The identity of artists and their workshops is important though they are generally anonymous.

The tasks in a workshop might have been divided among several experts: the master designer, a *pictor* who drew figures or complicated geometric designs, a craftsman in charge of the border decoration and of pavements of secondary rooms; assistants, apprentices, and general workers who prepared the site, cut the tesserae, and finished and cleaned up the work at the end. Certain parts could have been made in the workshop atelier and taken later to the site and placed within the pavement. Differences in the stylistic execution of the pavements were due solely to the artists’ professional ability.

Balmelle and Darmon (1986: 238-240) describe the mosaic artists and workshops as artisans travelling from place to place, carrying only their tools. The basic materials of their trade would be found at the site, and they were probably considered members of the builders’ team. Balmelle and Darmon (1986: 241-243) and Dunbabin (1999: 275) portray the status of the mosaicists on the basis of the edict of the Emperor Diocletian of 301 CE, which attempted to fix maximum prices for commodities and artisans’ wages. A distinction is observed between the mosaicist called *musaearius* (in Greek *μουσιαρίω κενητή*) and the one called *tessellarius* (ψηφοθέτη), generally explained as a wall mosaicist and a floor mosaicist. Yet it could also mean the difference between the designer who draws the pictures, and the artisan who produces and adds the decorations and background; or it might distinguish skill, competence, and expertise, or perhaps describe the creator of superior decorative mosaics and the producer of plain mosaic pavements (Bruneau 1988: 33-34; Jesnick 1997: 58).

Only few examples have been found of preliminary drawing or incised lines for geometric or figured scenes under floor mosaics. Still, they may indicate that these preliminary sketches were considerably more common on mosaic pavements than previously supposed (Dunbabin 1999: 284-285).

These preliminary incised lines marked on the bedding of the mosaic (*sinopia*) are found on several pavements in Israel. An example is the mosaic pavement (Oecus 456) at the Herodian western palace at Masada (1st century BCE) which was partly destroyed in antiquity. The surviving bedding shows the process in which the mosaic was laid. Preparatory incised parallel lines appear on part of the pavement designating the border and the principal patterns of the mosaic, serving as guidelines for the mosaicists. But no paintings of the pattern or the design endured. Similar sinopia from the 1st century CE were found in other areas (Yadin 1966: 127; Foerster 1995: 151, fig. 254).

Preliminary incised lines marked on the *nucleus* of the mosaic of the House of Dionysos at Sepphoris indicate the principal units and composition of the pavement (Talgam and Weiss 2004: 115-116).

In the Khirbet El-Murassas monastery at Ma’ale Adummim preparatory painting on the white
plaster before the laying of the tesserae appears on three pavements (Magen and Talgam 1990: 149-150). The best preserved is in the nartex. In the big chapel bema, the painting shows contours and lines marked in red and black. In the upper layer of the church floor incised guidelines of the main composition are displayed, and traces of various colours indicate the use of polychromic preparatory paintings.

Other examples are the eastern church mosaic at Herodium (Netzer et al. 1993: 225-226), which beneath the pavement displays red, yellow, and green paint marking the medallions and the figures; the Beth Midrash mosaic at Meroth shows remains of red paint outlining the design (Ilan 1989: 33). When the mosaic was being treated at the Israel Museum laboratory it was noticed that the pattern appeared in mirror-image markings on its underside, with the pattern larger than the mosaic; also, the inscribed word תַּלְתָּה ‘lamb’ was longer and located in a different place from that on the topside. The artists apparently had to reduce the size of the mosaic. Talgam (1987: 153) maintains that work on the mosaic must have been done with constant collaboration between the designer/painter (pictor or ordinatur) who drew the sinopia and the tessellare or pavimentare who laid the stones.

The signatures inscribed on mosaic pavements are generally of one, two, or three artists: a single signature might indicate a master-craftsman or the head of the workshop, possibly supported by assistants or apprentices. Two and three signatures perhaps mark a division of labour between a director and assistants, or among artists performing different tasks, or all working together.

Though it is difficult to isolate the work of each individual artist when two or three are named in inscriptions, sometimes the style of a pavement might point to the work done by the different mosaicists (see the discussion of the El-Hammam, Sepphoris, and the Petra pavements, below).

At times it seems that mosaicists came from abroad to work, and later trained local artisans. This is indicated by the survival of the local mosaic traditions, in particular by the recurrence of some themes.

The mosaic workshops existed for clientele of all religions. Artists and workshops supplied their products indiscriminately to Jews, Christians, and pagans alike. These workshops produced uniform or conventional designs which would be acceptable to the various ethnic clients. Special decorative designs or religious symbols would be added at the customer’s request; Jewish symbols for Jews, Christian symbols for Christians, and mythological depictions for pagans.

A. Mosaicists and Artists Identified by Inscriptions

The identity of artists and mosaicists of synagogue and church pavements can be deduced partly from inscriptions on them which sometimes mention the artist by both name and deed, or a prayer dedicated to or commemorating the artists, and sometimes both. The signatures found on these floors date from the 5th to the 8th century.

Such inscriptions are few. Donderer (1989) lists 92 certain inscriptions of artists, but not all of them seem convincing. Dunbabin (1999: 270) maintains that about 70 to 80 signatures of mosaicists are preserved on pavements across all periods. No mosaicist’s name appears on more than one mosaic, except in a single house, apart from the inscriptions on the Beth ‘Alpha and Beth She’an synagogue pavements that name the same mosaicists, a father and a son. Some inscriptions evince confusion between the donors and the artists.

The inscription usually states the name of the mosaicist/s, often followed by a word meaning ‘made by’ or ‘work of’.

Inscriptions on Synagogue Pavements in Aramaic and Greek were discovered on a few mosaic pavements, identifying the mosaicist (Hachlili 1988: 383-385).

- On the Beth ‘Alpha synagogue mosaic a Greek inscription, near the western entrance in a tabula ansata, reads: Μνησθούσιν ὑπὸ τεχνίτ[αι] εὑ κάμνοντες τῷ ἔργον τοῦ Μαριανῶς καὶ Ανίνας υ [ι] ὡς, ‘In honoured memory of the artists who made this work well, Marianos and his son Aninas’ (fig. XII-1a). Judging from this inscription, the mosaicists Marianos and his son Hanina were local artisans who created (with special skill) a mosaic in an independent style (Sukenik 1932: 47; Avi-Yonah 1981: 292, Nr. 22; Roth-Gerson 1987: 29-30; Hachlili 1988: 383, fig. X.7c; Donderer 1989: no.A25, pl. 18, 1). Sukenik (1934: 77) claims that as the inscription is the only one in Greek it was the initiative of the mosaicists.