

Wiktor A. Daszewski, *Corpus of Mosaics from Egypt 1. Hellenistic and Early Roman Period. Aegyptiaca Treveriensia. Trierer Studien zum griechisch-römischen Ägypten 3*. Verlag Philipp von Zabern, Mainz 1985. VIII, 211 pages, 46 plates, 4 colour plates.

Estimates of the role played by Alexandria in the development of Graeco-Roman mosaics have varied in the past as much as any other assessment of the contribution of that city to ancient art. At one extreme there is P. GAUCKLER's derivation of the whole art of mosaic from Alexandrian developments of earlier Egyptian incrustation techniques (Daremberg-Saglio III 2 [1904] 2090–2092); at the other, the emphatic denials by TH. VON LORENTZ (RE XVI 1 [1933] 336) and D. LEVI (Antioch Mosaic Pavements [1947] 4–5; EAA V [1963] 212) that Alexandria played a part of any importance in the development of the art. More recently, greater caution has prevailed, dictated by the extremely limited nature of the evidence: the only basis readily available for an assessment of the mosaics from Egypt was B. R. BROWN's *Ptolemaic Paintings and Mosaics and the Alexandrian Style* (1957), which discussed only five mosaics. The proposal for a *Corpus of the Egyptian mosaics* was put forward by K. PARLASCA in his contribution to 'La Mosaïque Gréco-Romaine II' (II<sup>e</sup> Colloque international pour l'Étude de la Mosaïque Antique, Vienne 1971 [1975] 363–369) in which he drew attention to several significant works that were previously little known. This project has been taken up by D., member for many years of the Polish Centre for Mediterranean Archaeology in Cairo and Director of the Polish Excavations at Nea Paphos in Cyprus. To the mosaics previously known he has added material from new excavations (notably from the Polish excavations at Kom el Dikka in Alexandria, which will appear in the second volume), mosaics scattered through remote villages and buried in museum basements, and references to works discovered in the past and now lost. The total quantity of material is still not large, and even now (at least for the early period) hardly adequate for a full appreciation of the

role of Alexandria in the art; but it undoubtedly permits a fairer assessment than previously, allows at least provisional answers to be advanced to certain persistent questions, and offers tantalizing glimpses of the potential achievement of the city. D. has already published several preliminary studies, for example in the Symposia 'Das ptolemäische Ägypten', Berlin 1976 (1978) 123–136, and 'Das römisch-byzantinische Ägypten', Trier 1978 (1982) 160–165, in which he tackles some of the individual problems. The present volume, the first of the *Corpus* itself, covers the Hellenistic and early Roman period, with a cut-off point at approximately the end of the first century A. D.; a second volume will deal with the later Roman and Byzantine periods. This volume was completed in 1979; works that appeared later are referred to in the notes and in appendices, but are not fully integrated into the text.

D. opens his account with three literary texts which may be of relevance to Alexandrian mosaics. The first is Cairo Zenon Papyrus 59665, which specifies the design of the pavements of some baths in Philadelphia, ca. 256–246 B. C. It gives a rare insight into the method of work of the craftsmen, and the remarkable degree of control exercised by the royal authorities; but although the type of composition can be paralleled on several later floors, the papyrus gives no clear information about the technique in which the floor was executed, a central question at this date. As D. sees, no definite conclusions can be drawn from the use of the word ψήφος for the outer border; and he rejects, in my view rightly, the interpretation of P. BRUNEAU (in: *Stele Kontoleon* [1980] 134–143), that ?]γραφικὸν ἄνθος refers to figural decoration, which would suggest work fine enough to be an *emblemata vermiculatum*. The second text is an inscription of the late first century A. D. from Tیره/Apateira (recently republished by C. P. JONES, *Journal Rom. Stud.* 73, 1983, 116–125, but without comment on the passage in question). It describes the contents of a *beroon*, which include nineteen .....]α Ἀλεξανδρεῖνὰ ψηφωτά. D. accepts the restoration of the missing word as ἐμβλήματ]α by Keil and v. Premerstein, and uses this inscription as testimony to the established reputation of Alexandria as specialised centre for the production of *emblemata*. He suggests that the exceptional conditions of mosaic work in Egypt – the shortage of suitable stone, which had to be imported from overseas, and the concentration of the craftsmen in a few central ateliers, possibly under close royal control – recommended the production of small portable panels in preference to mosaics laid on the spot. He goes on to suggest that numerous *emblemata* found in other parts of the Mediterranean, including such well known problematic examples as those of the Casa del Fauno and of the villa at Zliten, may be products of Alexandrian craftsmen. This is an attractive series of hypotheses, and D.'s arguments for the economic conditions under which the production of *emblemata* might develop make very good sense; but the restored inscription makes a shaky foundation for the argument. The same text has also recently been discussed by P. BRUNEAU (*Revue Etudes Grecques* 97, 1984, 62–76); although he may carry scepticism too far in questioning whether Ἀλεξανδρεῖνὰ refers to the Egyptian Alexandria, his doubts about the restoration and the conclusions to be drawn from it seem justified. D.'s third text is the passage of Moschion in Athenaeus V 207c, describing the luxury ship sent by Hieron of Syracuse to Ptolemy Euergetes, decorated with mosaics showing the Iliad. D. rejects the suggestion of K. PHILLIPS (*Art Bull.* 42, 1960, 246 f.) and others, that the ship may have been responsible for conveying the technique of tessera-mosaic from Sicily to Egypt. Since a similar rejection from the Sicilian side has recently been made by D. VON BOESELAGER (*Antike Mosaiken in Sizilien* [1983] 26–30), let us hope that this misguided idea is now finally laid to rest.

