

ROGER LING, *The Insula of the Menander at Pompeii*. Band 1. The Structures. Clarendon Press, Oxford 1997. VIII, 393 Seiten, 62 Abbildungen, 131 Tafeln.

Beginning in the 1970s, the British scholar Roger Ling and his team, represented here by the contributions of six individuals, have labored both at ancient Pompeii and in their scattered studies to record and analyze the *Insula of the Menander* (Regio I, insula 10) in its entirety, a project unparalleled in its size and scope, inasmuch as traditionally only studies of individual properties – as in this case A. Maiuri's earlier publication of the *Casa del Menandro* – not complete city blocks, have been undertaken by the students of this famous and important ancient site. Professor Ling's other projects have understandably intruded on this longterm study, but now at last (there have, however, been interim reports), we are beginning to see its results.

One of the most important things that an author of such a deeply detailed archaeological study as this must decide is the manner of presentation. He has decided first to divide his materials into three, focussing in separate volumes on 1) the structure of the insula, 2) its decorations, and 3) its moveable finds. The current volume presents the materials and analyses of the first of these divisions. Following introductory matter (chapter I: General Background) including a judicious statement on the problems of interpretation and dating the fabric of walls, the author proceeds (chapter II: The Individual Houses) with separate discussions of the eight properties that comprise the insula, especially with the famous and extensive *Casa del Menandro* (pp. 47–149). Each entry is preceded by the bibliography of the property's excavation history and the writing found on its walls. There follow descriptions of the final state of the property (subdivided into units in the cases of larger parcels), its internal functioning, and its structural history. A summary of the phases of the building history in tabular format completes the entry. More formidable details are included in a 67-page, room-by-room gazeteer (Appendix A), which describes buildings in depth. The main text is completed (chapter III: The Whole Insula) with a structural history of the entire insula and a short discussion of ramifications for Pompeii and the Roman world at large. Scattered throughout the text are 131 plates and 62 figures, although 38 of the figures (termed "additional") are gathered together following six appendices. Brief acquaintance, in short, allows the reader to access just about any specific piece of information within seconds.

But such rigid organization leads as well to inconvenient arrangements. The main plan of the insula to which the reader must constantly refer, for example, can be found only on page 346 (an "additional" figure), while the second plan most commonly studied by this reader, that of the roofing of the insula, is buried away on page 377. Moreover, while each entry includes a discussion of the building history of the property in question, the plans (figs. 14–18) illustrating those histories, to which one must regularly turn, are economically placed in the presentation of the history of the insula as a whole (pp. 223–237), so that for convenient perusal the reader finds himself in need of more fingers than the human hand provides.

That said, there is little to disagree with in this volume, especially since the author has given up his earlier contention that the earliest phase of the insula belonged to the fourth and third centuries B.C. rather than the late third and early second. His analysis is certainly correct in its overview, and he has presented the significant details so clearly that by the time one reaches the presentation of the whole insula the logic of the approach and the correctness of the analysis are patent. Besides, he has greatly aided his arguments with regular considerations of second stories, drainage, lighting, and roofing, aspects of buildings that have rarely made appearances in traditional studies.

Small questions and quibbles will of course arise with individual readers. The author strongly holds the line against speculation on room use, but a word of explanation of the possible uses of a line of niches originally installed in what became the yard and room 5 of I,10,1 and of two later blocked in the south wall of room 41 (the yard entered at I,10,16) of the *Casa del Menandro* would not have been out of place. Thanks to his scruples on room use, the weaknesses of our traditional nomenclature for rooms become

even clearer, but it seems to do little good to call spaces in I,10,1 and I,10,2–3 “atria”, while noting (p. 25) that they lack all characteristics of the atrium apart from being central spaces off which other rooms open. Important in his discussion of the development of the peristyle of the Casa del Menandro are a series of semicircular cuttings, perhaps for plants, in front of the original positions of columns, but here photographic evidence is missing. Also missing is the label for room 10 (the latrine discussed on p. 214) of I,10,18 on figure 24, the plan of the insula as a whole.

On the other hand, the same individual readers will find their own pleasures scattered throughout the text. That construction of some sort seems to have been taking place almost continuously somewhere on this insula is a surprise that will be shared by all. The author himself is strong, as one would expect, on architectural space, whether discussing the suite of rooms surrounding the main dining room of the Casa del Menandro (pp. 137–138) or noting the perspectival device of three pairs of increasingly shortened columns from the tablinum through the peristyle, which adds visual depth to the house as viewed from the fauces (pp. 140–141). And Appendix E by Lesley Ling on thresholds and doorways, with its details on wooden thresholds and curiously locking rooms is nothing short of fascinating. Indeed, it is in such passages as these, when the authors play to their strengths and loose themselves from what appear to be the restraints of their basic decisions on organization that the text comes alive. Here it is that one regrets the decision to treat only the building structures of the insula in this volume; the lack of nearly any mention of painting, the author’s special area of expertise, in particular renders this an oddly restricted study that cries out for its companion pieces. But those companions will presumably be shortly forthcoming to give a more rounded and vivid view of the insula.

The Clarendon Press has produced a handsome and serviceable book that belongs in any library with a serious focus on ancient Pompeii. Thanks to its organization, this volume can be read on several levels: in its entirety, as studies of individual properties, or with reference only to particular aspects of the individual properties throughout the text. The tabular presentation of individual building histories will prove especially useful, and the volume should be of a variety of uses for both researcher and classroom student.

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