



Review

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ROMAN MOSAICS IN BRITAIN: AN INTRODUCTION TO THEIR SCHEMES AND A CATALOGUE OF PAINTINGS, by *David S. Neal*. (Britannia Monograph Series, 1.) Pp. 127, figs. 26, pls. 88, color fiches 2. Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, London 1981. £9.95.

WALL-PAINTING IN ROMAN BRITAIN, by *Norman Davey* and *Roger Ling*. (Britannia Monograph Series, 3.) Pp. 231, figs. 60, pls. 124 (15 color). Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, London 1982. £14.50.

In 1970 the journal *Britannia* was launched for publications on Romano-British material, which were becoming too numerous to be accommodated in the *Journal of Roman Studies*. The monographs reviewed here represent the expansion of this venture to a series of specialist studies under the aegis of a now well established journal. The announcement of the project aroused high expectations, which, in the case of these two books at least, have been fully realized.

At the outset, the similarities and differences between the two works should be noted. One is written entirely, the other in part, by authors who would consider themselves primarily conservators rather than academics in the narrow sense of the word. The arrangement of introduction, catalogue and plates in each case is almost identical. Yet these similarities, as well as the titles used, are somewhat deceptive. Neal's book, it must be emphasized, makes no claim to being a general treatment of the subject, which is a vast one. It deals exclusively with those mosaic floors that he has painted in water color over the last twenty years, much of it as an archaeological illustrator for the British Department of the Environment. These floors certainly represent an excellent cross-section of the material available, but by no means constitute the complete picture: some of the most familiar British examples, such as the splendid scenes from Bignor Villa or the Virgilian scenes in the Low Ham Villa, to name but two, are not represented. The kernel of the other book is the corpus of Romano-British wall paintings restored by Davey, also associated with the Department of the Environment. Since, however, the study of Roman wall painting in Britain is still very much in its infancy, and the total amount of material recovered much more limited, Davey, in collaboration with Ling, an authority on ancient art, has been able to attempt a general and comprehensive treatment of the whole subject.

The tradition of British mosaic-illustration goes back to the 18th c., to the work of men such as Samuel Lysons and William Fowler. In recent times, of course, much more emphasis has been laid on photography in recording mosaics, but since the pavements are invariably dirty or covered by

lime, the results are often in fact much less satisfactory. As an illustrator, Neal can discuss his material with the eye of a craftsman. He demonstrates, for example, that in setting the mosaics, the craftsman laid the motifs first and added the background tesserae afterward. This procedure is illustrated clearly at Brantingham (no. 12), where the motifs actually break into the surrounds of the panel and were thus demonstrably set first. Neal's skilful account of how mosaic patterns evolved is especially fascinating. A scheme of nets was laid out first as a guide to the design, which could be changed radically by an expansion or contraction of the network. He concludes that there is no evidence that mosaics with similar patterns came in standard sizes. Under such a system the designer would have been obliged to make scale drawings for rooms of different dimensions. The precise layout would thus have varied with each mosaic; most schemes seem in fact to have been chosen at random by the client and are on occasion quite unsuited to the shape of the room. This variation explains the necessity for "make-up" panels, converting squares into rectangles, as well as the presence of clumsy and unsightly borders.

The catalogue of 87 items is superbly illustrated; indeed, some of Neal's paintings have become familiar "classics" in their own right. For those acquainted with Romano-British mosaics there are some illuminating revelations. One of the best known pavements is the bizarre Venus panel from Rudston (no. 66), with its curious assemblage of human and animal figures. I was surprised to discover from Neal's illustration and commentary that the head of the lion, as it has always been depicted, is in reality a restoration, carried out by the Hull Museum. My only serious reservation about Neal's catalogue is that, while his commentary is judicious and thorough, he restricts his comparisons to material from Britain. This decision was no doubt conscious, since consistent citation of the vast number of parallels from other provinces would have been beyond the scope of a single volume. But a selective discussion of some of the more significant instances would have been welcome. Two examples should suffice to illustrate this point. At Aldborough Villa (no. 3) there is a striking Greek inscription, ΕΑΗΚΩΝ, associated with part of a female figure in a girdled tunic, probably a Muse. The presence of a Greek mosaic inscription in Britain is unique and intriguing, with clear implications for the social and intellectual standing of the owners of the villa; at the very least a citation of parallels in western provinces, as at Cologne (K. Parlasca, *Die römischen Mosaiken in Deutschland*, 80-82), would have been most useful. Brantingham (no. 12) has produced one of the most interesting of all Romano-British mosaics, depicting a central bust of a female adorned by a mural crown with nimbus, and nimbate busts in the side panels. The figures naturally invite consideration of eastern comparanda, especially in view of Neal's observation that not only are the figures unusual, but also that there is no parallel in Britain for the overall scheme of decoration.