After synthetic chapters analysing the Composition, Decorative Motifs, and Technique of the mosaics, problems of workshops and style, and their relationship to the architectural context, there follows a Catalogue of 53 items. The total appears at first sight substantial, but many are probably or certainly fragments of the same pavement; others are very small and insignificant fragments, of value at best for the information they can give about technical procedures. Approximately half come from Alexandria; they are rare in other cities of the Delta, almost non-existent in Upper Egypt, a fact which in itself makes clear the essentially Greek nature of the art. Very few indeed were found *in situ* during properly executed excavations, and most have no archaeological context at all.

The first point of interest to emerge from D.'s analysis concerns the evolution of tessellated mosaics, and the question of a 'passage' from pebbles to tesserae. This reviewer came to a rather negative conclusion on the question some years ago (*Am. Journal Arch.* 83, 1979, 265–277), believing that there existed an insufficient number of dated examples of the supposed intermediate techniques to allow the establishment of an orderly sequence of evolution. (The emphasis here is upon orderly: clearly the general evolution took place, what is at issue is the extent of overlap and mutual co-existence of the various techniques, and

whether it is possible to arrange the surviving examples into a sequence with at least a relative chronology). Since then, the question has been treated by D. SALZMANN, in his *Untersuchungen zu den antiken Kieselmosaiken* (1982) 59–77, who does argue for an orderly progress from one technique to another. Salzmann's work increased very considerably the number of known examples of the 'intermediate' techniques, and did much to illuminate the dark areas of the third and early second centuries B. C.; but the number of securely dated examples remains very small. He allotted no great importance to Alexandria in the process of transition; although his book appeared only after the present volume was already in the press, his proposed datings for the Egyptian floors are discussed by D. in an appendix, and, for the most part, rejected. D.'s argument that Salzmann's somewhat schematic pattern takes insufficient account here of local factors and variations seems, to this reviewer at least, justified. D. too argues for a consistent and orderly evolution from pebbles through a mixed technique of pebbles and more-or-less regular tesserae, to mosaics made entirely of regular tesserae, and leading on to the development of the fine '*vermiculatum*' technique; but he bases his argument upon mosaics from Alexandria itself. First, there is the Warrior mosaic from the Basileia district of Alexandria: a pebble mosaic, traditional in composition and conception, but making use of cut tesserae for a few special purposes; it also introduces such technical processes as the use of lead strips for outlines. The second is the mosaic of the Hunting Eros from Shatby, whose date has long been disputed. Breccia proposed a *terminus post quem* of the first century B. C., on the grounds that the mosaic must be later than the use of the Shatby area as the early necropolis of Ptolemaic Alexandria. D. re-examines the accounts of the discovery of this mosaic (as of the previous one), comparing them with the data from more recent excavations in the area, and shows that its findspot is unlikely to have formed a part of the necropolis, and that there are no archaeological grounds to impose a late dating, and at least plausible ones for an early one; he rejects firmly Brown's description of the mosaic as 'neo-classical'. The restoration of this important mosaic to its proper place is a valuable contribution; and D.'s detailed photographs allow a full appreciation of its technique, difficult to assess from previous publications. The next stage in the evolution is represented by the fragments showing a centaur and a stag (plus a lost fragment with geometric borders), which have gone further towards full tessellation, but retain some features of the earlier technique. After this, no other 'intermediate' pavements survive, and we come to the highly sophisticated *emblema* from Thmuis signed by Sophilos: a true 'painting in stone', with the fine '*vermiculatum*' technique fully developed.

