

Wolfgang Ehrhardt, *Stilgeschichtliche Untersuchungen an römischen Wandmalereien von der späten Republik bis zur Zeit Neros*. Verlag Philipp von Zabern, Mainz 1987. VII, 169 Seiten, 14 Abbildungen, 118 Tafeln.

The Third Style of Pompeian wall-painting, first defined by A. MAU along with the other three 'Styles' in 1882, and subsequently studied in a monograph by A. IPPEL in 1910, had to wait till the late 1970s for a modern reassessment. The Dutch scholar H. G. BEYEN had intended to tackle it in the third volume of his monumental history 'Die pompejanische Wanddekoration vom zweiten bis zum vierten Stil' but had failed to complete the Second Style at the time of his death in 1965. The task fell to his pupil, F. L. BASTET, who in 1979, together with his own pupil MARIETTE DE VOS, published 'Una proposta per la classificazione del terzo stile pompeiano'. As its name implied, this offered a chronological framework for the style. Using the guiding principle laid down by Beyen – that Pompeian paintings evolved by a sequence of gradual changes in form and repertory – it divided the available material into two phases, each of which was subdivided into smaller groups: I A–C (dated approximately 20–10 B. C., 10–1 B. C., and A. D. 1–25), and II A–B (c. A. D. 25–35 and 35–45).

At the very time that Bastet was preparing his book W. Ehrhardt was working on a dissertation on the same theme at the University of Bonn (approved in 1977). The present volume is at once the published version of this dissertation and an attempt to correct and refine the results of Bastet. In many respects Ehrhardt and Bastet see eye to eye. Both, above all, accept the general thesis of Beyen that not only did the Fourth Style succeed the Third (whereas Ippel and Curtius had argued that the two emerged contemporaneously in different centres) but the change-over can be discerned taking place in Pompeii round the middle of the first century A. D. (this in opposition to Schefold, who has argued strongly that the Fourth Style was invented *ex novo* in Rome about A. D. 60 and reached Pompeii only after the earthquake of 62). Both, moreover, are in broad agreement about the relative dating of the majority of Third Style decorations (some significant exceptions will be mentioned below). The principal differences in Ehrhardt's analysis are that it allows more overlapping with the Second Style at the beginning and with the Fourth at the end, and that it admits a degree of revival of earlier schemes and motifs in the later years of the style. Ehrhardt also, unlike Bastet and other writers, who tend to contrast the fantastic character of Third Style architecture with the relative realism of Second, stresses its structural plausibility when conceived in terms of materials such as wood, ivory, gold, and glass. Only the proportions are exaggerated in their thinness and the statics therefore unrealistic.

The author has one enormous advantage over Bastet: his publishers have allowed him sufficient space and number of illustrations to argue his case in meticulous detail. Bastet was forced to summarise his conclusions relatively briefly, group by group, and monument by monument, without always being able to explain, still less to illustrate (he had only 16 line-drawings and a little over 100 photographs) the full processes of reasoning which brought him to them. Ehrhardt, on the other hand, can afford to develop his case logically from dated monuments to undated, and has no less than 558 photographs, including many

close-ups of ornament, to support his arguments. Further support is provided by a total of 1418 footnotes. His mastery and handling of all this detail is superb. Not only does he know every decorative detail of every surviving scrap of Third Style painting, but amid the many hundreds of comparisons and citations there is hardly a single false reference.

This advantage is coupled with a greater flexibility of approach. Unlike Bastet, Ehrhardt puts considerable emphasis not just upon the form and content of the decorations, but also upon their stylistic character; this enables him to establish, for example, that the decoration in *exedra G* in the House of the Gilded Cupids at Pompeii, though it shows superficial resemblances to early Third Style paintings, such as those of the Villa Imperiale, is in fact a later work borrowing motifs and ideas from the earlier period. Similarly with the black *triclinium* in the House of the Orchard, which seems to have been based on the same model as a *triclinium* in the House of the Beautiful Impluvium; the two decorations are not, as Bastet thought, contemporary, but the one (Beautiful Impluvium) is Augustan and the other Claudian. Ehrhardt is well aware that the chronology of Pompeian painting is not a neat chessboard on which every piece has its proper and clearly defined place. The role of taste, the cultural aspirations and financial resources of the patron, the function of the room, and simply the overlapping of different fashions – all tend to complicate the issue. Thus, while superficially similar decorations may belong to different phases, ostensibly different decorations may belong to the *same* phase. In at least one house where Bastet postulates separate periods of Third Style decoration (the House of the Gilded Cupids), Ehrhardt argues for a single phase in which rooms with different functions were deliberately accorded different treatments. In some cases he sees late-Second and early-Third Style decorations, or late-Third and early-Fourth, executed in the same house at the same time (e. g., respectively, the House of Paquius Proculus at Pompeii, and the House of the Tuscanic Colonnade at Herculaneum).

