

Renate Thomas, *Römische Wandmalerei in Köln*. Kölner Forschungen, Band 6. Verlag Philipp von Zabern, Mainz 1993. 400 Seiten, 182 Textabbildungen, 8 Farbtafeln, 26 Rekonstruktionszeichnungen, 2 Faltpläne.

This monumental publication sets out to do something which has rarely been attempted before: to produce an analytical corpus of wall-paintings from a single Roman city. If we leave aside wholly exceptional sites such as Pompeii and Herculaneum, where the material is so abundant that analytical studies have tended to focus on individual houses, the only city for which a comparable publication exists is Ephesus (V. M. STROCKA, *Die Wandmalerei der Hanghäuser in Ephesos*. *Forschungen in Ephesos VIII* 1 [1977]). At Ephesus, however, most of the wall-paintings survived *in situ*, and there was little difficulty in reading either the decorative scheme or the figure-scenes within them. In Cologne, as in most urban sites of the northern and western provinces, the paintings have had to be reconstructed from fragments, and all but a few are woefully incomplete. This means that the precondition for any corpus is a massive labour of sorting and reassembling fragments – a labour which can last several years and which often proves frustrating. Systematic programmes of reconstruction have been carried out for many years by Alix Barbet and her colleagues in France; but, apart from a corpus of the paintings from Glanum (St.-Rémy-de-Provence), where the number of surviving decorations is relatively few, Madame Barbet's publications have tended to focus on individual monuments.

Cologne offers a large assemblage of material, and has been uniquely fortunate in the skill of its excavators, in the patience of its restorers, and in the availability of resources to fund a long-term programme of research. In a foreword to the present volume Hansgerd Hellenkemper, director of the Römisch-Germanisches Museum, which has played a major role in sponsoring and coordinating this work, sketches the history of the study of Roman wall-painting in Cologne. Although isolated finds were made in the nineteenth century, the first major assemblage came from the excavation of a villa in the Müngersdorf district, 5 km west of the Roman city, in 1926; this enabled J. Klinkenberg to reconstruct a complete wall-decoration, which was displayed in the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum until it was destroyed during an air-raid in 1943. Ironically, while the events of the Second World War put paid to this pioneering reconstruction, they also created the conditions for the recovery of further wall-paintings in the city-centre. Both the construction of an air-raid shelter south of the cathedral and subsequent damage caused by actual raids led to excavations which produced fragments of various decorations. Later, in 1969–71, there were major rescue excavations which exposed a large area of houses south and west of the cathedral. These yielded the most extensive material yet recovered, including the red and black "Schirmkandelaberdekoration" reconstructed and published by A. Linfert in 1972–73 and megalographic paintings of animal-scenes restored by Mathilde Schleiermacher. From the early 1980s much of the work of processing and evaluating the Cologne wall-paintings has been in the hands of the author, and the present volume represents the culmination of her efforts.

The most substantial and important part of the book is the catalogue, 320 pages long. This contains 39 principal complexes of finds, arranged topographically: 36 from the interior of the colony, two more from villas in the vicinity (the Müngersdorf building and a suburban villa to the south-west, under the church of St. Pantaleon), and one from the naval base of Marienburg, 3 km up the Rhine. For every complex we are first given a description of the archaeological context, accompanied by site-plans (which, gratifyingly, are oriented, wherever possible, with north at the top). This is followed by examination of the stratigraphy, designed to establish chronological parameters. Then comes a detailed description of the paintings and a discussion of the parallels, concluding in most cases with a suggested date. For almost all of the paintings, even isolated fragments, there are clear illustrations, either photographs or line-drawings. Reconstructed schemes are presented in exemplary fashion at the back of the book in a series of drawings which carefully distinguish between the surviving fragments and the extrapolated elements. In addition to the catalogue, the author gives us two introductory essays. The first surveys the history of research into the paintings of Cologne and (to set these in context) of contemporary painting in other parts of the Empire. The second presents a putative reconstruction of the chronological development of Roman painting in the city.

In most respects this is an excellent publication. The catalogue is meticulously careful and the assessments are generally cautious. The archaeological evidence is invariably given priority in the search for dates, and the author rightly stresses (e.g. on pp. 31 and 54) that different forms of decoration, such as imitation



marbling, simple white-ground panel-schemes, all-over figure-compositions, or "wall-paper" patterns ("Tapetenmuster"), can occur in the same period and are not necessarily chronologically discrete.

One proviso worth stating is that the text seems to have been completed some years ago. There is little reference to bibliography later than 1986. Thus, in discussions of the Pompeian Third Style, the author cites only Bastet and De Vos, not the more recent book by W. EHRHARDT (*Stilgeschichtliche Untersuchungen an röm. Wandmalereien von der späten Republik bis zur Zeit Neros* [1987]). Nor does she show any awareness of the "Häuser in Pompeji" series, the first volume of which appeared as long ago as 1984. There are also numerous relevant articles which have escaped her net, including two by the reviewer dealing respectively with the Kingscote paintings, discussed below (*Britannia* 12, 1981, 167–75), and with "Tapetenmuster" (*Ant. Journal* 64, 1984, 280–97).

