With this book, Hallie M. Franks delves into the imagery of Greek pebble mosaics associated with symposia from the late fifth until the mid-third century BCE, which she sees as an integrated feature of the setting for symposia. In her own words, they are “part of a nuanced spatial and bodily, rather than an exclusively visual, experience.” (p. 4). To illustrate this thesis, Franks focusses on specific examples that in her opinion respond to patterns of sympotic activity, and hopes to contribute to “thinking in new ways about the experience of viewing in ancient Greece, as well as how imagery and its
spatial contexts both shape and are shaped by lived experience.” (p. 5).

In “Theoretical Foundations” Franks suggests that mosaics in andrones during symposia “had the capacity to structure and direct experiential metaphor by actively recasting the relative patterns of the circling cup as, for instance, the journey of a ship on the seas or the rhythmic, cyclical patterns of the cosmos.” (p. 10). She argues there existed a direct relationship between the passing around of the cup and the imagery of the mosaics, which were actively engaged in the ritual of the symposium.

Chapter 1 (“The Symposium, the Andron, the Mosaics”) presents an overview of literary and iconographical sources for our knowledge of symposia and the sympotic context. Important aspects are reclining, equitable turn-taking, and friendly competition. Franks considers the passing of the cup from left to right (epidexia) an important phenomenon because it helped to ensure commensality, and the space as encouraging the construction of group identity through circularity — in her view a crucial function of the symposium. She then discusses the pebble mosaics from andrones, of which the earliest examples, from the fifth century, are mainly in black and white. In the course of the fourth century more colours were introduced. Examples are almost exclusively from the Greek mainland (Olynthos, Eretria, Athens, Pella, Sikyon), with Rhodes as the exception. Franks uses calculations
by Westgate (“Greek Mosaics in Their Architectural and Social Context”, Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies of the University of London 42, 1997-1998, 94-97): of 59 pebble mosaics with known contexts 47 come from andrones and their anterooms. According to Franks three groups of loose patterns can be discerned:

1. A series of bands (waves, vines, meanders, or checkerboards) around a central image consisting of a star, a wheel, a flower, or vegetation.
2. Floral patterns.
3. Figures, which are almost exclusively oriented toward people entering the room.

Chapter 2 (“The Journey Out. Symposium at Sea”) deals with nautical and watery themes on mosaics. Examples from Eretria and Sikyon according to Franks depict exotic foreign landscapes, distant places with which the Greeks had no contact. In room 9 from the House of the Mosaics in Eretria the indicators are a Nereid and a hippocamp on the threshold, and a border of waves in the room itself, surrounding gryphomachies and lion attacks. The next section (“The Periplous”) deals with the connection the Greeks frequently drew between the sea and wine, and between the nautical journey and the symposium. Franks speaks about communal identity: as a company of men isolated within a contained space, symposiasts are like the crew of a ship. The andron and its imagery had the capacity “to participate in the production
of experiential metaphor through the active mediation of the senses.” (p. 77).

In Chapter 3 (“The Journey In”) she discusses mosaics that show Dionysos as a traveller, whose exposure to the unfamiliar brings new knowledge. For example, the andron of the Villa of Good Fortune in Olynthos depicts Dionysos on a chariot, pulled by panthers. The waves surrounding the mosaic, Franks suggests, indicate the oikoumene. She also suggests that because the image of the god was only partially visible during the symposium the “fractured mode of horizontal viewing may have the effect of suggesting his presence” (p. 99). I doubt whether the idea of the image on the mosaic being concealed and revealed to different drinkers throughout the evening is realistic. The mosaics were only visible well to people entering the room. And the placement of tables and other items necessary during the symposium, like a krater and lamps, would further hide the mosaics from sight during the symposium.

To answer the question why Dionysos’ journeys are depicted in andrones, Frank explores the term theoria, denoting a trip to the unfamiliar, demonstrating the promise of physical travel as an effective metaphor for internal journeys. She sees the god as a theoros, supplying both a paradigm for the transformative journey of the symposium and his divine presence as experienced in the form of wine by the symposiasts. Franks’ premise is that the andron is an active space, producing a
complex spatial metaphor, in which three aspects are important: “the ritualization of space, ... the interrupted view of the god in the mosaic, and the circling of the wine cup.” (p. 110). Bellerophon, who appears in two mosaics, is equated to Dionysos as both a traveler and a wanderer.