The book may be briefly summarised. After a chapter on external dating criteria, the decorations of Augustus's properties on the Palatine, that is the House of Augustus itself, the so-called House of Livia, and the Aula Isiaca, all rightly dated on historic evidence to a single phase round 30 B. C., form the starting-point for the assembling of a group of walls of the early Augustan period. This is extended, with the aid of epigraphically dated decorations in the pyramid of Cestius (before 12 B. C.) and the villa at Boscotrecase (soon after 11 B. C.), down to the end of the first century B.C. We thus have a sequence of walls spanning the end of the Second Style and the beginning of the Third, in which the 'candelabrum' and architectural styles, originally independent forms existing side by side, are forged into a new manner characterised by a closed wall with a central *aedicula* and miniature architecture in the upper zone. The architectural forms are exaggeratedly thin, and as time goes on there is a tendency towards greater freedom and fantasy in the ornament. For the period from Augustus to Claudius the author starts with a *terminus ante quem* of A. D. 42 (not used by Bastet) for paintings in the Great Palaestra at Pompeii, and builds up a small group of Caligulan decorations, whose general placing is confirmed by their relation to the original paintings in the *columbarium* of Pomponius Hylas in Rome (built between 19 and 37). Further decorations are then fitted in the late-Augustan and Tiberian periods on the grounds that they show dependence in scheme or ornament upon the Boscotrecase phase but seem to be earlier than the Caligulan group. The general tendency of the time is initially towards denser and richer ornament, but by the Caligulan period the structure of the wall becomes less clear and coherent, with the central *aedicula* less dominant, and the threefold vertical and horizontal divisions less rigid; at the same time the ornament loses something of the fine linear quality of Augustan times.

Finally, for the Claudian and Neronian periods up to 62, the author again begins at the end, identifying early-Fourth and transitional Third-Fourth Style decorations which ante-date the earthquake, whether on archaeological grounds (House of Paquius Proculus, House of the Bear, and House of the Mirror at Pompeii), or on the evidence of tile-stamps (the upper peristyle of the Villa San Marco at Stabiae, dated soon after c. 50). Once more the gap is filled by decorations which carry on the trends of the preceding phase and anticipate those of the new one. Characteristic of the Claudian and early-Neronian groups is the role of the architectural elements, which on the one hand become more plastic and include perspectival structures seen through fictive windows, and on the other are subordinated to rhythmic patterns of fields in contrasting colours. The ornamental borders acquire greater variety and richer colouring (notably in the Houses of M. Lucretius Fronto and L. Caecilius Jucundus), before becoming simpler once more, in anticipation of the typical stencil-like 'Filigranborten' of the Fourth Style. It is one of the characteristics of this

late phase that it incorporates reminiscences of early-Third or even Second Style work; so a final, especially interesting, section is devoted to the question of 'copies' and 'retrospective' decorations. Most of the examples discussed show selective borrowings rather than wholesale imitation, and the motive behind them appears to have been a kind of nostalgia on the part of the householder; in one case, the House of Caecilius Jucundus, the retrospective *décor* is reserved for a particular room, the *triclinium*, while other rooms were decorated in the contemporary manner. This phenomenon goes part of the way towards accounting for Schefold's 'pseudo-Third' Style: the Swiss scholar sensed that the relevant decorations were different in feeling from others of the Third Style but preferred to place them in the Vespasianic period as a kind of reaction to the excesses of the early Fourth Style.

In an Appendix, the author examines the famous passage of Vitruvius which attacks anti-realistic trends in contemporary (that is late-Second Style) wall-painting. He concludes that the criticisms of Vitruvius and his like were not without success, because half-plant and half-animal forms disappear in the Third Style, only to reappear at the beginning of the Fourth; and even the 'stalk-columns' and 'aedicula-like forms supported by candelabra', though remaining popular, are modified in such a way as to lose the structural ambiguities and inconsistencies of the late Second Style.

With such a rich feast there is very little cause to quibble. It is a pity that space could not have been found for an examination of the style of the central picture-panels, which might both have reinforced the results of the decorative analysis and have benefited from it. But that was not part of the author's terms of reference. More important, one wonders whether the emphasis on realism in the Third Style is not slightly overstated. It is true that many of the architectural and other elements are relatively realistic if conceived in terms of wood and precious materials – much more realistic than the components of some interiors in Art Nouveau. But the way in which the elements are used, and the overall accumulation of effects, is unrealistic. Though, as Ehrhardt rightly observes, the Second Style is in its own way equally unreal, nonetheless its structures remain, till the final stages, relatively coherent and convincing in their organisation. In the Third Style, however, the architectural structures tend to be used sporadically and often seem, though technically feasible, to be meaningless fancies, playful concoctions of maypoles and matchsticks (see, e. g., the upper zone of the wall from *triclinium t* in the House of Spurius Mesor). The artists are more interested in effects of ornament and colour than in creating a fiction of reality.