The Davey-Ling monograph is a general study of the subject, including an excellent discussion of parallels from elsewhere in the Roman world. As the authors make clear, wall painting presents a different set of problems from mosaics. On the one hand, almost all the surviving material comes from recent excavations using reliable dating techniques. On the other hand, it is extremely difficult to date wall painting by stylistic criteria. It is clear from examples elsewhere that simple and sophisticated designs could co-exist, as, for instance, in Rome, where architectural decorations appear alongside striped and linear designs. Nevertheless, Davey and Ling do draw up an approximate chronology. The finest decorations technically, with evenly applied pigments and burnished surfaces, belong to the 1st and 2nd cs., while coarser work, roughly finished and with much of the background left in the natural white of the plaster, is common in the 3rd and 4th cs. Because of the friable nature of the material, less is known about the technique of wall painting than of mosaics, but in an excellent section on technique and conservation, Davey and Ling show that in Britain the fresco was preferred to the tempera method. This technique is attested at Leicester (p. 57), where the seams between the areas of fresh plaster are placed so as to coincide with divisions in the painting scheme.

The catalogue, of 65 items, includes all the important restored decorations, as well as those found in position on walls. One is immediately struck by the scarcity of figured scenes in Britain, and by the difficulty of identifying those few that are found. I am not persuaded that the figure in the Kingscote painting (no. 21) is Achilles, or that we can identify the male youth in the superb painting at Tarant Hinton (no. 39, undoubtedly the finest in Britain) as Narcissus. The only convincing mythological identification is in a painting from Otford (no. 30), where a figure brandishing a spear is accompanied by a quotation from the *Aeneid* (1.313, 12.165); the subsequent discovery of fragments with scraps of Latin supports the idea that this painting might have been part of a series of scenes with commentary in the form of quotations (as in the Baths of the Seven Sages at Ostia).

While it is to be expected that British wall paintings will not exhibit the range and variety to be found in the more developed parts of the Empire, there are some interesting examples. Britain seems to have developed a technique of painted imitation-mosaic guilloche (p. 159) found in four villa sites in the south and west of the province; it is possibly a motif evolved by a local workshop. Especially striking are the paintings from the house at Dover (no. 14). The realistic architectural forms are reminiscent of the second Pompeian style, but the particular formula used in this instance is unusual, involving a continuous podium supporting pilasters attached to a closed wall. The "surrealist" plant growing from the podium seems to be unique.

These two volumes augur well for the series. They are handsomely produced, but without undue extravagance.

The use of fiches for some of the color plates, in particular, is to be commended. While of primary use to the student of Roman Britain, they should prove invaluable for anyone interested in conservation or generally interested in the history of ancient art.

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GRIECHISCHE MEISTERWERKE IN RÖMISCHEN ABGÜSSE: DER FUND VON BAIA, by *Christa von Hees-Landwehr*. Pp. 54, figs. 62, map 1. Liebieghaus Museum alter Plastik, Frankfurt 1982.

In 1954, Mario Napoli found 430 fragments of ancient plaster casts in the fill of a cellar room in the Sosandra Baths, Baiae. The German scholar W.-H. Schuchhardt was given the publication of the fragments, with von Hees-Landwehr as his assistant. Most of the study had been completed before Schuchhardt's death in 1976 (see *AA* 1974, 631-35, with bibliography). This booklet is dedicated to him, as a tribute to his labors on these important ancient casts.

During May-August 1982, there was held in the Liebieghaus Museum in Frankfurt an exhibition of some of the fragments, accompanied by modern plaster replicas of the works they are believed to copy. The volume under review is the guide for that exhibition. It is not intended to be a scholarly discussion of the cast fragments; rather it explains to the interested layman the methods of, and reasons for, copying, and gives short analyses of problems incurred in studying ancient copies. It is written in necessarily brief and simplified language. Archaeologists, especially those who have not yet seen the Baiae casts, will note some conclusions presented in the guide for which more detailed argument would be desirable. The most important of these is the statement that these casts were taken from Greek bronze originals, not from marble copies or Roman bronze replicas (p. 23).

There are indeed details in some fragments which argue for a source in bronzework: the scales on an aegis of the Velletri Athena type; the engraved locks of Aristogeiton's beard; the filler with finger impressions, from under the raised foot of the Sosikles Amazon type. If all the casts are mechanical reproductions of the originals, and are not taken from copies, many of the fragments become crucial for our understanding of the originals. Working from the premise of bronze originals as the sources, the author has drawn some interesting conclusions. For example, the Roman copyists of the Westmacott type increased the volume of the original by a few centimeters. The change is explained by the need to make the legs more capable of supporting the weight of the (marble) torso; we must think of the original