Chapter 4 (“The Journey Around”) focuses on the four-spoked wheel as a metaphor for the motion of turning characterizing the *epidexia*. After the introduction of four mosaics with this motif a long exposé follows on the supposed significance of the wheel, entering also in cosmic harmonies and cyclic rhythms, and, as the movement can be associated with turning, even on dance, on control and “the potential to spin out of control, particularly when Dionysos is involved” (p. 140). The section ends as follows: “Such collective dancing in honor of Dionysos brings us back to the symposium by way of a now familiar metaphorical theme: the sea.” (p. 142). Franks also suggests that mosaic wheels mirror the circling of wine around the room: “The icon of the wheel, therefore, has the capacity not just to symbolize the equity among those present, but also to contribute to spatial experience that enforces that claim.” (p. 148).

In Chapter 5 (“The Journey Back”) Franks argues that images like centaurs and floral motifs relocate the symposiasts in a distant and exotic past or ancient primitive landscapes. She reflects on this primitive past by introducing vase paintings that show primitive symposia, sometimes outdoors, suggesting
that the mosaics point at a symposiast’s journey, “far from the here-and-now cares of the oikos and the stresses of the polis” (p. 175).

Franks concludes that the role of experiential metaphors was crucial in creating bonds among symposiasts. This conclusion is undoubtedly right, but one may question if mosaics really played so crucial a role in the symposium as suggested in this book.

As illustration of sometimes problematic reasoning I point to Franks’ suggestion (Chapter 2) that these mosaics: “… reframe the experience of sympotic movement as a metaphorical journey to lands potentially accessed by the sea or bordered by the Ocean.” (p. 57). The examples Franks provides with certain provenance are few (Eretria, House of the Mosaics, andron 9 and its anteroom 8; Olynthos, Villa of Good Fortune, room g) and the assumption that the mosaic from Sikyon, with depictions of - amongst others - exotic animals and swimming Ethiopians, comes from an andron, is questionable, as there is no indication of a border for the placement of couches. It is therefore possible to wonder if the given examples are representative of a larger group that could confirm Franks’ hypothesis.

The question of representativeness as well as implicit meaning becomes even more problematic in Chapter 4, where one could ask why there are few wheels in the pebble mosaics of andron
floors, if the motive is as important as Franks suggests. Of her four examples, it is questionable whether the andron mosaic of the House of the Greek Mosaics in Athens depicts a wheel: the “spokes” of the wheel are in line with the diagonals of the surrounding rectangle and therefore part of a geometric pattern, much like a St. Andrew’s cross. Another example, from the same house, is in the anteroom of the andron, and therefore not visible during the symposium. A fifth example, the mosaic in room e in the Villa of Good Fortune in Olynthos, does not belong to an andron, as Franks rightly states, and seems to have had a totally different meaning, identified by Robinson as a wheel of good fortune. This all questions the correctness of Franks’s interpretations of some of the motifs discussed.

In Chapter 5, too, some of the examples are problematic: the mosaic from the tholos associated with Darron’s sanctuary, at Pella, is not from an andron, and its central scene is surrounded by a border of waves, which Franks does not discuss. This raises the question whether the supposed association of such waves with the sea, as discussed earlier, also works for this mosaic. The same applies for house Δ in Rhodes, where the central motif of Room A, with a centaur at a hare hunt, is bordered by waves. More probably, this type of border should be considered only a decorative motive. Keeping this in mind, we also have to reconsider the meaning of the waves in the mosaics mentioned in Chapter 3.
To illustrate the often associative manner of reasoning which characterizes the volume under review, I discuss the section on the Periplous (pp. 61-67). Here the comparison between symposiasts and men at sea seems to me based on somewhat far-fetched grounds: “similar physical effects, which might include swaying, loss of balance, and nausea.” (p. 63). To strengthen this equivalence Franks uses vase painting and especially the famous Munich cup by Exekias (Staatliche Antikensammlungen und Glyptothek 8729), with Dionysos in a boat as if reclining on a kline - according to Franks also to be considered a kind of periplous. She equates the circling of the cup in the andron to the journey at sea from harbor to harbor. Franks then discusses depictions of Skylla, who would represent the perils of the sea. Again, one may question how representative the given examples are. If the message, as Franks suggests, was that drinking too much wine might end in wreckage, why is there no wine involved in the story or depictions of Skylla? And Franks goes even further when she sees symposiasts drinking from the cup as comparable to the whirlpool Charybdis. She suggests that the depiction of Bellerophon “might also hint at his later attempt to enter the realm of the gods.” This seems to me to overinterpret the evidence. Therefore I would still recommend the fundamental work on pebble mosaics, by Dieter Salzmann (Untersuchungen zu den antiken Kieselmosaiken, Berlin 1982), who already asked whether these mosaics only had a decorative function or a specific iconographical meaning, possibly in relationship with
the room. For Salzmann many of the themes could be linked to Dionysos or Aphrodite, as metaphors of life and happiness.

From the discussion above it is clear that I do agree with Franks’s conclusion about the crucial role of experiential metaphors in the symposium, but I doubt if mosaics really played as crucial a role in the symposium as she suggests.