A further point which may be a little overstated is the sharp differentiation between the late Third and early Fourth Style. On p. 132, for instance, we read: 'sowohl hier als auch in den anderen späten Wandmalereien Dritten Stils finden sich Motive, die Verbindungen zwischen diesen beiden typologisch unterschiedlichen Dekorationsarten herstellen. Aber diese Motive bleiben vereinzelt, gewinnen in keinem Fall so an Bedeutung, daß es schwerfiele zu entscheiden, welcher Dekorationsart die betreffende Wand zuzuordnen ist'. This may be true of the House of the Tuscanic Colonnade at Herculaneum, but elsewhere it is more difficult to draw the distinction. The paintings of the House of Trebius Valens, for example, which the author would classify as early Fourth Style, seem to me still rooted in the Third; many of the motifs look ahead towards the new manner, but the overall effect remains that of the old. The same may perhaps be said of other decorations not considered by the author such as the green room (*oecus 11*) in the House of Menander, which to H. G. BEYEN had all the hallmarks of the transition from Third to Fourth Style (Nederlands Kunsthist. Jaarboek 5, 1954, 199–210). Here the vocabulary of the two styles intermingles in such a way that ascription to one or the other seems artificial. This is not to deny the validity of the main point which the author seeks to make: that the Fourth Style does not evolve *inevitably* out of the Third (cf. p. 151). Only the abruptness of the change should not be exaggerated.

One innovation which is fundamental to Ehrhardt's chronology is his early dating of the so-called 'candelabrum' style. Instead of being a phenomenon of the years after c. 20 B. C., it is pushed back into the 30s and 20s and becomes a feature of the late Second Style, existing alongside the architectural schemes of this time (House of Livia, House of Augustus, Aula Isiaca, House of the Cryptoportico, House of M. Obellius Firmus, etc.). Paratactic decorations articulated by candelabra certainly occur alongside architectural decorations in the Farnesina villa, but this belongs to a slightly more developed phase. It is difficult, in particular, to believe that the very fanciful candelabrum decoration in *triclinium n* of the Caserma dei Gladiatori at Pompeii can, as the author proposes, be as early as the time of the House of Augustus. I would prefer a date in the last decade B. C.; that there were building operations (and thus perhaps some re-decorating) in progress in at least part of the house at that time is suggested by the presence of stamped tiles of

11 B. C. The Caserma decoration would therefore be contemporary with the Third Style paintings of the villa at Boscotrecase, which produced specimens of the same tile-stamps (see Ehrhardt, pp. 4 f., against Bastet and others who prefer a later date on stylistic grounds). The candelabrum decoration in a niche in the *tablinum* of the House of Paquius Proculus could well be earlier, say about 20 B. C., and, as Ehrhardt argues, contemporary with the late Second Style paintings in the same house. The Farnesina decorations would belong about the same time. But it seems unnecessary to push the beginnings of the style back much further (though candelabra make tentative appearances in a few architectural decorations, e. g. at the corners of room 7 in the House of Augustus). Ehrhardt's case for early dating rests ultimately on a problematic graffito cut in plaster painted in the candelabrum style in Pompeii V 4, b. This graffito, now lost along with the plaster, was restored by Mau to give a pair of dates *Vk(alendas), idu(s) Qui(ntiles)* (CIL IV 6778); and, since the month Quintilis was re-named 'Julius' between 46 and 44 B. C., it ought to date no later than this time. MAU played down the importance of the *terminus ante quem*, arguing that someone could have used the old month-name much later than 44 (cf. *Röm. Mitt.* 16, 1901, 361). Ehrhardt asserts its validity; nevertheless he allows a margin of about fifteen years after 44, and thus dates the beginning of the candelabrum style in the 30s. To this reviewer the whole argument seems fraught with uncertainty. Leaving aside the reading and interpretation of the graffito (which possibly has nothing to do with dates at all), Ehrhardt seems to want to have his cake and eat it. He criticises Mau's chronology of the candelabrum style because it pays insufficient respect to the *terminus ante quem* of 44, while at the same time proposing a chronology of his own which undermines the same *terminus*. If he accepts that 'Quintilis' could still be used in the 30s, he might as well allow it in the 20s or later. Perhaps there were Republican sympathisers at Pompeii who had ideological objections to using the month-name 'Julius'!

All these are cavils. W. Ehrhardt has made a remarkable contribution to the study of the Third Style in particular, and of Roman painting in general. He has opened new insights into the way that the decorative styles evolved and has challenged a number of accepted views about the chronological framework of Pompeian painting. If this book provokes the necessary re-examination of some of our basic tenets, it may prove to be a turning-point in the historiography of the subject.