

Volker Michael Strocka, *Römische Fresken in der Antikensammlung des Württembergischen Landesmuseums*. Archäologische Sammlungen, Führer und Bestandskataloge, Band 1. Württembergisches Landesmuseum, Stuttgart 1991. 64 Seiten, 30 Abbildungen, Faltblatt.

This excellent little catalogue and guide-book presents a set of Romano-Campanian wall-paintings which were acquired by the Württembergisches Landesmuseum in 1983. Said to come from Boscoreale, just north of Pompeii, they consist of seventeen pieces cut from the decoration of a single room, plus one further piece which evidently comes from a different decoration, but which may well derive from the same building. All are of fine quality and show figures (Danae, Leda, Hermaphroditus, Cupids and Psyches) and architectural elements painted upon a yellow ground. They belong unmistakably to the so-called Pompeian Fourth Style.

The main text is prefaced by an introduction written by the present museum director, Margret Honroth, who sets the acquisition of the paintings in context. Since 1959 the Landesmuseum has adopted a deliberate policy of building up its holdings of classical antiquities from Mediterranean provenances. This involved, *inter alia*, the purchase of bronze figurines, Roman imperial portraits, and Attic painted vases. The resulting collection was systematised in 1986 in a display strategically placed between the "Romans in Württemberg" and the collection of Renaissance and Baroque sculpture – thus underlining the importance of the classical tradition both for the Roman province and for the artistic output of later ages. The purchase of the Roman wall-paintings played an essential part in the formation of the collection; and they form an integral part of the display, being incorporated in a reconstructed room which serves as a basis for the colour-

scheme of the modern exhibition room. The credit for acquiring the paintings and planning to use them as a setting in which to display the other antiquities belongs to the former director, Claus Zoege von Manneffel, and it is fitting that this booklet is dedicated to him as a tribute at the time of his retirement.

The work of describing and analysing the paintings falls to V. M. STROCKA, who, as director of the documentation project "Häuser in Pompeji" and one of the leading authorities on Roman painting, is uniquely well qualified for the task. After a brief preamble dealing with the circumstances of the acquisition, the nature of the modern restoration (carried out in Basel in 1980) and the technical processes involved in the original production (an account based primarily on analogy with observations of other paintings), he presents the panels one by one according to their role in the decoration – central panels first, then figures from the side-fields, then architectural elements from the main zone, and lastly the elements from the upper zone. All are meticulously described, both in terms of their condition and in terms of their content. Discussions of the iconography are supported by footnotes giving full documentation for parallels. In a concluding essay, the author (1) sketches the development of decorative schemes in Roman wall-painting, in order to show where the Württemberg fragments fit in, (2) discusses the reconstruction of the decoration from which the fragments derive, using internal evidence and educated guesses based on round numbers and simple proportional relationships, (3) presents comparanda for the ornamental repertory to support a dating in the first years of the Fourth Style, and (4) makes some comments on the significance of the central pictures.

The catalogue is supported by colour photographs of all eighteen pieces, both the whole panels and details, as well as by black and white illustrations of the comparative material. A line-drawing showing a reconstruction of the decorative scheme, with the position of each piece clearly indicated, is presented in the form of a folder at the back. The cover of the booklet itself shows the same montage, this time with colour photographs.

