
This book, the first volume of two, examines one of the thorniest problems in classical archaeology: the existence or otherwise of an indigenous Italian tradition in the visual arts from the middle period of the Republic to the end of the Julio-Claudian era. Comprehensive and careful, its investigation of the questions involved is facilitated by an impressively large collection of good-quality illustrations, over 200 in all; whatever other criticisms may be levelled at the argument, these and the author's detailed descriptions of each piece alone constitute a valuable contribution to the literature on Roman art.

The book opens with an extended résumé of opinions concerning the possibility of the survival of an authentically 'native' artistic tradition in late republican and early imperial central Italy, a definition of its distinguishing characteristics as against the 'official', largely Hellenised, art of the metropolis, and an attempt to determine its origins and significance in Italian society. On p.29 the author concludes by declaring her allegiance to the (Marxist-based) views of Bianchi-Bandinelli, with one important qualification: that considering the spread of its clientele the tradition should be deemed 'Italian' rather than 'plebeian'. Characteristic of this 'Italian' substrate are: in the choice of themes an insistence on concrete reportage of actual events (triumphal, funerary and other processions, gladiatorial shows, sacrifices, weddings, industrial and pastoral scenes); and in the area of style, a decided preference for crabbed movement, dumpy proportions, no-nonsense anatomy and clothing, realistic portraiture, frontality, paratactic composition, 'hierarchical' scale and an 'explanatory', non-naturalistic perspective that finds its most developed expression in the 'birds-eye' views of the Neronian period onward. This tradition matures in the later second century B.C., is regularly contaminated by neo-Attic Hellenism under Caesar and Augustus, but liberates itself progressively thereafter, especially under Nero. A second volume is promised for the remainder of the story.

In the field of iconography, the author is almost certainly right; the evidence for her view is overwhelming, and her careful handling of themes and motifs goes far to prove her point. Her search for an authentic Italian *style*, however, is less successful. In the republican monuments, the impression is less of a continuous tradition that stands confidently on its own two feet than a series of spasmodic responses to Hellenistic influence, apparently often transmitted at second or third hand. Thus, frontality and paratactic composition are not major components of the earliest monuments, but surface only in the later second century – precisely the time of their first real popularity in the Hellenistic East, on monuments like the Hekataion at Laguna or the Lakrateides votive in Eleusis; for crabbed movement one need look no further than the Polybius stele from Kleitor, for dumpy proportions and 'no-nonsense' anatomy and clothing the
frieze of the temple of Artemis Leukophryene at Magnesia. Or take the contrary case, when the artist works in isolation: separation from the source of inspiration may not hamper the desire, but it certainly takes away the performance — the early first-century Volterra urn, fig. 17, is an excellent example, with its procession of etiolated figures arranged schematically in a row. Significantly, Zanker has observed exactly the same processes at work on republican engraved gems (Hellenismus in Mittelitalien 585, re M.L. Vollenwieder’s Porträtmimen der römischen Republik), a genre entirely overlooked by Felletti Maj.

The sections on republican painting, and on Caesarian and Augustan art, are more satisfactory; the suggestion (p.150) that the Esquiline paintings already show continuous narrative c. 250 is most thought-provoking, as is the author’s account of historical and triumphal painting in general. Even here, though, one must sound a note of caution: comparison of the surviving republican paintings with those published in Delos vol. ix show many points of similarity, casting doubt on the formation of much in the way of an authentically Italian painting style before the end of the late republic. The evidence for such a development taking place at this time in both sculpture and painting is indeed far stronger, but here again the Hellenistic background is ignored. Late republican art, in my view, must be seen as a local offshoot of, and solidly based upon, the late Hellenistic realism of, e.g. the ‘Ölwald’ relief from Athens, the latest Delian portraits, and the later East Greek funerary and votive reliefs: a mistaken belief that Neo-Attic prettiness is the sole legacy of Hellenism to late Republican Rome does much to obscure the true roots of this, the last of the great Hellenistic schools and the first both in large part created by, and ministering to, a non-Greek nation — hence its peculiarly unstable, hybrid and protean character.

Under Augustus, the pull of official classicism is strong, and for a time dominates even the local workshops; centrifugal tendencies soon reassert themselves, however, and ‘Italian’ tastes set out to conquer new fields — diagonally-based centripetal compositions (e.g. fig. 158 — one is reminded of Brueghel’s ‘Village Wedding’), bird’s eye perspective and so on. Yet here again one feels stirrings of unease — the former derives from a mythological scene in the Domus Aurea (p.329), the latter from an imperial coin-type of 64 (p.306): where does official court art end and ‘native’ art begin? At times, the terminological problem becomes acute: if fig. 172, dedicated in the precinct of the temple of Vespasian by a leading Pompeian magistrate is not ‘official’ art (p.340) by definition, it is difficult to see what else could be. The concept of genre as at least partially determinative of style, which the author rejects on p.33 as eventually ‘completely destructive of all artistic sincerity and integrity’ perhaps indicates the exit to the labyrinth: when sculptors are slaves and sculptural style largely programmatic in intent, artistic integrity is unlikely to feature prominently in the overall spectrum of values.
These reservations apart, I noted a certain number of omissions, minor errors and misconceptions, as follows. Fulvius Nobilior’s *artifices* were actors, not sculptors (p.60); J.M.C. Toynbee’s article on historical painting (*Proc. Br. Acad.* 1953) surely deserves a reference on p.62; on p.110 the author’s remarks are puzzling till one realises that the order of the illustrations in fig. 24 is a, b, e, d, c; on p.124, what is Hellenistic about composition in registers? (read in n.140 ‘p.152’ here); the list of possibilities canvassed for the Munich slabs from the Domitius-Ara ignores that of importation — they are of bluish Asian marble, while the Paris slabs are Pentelic (p.175); (see now T.P. Wiseman, *Greece and Rome* 21 (1974) 160 for the date of the Paris slabs); Italian Doric bucrania friezes are anticipated in the theatre frieze at Delos (pp.202-3); *imagines maiorum* surely deserve more than the brief reference accorded to them on p.215; on p.257 the discussion of Ptolemaic ‘impressionism’ and *ars compendiaria* (a red herring if ever there was one) omits B.R. Brown’s *Ptolemaic Painting and Mosaics* and Pollitt’s discussion in *The Ancient View of Greek Art*, not to mention virtually all other contributions since Vessberg; on p.308 Helen Waterhouse’s authoritative restoration of the Palestrina mosaic in her *Dal Pozzo—Albani Drawings* is overlooked; and finally on hunting (p.344) see V. von Graeve’s *Der Alexandersarcophag* and Hölscher’s *Griechische Historienbilder*.

Unfortunately for the author, it appears that a substantial interval elapsed between completion of her work (I noted no references after 1973) and publication: in the interval a number of fundamental contributions to the problem have appeared, including *Hellenismus in Mittelitalien*, Vollenwieder’s *Porträtgemmen* and Crawford’s *Roman Republican Coinage*. If the book has indeed been sitting on its publisher’s desk for four years, then a section of addenda should have been included to bring it up to date.

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