Another proviso is that little attention is paid to sociological questions. A corollary of the co-existence of different modes of decoration is that patrons had a freedom of choice: as recent studies of Pompeian houses have demonstrated, decorations would be varied according to the function and importance of given rooms and according to the spending power of the householder. The author mentions this aspect (e.g. on p. 31), but does not explore it as far as she might have done. For painted "Marmorinkrustationen", for example, she cites comparanda but says very little of their psychological effect. As imitations of marble veneering, which was the most expensive of all the media of interior decoration, and one associated primarily with public buildings, they must have been designed in some sense to enhance the space that they decorated, to give it an aura of grandeur. They are found, therefore, if not actually in public or communal buildings (such as the mithraeum in Richmodstraße), in reception rooms and other parts of the house which performed a quasi-public function (or through which visitors passed on their way to such parts of the house). Conversely, the simpler decorations (white-ground panel-schemes and "Tapetenmuster") were generally relegated to the subsidiary rooms. Only in very modest houses, such as the cottage at Iwerne Minster (Somerset) in Britain, where most of the rooms were completely undecorated, might a simple scheme be used for the main reception-room, because that was all that the occupier could afford. One wonders whether the author might not have taken more account of these factors in her chronological survey of the paintings of Cologne. If she had, she would hardly have suggested, as one of the possible explanations for the lack of paintings in the third century, the increased popularity of marble veneer during this period, a factor which can only have applied to the grandest rooms in the wealthiest houses. Given the amount and variety of the material from Cologne, there was surely scope for more discussion of the social implications. As it is, the author's concerns are more with the producers than with the recipients.

For the early period she distinguishes three different categories of production. The first consisted of competent, workaday decorations of simple form which might have been undertaken by legionary craftsmen. The second, and art-historically most significant, comprised all the more expensive polychrome and figured decorations. In terms of quality and pictorial handling, these stood fully in the metropolitan Roman tradition, and were thus presumably the work of immigrant artists from Italy. Only in their predilection for certain motifs, notably the "Schirmkandelaber" of the second half of the first century, did they betray any specifically regional character. Thirdly and finally, there were decorations by painters who sought to imitate the better quality work but whose lack of skill suggests that they were true "provincials".

This categorisation may possibly reflect a broad reality, but the reviewer would be more cautious in assigning the less skilled production necessarily to local artists. This approach, which is very similar to that adopted by J. M. C. Toynbee for the art of Roman Britain, glosses over the fact that even among Italian craftsmen there were varying levels of competence, as exemplified by the paintings of Pompeii. Provincials had no monopoly of incompetence. Conversely, immigrant artists need not have had a monopoly of skill: it is possible that native painters could very quickly have been trained to the level of any Italians working in Cologne. The situation, in other words, may well have been more complex than the author believes.

The reviewer would also be more cautious than the author in regard to dates. On p. 31 f. she rightly states that the Cologne paintings are important not just because they form a large "closed" group but because of the fullness of the archaeological record: "Hinzu kommt, daß in Köln bei einer Reihe von Fundkomplexen die Möglichkeit bestand, die Malereien im Grabungskontext zu untersuchen und so zu fest datierten Wanddekorationen zu kommen, die als Fixpunkte einer absoluten Chronologie dienen können". On closer inspection, however, it emerges that the archaeological context does not always provide unequivocal or



precise dates, and many of the paintings discussed in the volume are ultimately dated by comparison with paintings from other sites, notably in France, but also in Italy. Since many of these comparanda are themselves imprecisely dated, the dangers of constructing a "house of cards" become all too apparent. One must question, for example, whether the author's framework for the chronological development of "Schirmkandelaberwände" during the first century will stand up to close inspection. She claims that the first examples, which she dates to the Tiberian and Claudian periods, are simple and two-dimensional, while those of the Neronian and early-Flavian periods (notably the well-known decoration from Insula H/1, room 1434, published by Linfert) introduce an element of "Zweischichtigkeit" by carrying the black intervals up into a frieze running above the red fields, which are further detached from this "background" by being given an aedicula-like frame of Corinthian pilasters supporting a shallow entablature. In the late-Flavian period (decorations from Gertrudenstraße and Neumarkt) the red fields are framed all round by green bands edged with white lines, the figure-work is more restrained, and the pictorial handling less sketchy. But how firmly established in this chronological sequence? On p. 40 f. it becomes clear that the "Neronian" decoration of room 1434 (which Linfert placed rather later) is so dated partly because of its "stilistische Zwischenstellung in einer relativen Chronologie der Kölner Kandelaberdekorationen" and partly because of supposed typological correspondences with the early Fourth Style at Pompeii (cf. pp. 188–94). However, the author can find no good parallels for the particular system of fields framed by "columns" found in Cologne and is forced to argue that it may be a distinguishing feature of a local workshop or workshops (p. 42). Why not, then, following the principle of plurality advocated elsewhere in the volume (see above), argue that the architectural form of the scheme is merely a more elaborate variant, deliberately chosen by certain painters in certain circumstances, and having no chronological significance?

