

José María Blázquez, *Mosaicos romanos de España*. Historia, Seria menor. Ediciones Cátedra, Madrid 1993. 720 Seiten, zahlreiche Abbildungen.

J. M. Blázquez's book is the first to take an overall view of mosaic art in Roman Spain and Portugal, to which are added observations about selected pavements and frescoes from the Orient. This volume arrives at a time when much recent research has greatly broadened our knowledge and understanding of mosaics in the Iberian Peninsula, either through detailed publications of particular monuments and sites, through the study of specific iconographic themes, or through broader interpretations of individual periods such as Late Antiquity. New fascicles of the *Corpus de mosaicos de España* (a project headed by the author) also appear regularly. The moment therefore is ripe for a general synthesis of the rich pavement and vault decoration in mosaic achieved in Spain and Portugal during the Roman era. In fact, the present book does not attempt such a synthesis, but rather takes the form of an anthology of articles published by Prof. Blázquez and his colleagues at the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas in Madrid over the past twenty years, and arranged for presentation in this volume.

The contents of the book clearly reflect the wealth of mosaic production in Spain and Portugal and raise several important issues regarding the interpretation of these works of art. The first chapter, grouping thirteen articles and entitled "Art and Society in Spanish Mosaics", introduces several broad themes to be discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters, and also defines some of the major characteristics of the Spanish repertoire. One general feature is the historical transition from mosaics made in the black and white fashion (popular until the Antonine era, and while Spain had especially close commercial ties with Italy, where the fashion originated) to the use of polychromy, reflecting influences from other regions of the Empire such as Roman Africa. Indeed, the degree of African artistic influence on Spanish mosaics, in both style and iconography and especially during the 4th century and after, is a major issue about which scholarly opinions differ. The author, like K. Dunbabin, believes such influence was strong and was exerted both by itinerant craftsmen and by artistic models which passed from North Africa to Spain. (A Spanish example cited to this effect is a mosaic from Dueñas displaying a large head of Oceanus and accompanying Nereids, and reproduced on p. 25 of the present book.) By contrast, D. Fernández-Galiano took an opposing view, asserting that African and Spanish artists worked independently, creating parallel developments from a common repertoire. In a still different outlook, A. Balil and X. Barral claimed that African influence is best seen in the borders of Spanish mosaics rather than their central field (cf. the border with hunting imagery in a mosaic from Cardeñagimeno, p. 81 of the volume by Blázquez). This issue clearly needs to be explored further. Yet another important topic in the book's first chapter is the frequency and variety of mythological subjects depicted in Spanish pavements of the later period.

The next four chapters in this volume deal with specific themes in the Spanish and Portuguese repertoire, beginning with imagery of the circus and the hunt. Attention is focused on the latter theme, which includes

several fine mosaics of realistic hunts found in 4th-century Roman *villae*. One of these is the Mosaic of Dulcitus from the *villa* at El Ramalete, which shows a *dominus* on horseback hunting in a landscape and placed within a medallion framed by lush foliage. The rider makes a heroic gesture with one raised arm like the aristocratic hunters in several African mosaics, and the presence of his name personalizes the image. The author rightly questions Bianchi Bandinelli's proposal that Sassanian silver plates with pictures of royal hunters inspired the Spanish mosaicist – suggesting instead that there may have been an African artistic model and also making comparisons with hunt imagery on late Roman glass vessels. Another important Spanish work on the same theme is the hunt panel in the lower part of the *oecus-triclinium* pavement in the *villa* at Pedrosa de la Vega. Following P. de Palol's analysis of that pavement, Blázquez emphasizes its visual parallels with the Mosaic of the Small Hunt at Piazza Armerina and with contemporary hunting pavements from Carthage. We lastly note the hunt panels forming the outer frieze of the fragmentary dome mosaic in the mausoleum at Centcelles (near Tarragona), which apparently belongs to a *villa* and which was published by H. SCHLUNK (*Die Mosaikkuppel von Centcelles*. Madrider Beitr. 13 [1988]). Several features of these panels, such as a representation of the master's *villa*, the depiction of hunting with nets, and the presence of horsemen making heroic gestures, recall the *latifundia* cycles of African mosaics. At Centcelles, the hunt episodes are combined with panels representing Old and New Testaments events, personifications of the seasons, and elegant ceremonial scenes. All of this imagery and the presence of a nearby town named Constantí led Schlunk to attribute the mausoleum to an Imperial patron, namely, the ruler Constantians, who was slain in A. D. 350. That hypothesis, recently reaffirmed by H. Lavagne and previously questioned by J. Arce and N. Duval, needs to be re-examined.

Successive chapters (III-V) of Blázquez's book respectively deal with Dionysiac imagery, other mythological themes, and assorted subjects of both pagan and Christian content in the mosaics of Spain and Portugal. Among Dionysiac pavements, one especially notes examples of the later 4th to early 5th centuries found at Complutum (or Alcalá de Henares) and at Baños de Valdearados (illustrated on p. 309). The mosaic from Complutum depicts an abbreviated thiasos in its central tableau (which is flanked by panels with panthers and wine craters and a scene of grape-treading), whereas the pavement from Baños de Valdearados represents both the thiasos and Dionysos's triumph in two superimposed registers. These mosaics decorated large reception rooms in private houses, identifiable as a *triclinium* in the example from Complutum. The other most intriguing Bacchic mosaic, discovered at Mérida and apparently datable to the 5th century, represents Dionysos, the sleeping Ariadne, and a few other figures in a "dissociated" design (see pp. 321–324 with a brief description by A. Blanco Freijeiro). Dionysos, dressed in contemporary Roman costume, may be a portrait of the mosaic owner, who wished to identify himself with the wine god; in addition, the pavement was signed by the artist (EX OFFICINA ANNI PONI).

