Table of contents of fascicule 1

Articles

Author	Title	Page
S. Tusa & J. Royal	The landscape of the naval battle at the Egadi Islands (241 B.C.)	7
A. Roppa & P. van Dommelen	Rural settlement and land-use in Punic and Roman Republican Sardinia	49
L. de Ligt & P. Garnsey	The Album of Herculaneum and a model of the town's demography	69
E. E. Poehler	The drainage system at Pompeii: mechanisms, operation and design	95
C. Corsi, P. S. Johnson & F. Vermeulen	A geomagnetic survey of *Ammaia*: a contribution to understanding Roman urbanism in Lusitania	121
J. A. Baird	Re-excavating the houses of Dura-Europos	146
K. B. Stern	Tagging sacred space in the Dura-Europos synagogue	171
M. Kenawi, E. Macaulay-Lewis & J. S. McKenzie	A commercial nursery near Abu Hummus (Egypt) and re-use of amphoras for the trade in plants	195
B. A. Robinson	Mount Helikon and the Valley of the Muses: the production of a sacred space	227
A. de Pury-Gysel	*Aventicum* (Avenches), capital of the *Helvetii*: a history of research, 1985-2010. Part II. Urban development after A.D. 100, crafts, and finds	259
W. S. Hanson & I. A. Oltean	The 'Valu lui Traian': a Roman frontier rehabilitated	297
J. Weisweiler	From equality to asymmetry: honorific statues, imperial power, and senatorial identity in late-antique Rome	319
B. Munro	Recycling, demand for materials, and landownership at villas in Italy and the western provinces in late antiquity	351

Archaeological notes

Author	Title	Page
	A debate on the temple of Apollo Palatinus	
T. P. Wiseman	*Roma Quadrata*, archaic huts, the house of Augustus, and the orientation of Palatine Apollo	371
S. Zink	Old and new archaeological evidence for the plan of the Palatine temple of Apollo	388
	— — — — —	
O. Peleg-Barkat	The relative chronology of tomb façades in Early Roman Jerusalem and power displays by the élite	403
L. C. Lancaster	A new vaulting technique for early baths in Sussex: the anatomy of a Romano-British invention	419
K. W. Slane	Remaining Roman in death at an eastern colony	441
K. Jackson	'She who changes' (*Amibousa*): a re-examination of the triangular table from Pergamon	456
B. I. Sandor	The genesis and performance characteristics of Roman chariots	475
S. Keay, G. Earl, F. Felici *et al.*	Interim report on an enigmatic new Trajanic building at Portus	486
A. Cameron	Basilius and his diptych again: career titles, seats in the Colosseum, and issues of stylistic dating	513

Table of contents of fascicule 2

Reviews

N. Purcell	Sanctuaries in inner space	535
A. Landskron	Zeichen des Sieges und Zeichen der Niederlage	541
V. Kozlovskaya	Modern "barbarology" in action	545
T. Ramsby	Barbarians on their own terms	552
J. Sewell	House and household: Greek and Roman domestic complexity	560
V. Jolivet	Maisons étrusques, jardins romains: à la recherche des paradigmes perdus	564
H. W. Horsnæs	A South Italian kaleidoscope	577
R. Goffredo	Beyond Brundisium: a synthesis on Roman landscapes of southern Apulia	580
F. Colivicchi	Apulian landscapes in the *longue durée*	586
P. Visonà	Hannibal's War: the view from southern Italy	593
C. Machado	The epigraphy of the *plebs frumentaria*	599
P. Scotton	Drawings and design in ancient architecture	602
N. de Chaisemartin	*Frontes scaenae* et la part du religieux dans le théâtre	607
F. S. Kleiner	A view of Roman art	613
P. E. Knox	Written in the leaves: cracking the code of the Ara Pacis	616
T. E. Reeves	A new approach to Greek female portrait statues	618
E. P. Baltes	The aesthetics of replication: Large Herculaneum Woman statues in context	622
M. Koortbojian	Recent sarcophagus studies	631
K. Fittschen	Über das Umarbeiten römischer Porträts	637
C. Weiß	Das Kameoglas im British Museum	644
E. Swift	Other kinds of glass in the Louvre	651
S. L. Tuck	A catalogue of lighthouses, and questions arising	653
T. P. Wiseman	Where did they live (e.g., Cicero, Octavius, Augustus)?	656
S. E. Craver	Pompeii: some art, industry, and infrastructure	673
N. Monteix	De Waldstein à Wallace-Hadrill, fouiller Herculanum?	680
S. E. Craver	A panoply of archaeo-sciences from the Vesuvian area and beyond	690
A. J. Ammerman	Altinum and early Venice	696
M. J. Carter	Romans like us	704
M. Carroll	The Companionship of all types of families	708
V. Dasen	In search of ancient childhood, good and bad	712
V. Hutchinson Pennanen	The 99.5%: Rome's silent majority	716
A. L. C. Emmerson	Death, funerals and memory in literature and art	719
K. Nikolai	Re-assessing the Column of Marcus Aurelius	722
M. Sommer	The mysterious Elagabalus	726
J. C. N. Coulston	Greece and Rome (and their enemies) at war	729
G. Davies	Roman warfare: the *longue durée*?	748
J. P. Roth	Ideologies of discipline in the Roman military	750
M. Fanello	The complexities of ancient money	759
A. H. Merrills	Geographies	763
R. Häussler	A motley collection on landscape and religion	768
R. Hingley	Genealogies of empire: rethinking Roman imperialism for the 21st century	770
M. Millett	Perceptions of the imperial landscape	772
I. A. Oltean	Being Roman, locally	776
J. Sewell	A deficient picture of the city in the West	781
A. Rogers	Archaeologies of the North Sea and Channel	788
R. Ling	The finale of the corpus of mosaics of Britain	793
A. Booth	Exploring the artefacts of Roman Britain in their everyday contexts	801