All this is splendid, and the reviewer would wish to add only marginal comments. The dating to the early Fourth Style carries conviction: diagnostic are the carefully painted "Filigranborten", closely analogous to those of the *alae* in the House of the Vettii at Pompeii (figs. 24; 25). But whether the beginning of the Fourth Style can be pushed back to the 40s, as the author would argue, is a matter with which I have previously taken issue in my review of his book *Casa del Principe di Napoli. Häuser in Pompeji 1* (1984): see *Gnomon* 59, 1987, 432, and, in support, W. EHRHARDT, *Casa dell'Orso* (1988) 67 note 336. The author reiterates some of the arguments assembled in his earlier work, and gives a paragraph to one of the crucial monuments, the upper peristyle of the Villa San Marco at Stabiae (p. 56). Here he admits that his case for a Claudian dating is weakened by the discovery of tile-stamps later than those naming Claudius' minister Narcissus; but he adduces new evidence, namely the girth of the plane-trees in the peristyle, thought to indicate trees 50 years old at the time of the eruption of A.D. 79. They "müssen demnach als 10–20jährige Bäumchen in den vierziger Jahren gesetzt worden sein, was dann auch die Ausmalung datiert". This seems to me, at best, a dubious line of reasoning. If anything, the trees would point not to a date in the 40s but to one in the 30s. It is unlikely, *pace* the author, that they would have been transplanted when they were as much as 10 or 20 years old: even with slow-growing trees such as planes, transplantation is more easily effected at a younger age. If the dating of the trees is correct, it is more plausible to believe that they were there before the peristyle, or even that there was an earlier peristyle which was rebuilt and redecorated in the 50s or later (possibly after the earthquake of 62).

With regard to the iconography I am less inclined to see an integrated decorative programme than the author is. Two of the three central pictures (Leda and the swan and Danae and the golden rain) are obvious companion-pieces: both are examples of Jupiter's amours (and as such are linked paradigmatically in at least one literary context: MART. 14, 175). But Hermaphroditus does not form an obvious pendant to these, and the author's attempts to make him/her do so smack of special pleading. I have argued elsewhere (*Roman Painting* [1991] 135–41; O. MURRAY [ed.], *In Vino Veritas*, forthcoming) that the great variety of combinations in which subjects occur in Pompeian decorations militates against the view that they were often chosen to form meaningful programmes. In some cases they no doubt were: the three pictures in the grand *triclinium* of the Villa Imperiale are linked by a Cretan connection, those in the *ala* of the House of the Menander all relate to the fall of Troy, and those in the *triclinium* of the House of M. Lucretius focus on the myth and powers of Bacchus. In addition, ancient viewers will often have looked for programmatic associations whether or not they were intended: so Petronius in the *Satyricon* (83) makes his narrator

Encolpius attempt to find the common ground between three pictures of romantic myths (Jupiter and Ganymede, Hylas and the nymph, and Apollo and Hyacinthus) exhibited together in a picture-gallery. But the ingenuity which some modern commentators have applied to the task of identifying moral and intellectual themes in room-decorations seems to me to misunderstand the intentions of most ancient patrons and artists. If one examines the contexts of the pictures listed in notes 8, 14 and 19, one finds that they are combined with the most varied and heterogeneous subjects. Danae, for example, appears in company with Bacchus and Ariadne, Marsyas and Olympus, and Meleager and Atalante (?); Leda with Mars and Venus, Meleager and Atalante, Neptune and Amymone, Hercules and Telephus, Narcissus, Diana and Actaeon, Apollo Citharoedus, and Achilles on Skyros; and Hermaphroditus with Orestes and Iphigenia, Narcissus, Mars and Venus, Bacchus and Ariadne, and Theseus and the Minotaur. Such disparate pairings point not to the conscious construction of ideological programmes but to random selection from pattern-books. When Strocka writes of *cubiculum* R in the Casa degli Amorini Dorati that the combination of Leda with Diana – Actaeon and Venus fishing signifies "Liebeslist und Verlockung einerseits, Übertretung des Geziemenden und damit Unheil andererseits" or "Leidenschaft – Sehnsucht – Keuschheit (der Diana)", he may be putting far too sophisticated an interpretation upon the patron's choice. Nor does the erotic nature of the subject-matter necessarily indicate that the room was a *cubiculum*. Given its probable size (4,18 m × 3,50 m), it could equally have been a *triclinium* (it is scarcely smaller, for example, than the *triclinium* 9 in the Casa del Fabbro at Pompeii). There is nothing in the imagery which would be out of keeping with such an identification: other paintings of Jupiter's affairs and of Hermaphroditus are found not only in *cubicula* but also in *triclinia* (not to mention *oeci*, *exedrae*, *alae* und *tablina*).