Numerous other mythological subjects also appear in mosaics from the Iberian Peninsula. A useful summary of these themes occurs in an article concluding chapter IV of the present book, and is supplemented by a discussion of the mosaic with several mythical scenes from Torre de Palma (in Portugal), placed at the beginning of chapter III. Among artistic highlights are various episodes from the story of Achilles, which reflect a larger pictorial cycle that was popular in the late Roman era. They include a scene of Achilles and Briseis, who apparently are shown being reunited (the *triclinium* pavement of the *villa* at Carranque, near Toledo, illustrated on p. 433), and an image of Achilles on Skyros (located in the upper zone of the *triclinium* mosaic at Pedrosa de la Vega). By contrast, the mosaic from Torre de Palma represents a compendium of different myths, including those of Medea, the mad Hercules, and Apollo and Daphne among others (see the illustrations on pp. 289–292; one looks forward to J. Lancha's publication of this pavement). Also noteworthy is a late 4th-century mosaic in the *villa* of "La Malena" at Azuara, featuring an episode which D. FERNÁNDEZ-GALIANO interpreted as the wedding of Cadmus and Harmonia (cf. his article in *Journal Roman Arch.* 5, 1992, 162–177). One is impressed by the formal elegance of the tableau, which includes an assembly of Olympian deities.

The rest of this section of Blázquez's book is notable for its discussion of various allegorical and literary subjects, and its identification of particular mosaic workshops. One article in chapter IV is devoted to the celebrated Cosmological Mosaic in the Casa de Mitreo at Mérida (illustrated on p. 383 and the book cover), which in Blázquez's view either was made by a "Syrian or Oriental" mosaicist, or was based on an artistic model from that region. Like some other scholars, the author stresses what he considers to be the pavement's Mithraic content, and relates this to the discovery nearby of several statues of the Mithraic cult,

including an image of Aion, a figure-type who also occurs in the mosaic. Blázquez's discussion omits any reference to the important publication of the Cosmological Mosaic by A. ALFÖLDI and E. ALFÖLDI-ROSENBAUM (Aion in Mérida und Aphrodisias. *Madriider Beitr.* 6 [1979]), and it does not resolve the ongoing debate about the pavement's precise meaning. Among other pavements of intellectual or allegorical content mentioned in Blázquez's book are the Mosaic of the Muses from Arróniz (cf. the interpretation of this monument in a recent study by I. MORAND, *Idéologie, culture et spiritualité chez les propriétaires ruraux de l'Hispanie romaine* [1994] 222–224), and several pavements representing the four seasons (these include a mosaic from Conimbriga published by J. M. BAIRRÃO OLEIRO in a volume of the *Corpus dos mosaicos romanos de Portugal* [1992]). In a different vein, the author attempts to identify mosaic workshops active in the region of Zamora in Spain by analyzing the artist's treatment of geometric motifs and their use of color (chapter V, pp. 480–487). It is a very effective type of study which deserves wider application.

The remaining two chapters (VI–VII) of the present volume shift attention to the Orient, specifically to mosaics of Syria and Asia Minor, and to fresco paintings in Jordan. The reason for including this material is the artistic contact that existed between Spain and the Orient in Antiquity, with influence passing primarily from east to west. The author demonstrates this connection only to a limited degree. Some of his most convincing observations concern the transmission of geometric motifs, including comparisons between pavements at Liédana, Daragoleja, and Mérida in Spain, and mosaics at Sardis in Asia Minor (cf. pp. 618–619). Unfortunately, no illustrations accompany this part of the text.

Other articles in this book present a selective survey of mosaics in several of the principal museums in Syria and Turkey, partly overlapping the contents of a volume by J. BALTŸ, *Mosaïques antiques de Syrie* (1977) (a source which the author acknowledges), while also adding other works of art. Among the latter are a mosaic from Shahba-Philippopolis representing Dionysos in repose (illustration on p. 573) and a pavement of uncertain provenance depicting the story of Pelops and Hippodameia (picture on p. 575). A different article describes and illustrates (in addition to other mosaics) a panel from Xanthos now in the Archaeological Museum at Antalya which shows Thetis dipping the infant Achilles in the river Pege, in order to make him immortal (photo on p. 593). It is another reflection of the Achilles cycle that was popular in both the Eastern and Western Empire in late Roman times. Elsewhere in the same volume, the author reviews arguments for dating the peristyle mosaics of the Great Palace at Constantinople, and decides in favor of P. J. Nordhagen's view that they were made in the 1st half of the 7th century. The author has not settled the chronological debate surrounding these pavements, and his discussion does not include G. HELLENKEMPER SALIES'S well-reasoned proposal for a 5th-century date (cf. *La mosaïque greco-romaine IV* [1994] 185–188). In the remainder of his book, the author examines mosaics in the Archaeological Museum at Istanbul, especially the Orpheus pavement from Cos, and also describes the celebrated frescoes of Umayyad date adorning the hunting pavilion at Qusayr 'Amra in Jordan. The paintings form a fascinating ensemble with some Classical antecedents, but they exceed the principal purpose of the author's book.

Overall, one is grateful to the author for making such an abundance of information available in a single volume, and for stimulating future research on Spanish and Portuguese mosaics of the Roman era and their oriental connections. The book is a very useful introduction to its subject and would benefit from more ample illustration, with figure numbers added for ease of reference. An index of artistic themes and geographical sites would also be helpful. J. M. Blázquez has provided an initial survey of mosaic art in the Iberian Peninsula which raises many important issues of interpretation, and which paves the way for a comprehensive synthesis of this subject.

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