

During our delightful trip to St Albans, we visited the Verulamium Museum, named after the Roman City which stood at the very same location, 2000 years ago. The museum offered insight into the lives of the people of Verulamium, ranging from evidence of their diets and hobbies, to the pieces they used to decorate their homes. The principal ornamental piece was the mosaic, and we managed to observe various shell mosaics, such as the Oceanus Mosaic:

The Oceanus Mosaic portrays a central image of Oceanus - the sea god. This was a particularly consequential god during those times, as the people of Verulamium needed his support in order to safely travel and trade, as all of this involved the seas.



However, it was a different mosaic which caught my attention, as I noticed a symbol actually which originates from Asia:



The Lion's Mosaic is pictured here, and we can observe the Lotus flower near the bottom. The lotus flower appears on some of the earliest Buddhist and Jain imagery we have of South Asia, going as far back as 180 BCE (the mosaic is believed to have been made in 160-190 AD). The lotus flower symbolizes strength, resilience, and rebirth. Yet the presence of this symbol seemed curious and rather out-of-place for a Roman mosaic. Furthermore, something similar emerged at the end of the exhibition:

Another mosaic, evidently depicting a mandala. I was familiar with this as I had researched mandalas previously, and they are closely linked to the lotus flower in appearance as well as symbolism. It is intended to bring balance and a sense of idealism (present in its symmetry), and generally represent an eternal cycle of life. On the bottom we can also see a meander, a common decorative element in Greek and Roman art, which symbolizes eternity and the undulating flow of human life through reproduction. To see a mandala right next to a meander I thought to be extraordinary, as the merging of drastically different cultures is exhibited. This union through art demonstrates the key beliefs which were shared amongst people of different lands. Despite their numerous differences, these symbols of eternity united them through their key similarity - they were all human.