These works, D. argues, illustrate an evolution taking place, through a continuous series of experiments, in Alexandria itself. Alexandria is thereby restored to its old place as a leader in the invention of the true mosaic technique, though D. allows the possibility that comparable evolutions, perhaps differing in detail and in the rhythm at which they took place, may have occurred in other parts of the Greek world. D.'s study has the advantage that it is based on works produced within a single city; and he is firm in drawing a distinction between such works in Alexandria, where a consistent technical evolution may be looked for, and mosaics of irregular tessellation from more remote parts of Egypt, which should rather be considered works of provincial craftsmanship attempting to imitate more sophisticated techniques. But his argument is open to the objection that the development he postulates is based upon very few examples, none of which is securely dated. His re-examination of the archaeological evidence makes plausible an early Ptolemaic dating for the Warrior and Hunting Eros mosaics, and allows a possible association of the centaur and stag fragments with a building of the reign of Euergetes; but it cannot prove even such approximate datings, let alone the fairly precise dates within 20–30 years which he proposes for each mosaic. Even the date around 200 B. C., normally accepted for the Sophilos *emblema*, is based principally upon the palaeographic considerations quoted by Brown (op. cit. 67, n. 197), which are not in fact very precise. I have myself considerable reservations as to whether our knowledge of the third century B. C. is yet clear enough to permit such absolute dates; even the parallels from outside Egypt, or in different media, which D. uses for comparison, are often at best only approximately dated, and there is a serious danger of circular arguments. D.'s hypothetical sequence, exemplified in his three mosaics, I find convincing: although other explanations are theoretically possible, this one is more plausible and has the merit of economy. But perhaps a caution should be advanced against accepting too literally the absolute dates proposed, better seen as guidelines to a sequence, and against any attempt to use this proposed evolution in Alexandria as a touchstone with which to compare examples from elsewhere in the Hellenistic world. D. himself rightly stresses that the pattern of evolution is likely to show itself as complex and manifold.

The next important works D. discusses are the two magnificent *emblemata* from Thmuis representing the

bust of a woman in military costume crowned with the prow of a ship and holding a beribboned *stylis*. These masterpieces have usually been identified as personifications of the city of Alexandria; but D. finds no examples of city personifications in Hellenistic or Roman art which would be comparable. After considering various possible parallels, he draws attention to the royal associations of costume and attributes, and concludes that the mosaics are copies of an idealised rendering of a Ptolemaic queen, most probably Berenice II, in her role as Agathe Tyche and bringer of victory. There are difficulties, notably the maritime character of the supposed portrait of a queen who was not specifically associated with any naval victory; and the armour seems more appropriate for a personification than for the portrait of a queen, however idealised. Perhaps we have here some sort of a composite figure, in which elements of the royal iconography are used for the personification of an abstract quality; it is a reminder of how little we know of the role played by art in the Hellenistic monarchies, and its part in shaping and disseminating their ideology.

Another question which arises is the part played by native Egyptian traditions and motifs in this essentially Greek art form. D. concludes that the earlier pavements are purely Greek in subject as in style, but that by later Ptolemaic times a few local Egyptian motifs are beginning to appear in the repertory. He has two examples, probably to be placed in the late Hellenistic period, which show features of the typical Nilotic landscape: one a fragment of an *emblema*, the other numerous small fragments of what must have been a very fine large landscape scene, including pygmies and aquatic flora and fauna. He further argues that such subjects may have been spread to Italy and elsewhere, either in the form of *emblemata*, which in his view were widely exported from Alexandria, or by actual emigrant craftsmen from Egypt, whose hand he is prepared to see in such works as the Palestrina Nile mosaic and the mosaics of the Casa del Fauno.

Technically the book is very handsomely produced. The excellent illustrations include four pages of good quality colour plates, which permit an appreciation of the character of the original works; the indices are extensive. A map would have been useful, and it may be hoped that one will be provided in the next volume. The English text is that of the author himself; it is generally clear and accurate, but contains a number of unidiomatic expressions (e. g. 'hithertofore interpretations', or 'a punctual incrustation'). The number of misprints is higher than one would expect, given the quality of production, and some are repeated more than once. Only once does this seriously interfere with the sense, when on p. 132 the diptych held by Klio is described as having 'a triangular, goblet top' (? read 'gabled'). But these are minor complaints. The value of D.'s work goes well beyond that of the collection of the material, important though this is. He cannot succeed entirely in restoring Alexandria to its proper position, or in delineating the character of 'Alexandrian' mosaics; the material is still too scanty, and too many of his suggestions must remain beyond the possibility of proof. But they may at least be taken as valuable working hypotheses, to be discussed and refined by later contributions or discoveries. In general, D. puts forward a case for the importance of the city as a centre of production in the Hellenistic and early Roman period which will have to be taken seriously in all future discussions.