At times, one wonders whether the author does not bend the dating evidence to suit her preconceptions, as when a candelabrum decoration at Saint-Romain-en-Gal is dated after A.D. 20 in defiance of the excavators' contention that the house from which the paintings came was destroyed in 20 and not rebuilt (see p. 38 note 22). Throughout her discussions, too, there is a dangerous tendency to use details of brushwork and handling to reinforce the dating arguments. The reviewer is convinced that such details may often merely reflect the style of the individual artists rather than the style of the time. To use them consistently in comparisons with material from Italy and elsewhere seems to me to place too much confidence in this form of evidence.

On a more personal note the reviewer will perhaps be pardoned for referring to the paintings of Roman Britain, published in N. DAVEY/R. LING, *Wall Painting in Roman Britain*. Britannia Monograph Series 3 (1981). In her summary of this corpus on p. 29, the author repeats a number of the misunderstandings which appeared in a review published ten years earlier (*Bonner Jahrb.* 183, 1983, 904–8). In particular, she states that Davey and Ling attributed early paintings of high quality to "immigrant Campanian craftsmen", something which I would never have claimed: a Campanian origin is neither attested nor very likely, and is in fact implicitly denied for a landscape picture from Fishbourne (Davey and Ling, 116 note 1). The author also repeats a claim that there are inconsistencies in my approach to dating, in that in the introduction I argue for a time-lag between developments in Rome and their arrival in Britain, while in the catalogue this view is "etwas eingeschränkt"; but her earlier review (*Bonner Jahrb. cit.*, 908) makes it clear that in at least one case she has confused a typological comparison ("the same artistic phase") with an absolute date. More germane to the present review are the passages on the large-scale figure-paintings from Kingscote and Tarrant Hinton. According to the author the late (third- or fourth-century) dating that I assigned to these "geht von stilistischen Überlegungen aus, die sich aber offenbar nicht durch den Grabungsbefund stützen lassen"; following a verbal opinion given by H. Mielsch and V. M. Strocka (Davey and Ling, 79), she prefers a date around 200 (pp. 54; 203 f.; 387). Unfortunately for this view, the dates given by Davey and Ling for both Kingscote and Tarrant Hinton were based, in the first instance, not upon stylistic considerations but upon information about the archaeological context provided by the excavators. This situation remains unchanged. The excavators at Kingscote argue for a late-third to fourth-century date, those at Tarrant Hinton for the fourth century. For Kingscote a new and definitive publication, edited by Jane Timby, will present the dating evidence in full and confirm that the paintings, together with the mosaic pavement from the same room, can be placed no earlier than the end of the third century. The fact that I cited Strocka's views on dating without dismissing them does not imply that they were "ein Vorschlag, dem offenbar anhand des Grabungskontextes nicht widersprochen werden konnte" (pp. 203 f.). It means that there was a basic conflict of opinion which I felt unable to resolve. But, all things being equal, I would support the



archaeologists against any preconceptions about the history of artistic style and format ("stylistic parallels must take second place to independent dating criteria": Davey and Ling, 30); and, for Kingscote at least, it appears that the later dating must stand.

On the iconographic aspects of the Cologne paintings there is little to add to the author's comments. But the objects identified by her as *oscilla* (p. 44 and *passim*) are surely tambourines, a possibility which she mentions but appears to reject. *Oscilla*, by definition, should be hanging. The position of the Cologne objects, which are shown resting on the plates of candelabra, along with Dionysiac creatures and bric-à-brac, is much more appropriate to tympana, which often figure in Dionysiac contexts (in a similar form: see e.g. DAREMBERG-SAGLIO V 539 f., with the illustrations cited). A bust in the upper zone of a small peristyle house in the cathedral quarter is identified as one of the four Seasons, either Summer or Autumn, because it wears a garland of fruit and twigs in its hair (126 f.); but it also wears a veil, which would be more appropriate to Winter. Moreover, from the colour photograph reproduced in Plate VIII, it appears that the head was nimbbed, which would be an unusual feature in a representation of a Season (for one or two exceptions see G. M. A. HANFMANN, *The Season Sarcophagus at Dumbarton Oaks* [1951] I 266; II 156 no. 225; cf. LIMC V 1990, Horai/Horae no. 101). One must, indeed, question whether the bust represented a Season at all. In the absence of more distinctive attributes, and of the companion-busts on the other walls of the room, I would prefer to leave the identity open.

It would be wrong, however, to dwell on divergences of opinion. This volume is a major achievement: it presents the material in a lucid and methodical fashion, with the support of excellent illustrations. If it is possible to take issue with some of the author's datings and interpretations, this can be done in the knowledge that the evidence is presented with scrupulous thoroughness. A recent publication of the mosaic pavements from Augst (D. SCHMID, *Die röm. Mosaiken aus Augst und Kaiseraugst. Forschungen in Augst 17* [1993]) showed the potential value of single-site corpora for the study of artistic production in a different medium. The author's corpus has now performed a similar service for wall-paintings in Cologne. Let us hope that her example will be followed for other Roman cities in the north-western provinces.

Manchester

Roger Ling