M. Guggisberg — The Hoxne treasure — 804
P. Gros — Découvertes anciennes et recherches récentes: la renaissance d'une cité romaine de Bétique à partir des archives et des fouilles — 809
W. E. Mierse — A miscellany on Roman Spain and France — 811
S. Keay — An unsophisticated view of the economy of *Hispania* — 816
M. Kulikowski — Villas and settlements in southern Portugal — 820
R. Häussler — Sanctuaries on the periphery of Gallic towns — 822
R. Ling — New work on wall-painting and interior decoration in Gaul — 825
B. Hoffmann — The wooden finds from Vindonissa — 828
D. L. Bomgardner — A breakthrough from the frontier: from Augst to the heart of empire — 831
J. Rossiter — Roman spectacles in the Mauretanian provinces — 841
D. Boschung — Die Porträtplastik von Cherchell — 844
A. Gavini — Nuove luci su *Lepcis Magna* tardoromana — 848
E. M. Ruprechtsberger — Englische Archäologen im Land der Garamanten — 853
K. W. Slane — Corinth as context: more contributions on Corinthian society, cults, and the Isthmus — 858
E. Rizos — Roman-Christian Thessalonike — 864
J. E. Francis & G. W. M. Harrison — The long story of Gortyn — 870
S. Dillon — Roman marble sculpture in Miletus — 876
G. A. Plattner — Die dorische Ordnung im kaiserzeitlichen Kleinasien — 879
R. E. Kolarik — The first volume of the new Corpus of Mosaics of Turkey: Byzantine workshops at Xanthos — 884
C. P. Jones — Inscriptions of Ankara — 888
W. E. Metcalf — The monetary system in the Roman East: *caveat lector* — 894
M. Fischer — The material finds of Caesarea Maritima — 899
H. Dey — Caesarea Maritima from Strato to Heraclius — 901
L. I. Levine — Interpreting the synagogue at Nabratein — 905
M. Heinzelmann — Die Nekropolen von Eleutheropolis — zum Stand der römisch-frühbyzantinischen Gräberforschung im Heiligen Land — 909
I. E. Schrüfer-Kolb — Plaster moulds and casts for bronze-casting and bronze-working at Petra — 914
S. T. Parker — Water and more at Humayma — 924
Th. Rehren — Archaeometric (isotopic) studies on glass and glazes — 927
T. V. Buttrey — Coin hoards and finds from Egypt and Syria — 930
C. Grey — Late Roman slavery — 932
M. Vessey — The end of the pagan classics? — 939
M. R. Salzman — Why 410? — 947
S. T. Stevens — North Africa — and the Vandals — made manifest — 950
S. T. Stevens — Updating the archaeological record of Haïdra (*Ammaedara*) — 954
Ch. Eger — An extramural cemetery at Seville: the late-antique phase and matters of interpretation — 959
P. Arthur — Élite housing and society in late antiquity — 964
P. Delogu — Monks and their spaces — 965
J. Crow — A Balkan trilogy — 969
G. Fowden — The Umayyad horizon — 974
A. Wallace-Hadrill — Giuseppe Fiorelli and a different kind of statue — 983
C. C. Mattusch — Plaster casts: past, present and future — 985
J. Freed — The unvarnished story of archaeology in Carthage and Tunisia — 988
H. R. Hurst — The Reverend Nathan Davis, adventurer at Carthage — 996
S. E. Ostrow — The life and times of Francis W. Kelsey — 999
S. Dyson — Museums and the market in antiquities — 1004
BOOKS RECEIVED — 1008
BOOKS REVIEWED IN THIS ISSUE — 1017

The finale of the corpus of mosaics of Britain

Roger Ling

STEPHEN R. COSH and DAVID S. NEAL, *ROMAN MOSAICS OF BRITAIN*, vol. IV: *WESTERN BRITAIN* (The Society of Antiquaries of London, 2010). Pp. xviii + 453, figs. 435 (including colour), 1 colour folder. ISBN 978-0-85431-294-8. £160.

This volume, appearing 8 years after the first, is the fourth and final installment of the two authors' major corpus of Romano-British mosaics. The scope and quality of their achievement has been assessed by the present writer in previous reviews[1] and needs little rehearsal here. Suffice it to say that each volume seems to be an improvement on its predecessor, and many of the weaknesses noted in the initial review have now been eliminated. The layout makes better use of the high-quality paper; the English, while not always smooth, is generally clear; and the citation of references is more careful. Above all, the reproduction of the authors' colour paintings, which form the nucleus of the record, does them full justice, avoiding the errors that blighted vols. I and II.

The material covered by the new volume is focused mainly on the counties of Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire, but also includes Herefordshire and Worcestershire and the Welsh border counties, as well as isolated discoveries along the coastal margins of Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire. Of the urban sites, the most important are Cirencester, which has yielded 63 mosaics, including one outside the city walls; Gloucester (41, including 3 extra-mural), and Caerwent (59, again with 3 extra-mural). The rural sites include a number of spectacular villas, notably Woodchester and Chedworth (both Glos.) (22 and 18 mosaics, respectively) and North Leigh (Oxon.) (19). In addition, there are mosaics from two military sites, the fortresses of Caerleon and Chester, where mosaics were laid principally in bath-buildings but also in other buildings such as the commandant's house.[2]

As in previous volumes, this material is catalogued by counties, each prefaced by an introduction describing the geographical and historical context, while individual sites are listed alphabetically. There are also, in this last volume, two major appendices. The first lists discoveries that came too late to be included in the first three volumes, plus corrections and amplifications of discussions in those volumes. The second, compiled with the help of M. Cosh, gives a useful set of potted biographies of draughtsmen who have recorded Romano-British mosaics over the centuries, from William Camden (at the turn of the 16th/17th c.) to the present.[3] At the beginning of the volume, the general introduction broadly follows the format of its predecessors, with sections on the history of the region, the story of discoveries of mosaics, an account of the buildings and rooms in which mosaics occur, a survey of the subjects of figured mosaics, an analysis of workshops and the organisation of the mosaics industry, a review of decorative schemes, and comments on the materials used to make the tesserae. This last volume, however, has two additional sections. The first, inspired (it is claimed) by the fact that the publication date of 2010 is the 1600th anniversary of the notional end of Roman government in Britain, is a valuable survey of the fate of mosaics at the end of the Roman period: here an important observation is that some mosaics were systematically removed from principal reception rooms to turn them into working spaces, thus distorting the pattern of distribution within many residential buildings. The second section, on the legacy of Romano-British mosaics, explores how mosaic patterns may have influenced the Celtic insular art of the post-Roman period.[4]

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1 *JRA* 16 (2003) 625-30; *CR* 57 (2007) 538-40; *CR* 60 (2010) 580-81.

2 Here it should be noted that the labyrinth mosaic at Caerleon, previously attributed to the *principia*, is now convincingly re-assigned to the *praetorium*: see M. Lewis, "The Isca *praetorium* reconsidered," *The Monmouthshire Antiquary* 27 (2011) 17-34.

3 One surprising omission is R. H. Moyes, despite the acknowledgement (410) of his work at Colchester.

4 This is less useful, because the analysis is too superficial and often difficult to understand; it is far from clear, for example, how "classical literature such as Virgil's *Aeneid*, possibly one of the sources for battle scenes, and Bede, expressing himself in Virgil's vocabulary" (31), are relevant to the discussion.

Unusually for Britain, the region under consideration has yielded several mosaics of the 2nd c. in villas as opposed to town-houses (e.g. at Great Witcombe [Glos.] and probably one pavement at North Leigh). Only in the area immediately north of London is there a comparable concentration of rural mosaics at this time; presumably these were two regions where the early advance of Romanisation and the spread of wealth favoured investment in rural properties. Most of the mosaics, including most in the towns, belong to the 4th c., when the western part of Britain, now the separate province of *Britannia Prima* with its capital at Cirencester, evidently enjoyed something of a golden age. Here, protected to some extent from the insecurity which affected the eastern parts of Britain, prosperity continued late. One mosaic, at Hucclecote (Glos.), may even be as late as the early 5th c.: stratified coin evidence indicates a date no earlier than A.D. 395.

Among the highlights of this volume are the Great Orpheus pavement at Woodchester, the largest and best known mosaic in Britain (it earns a special folder at the back of the volume to showcase Neal's painting), and the various other mosaics which show Orpheus playing his lyre in a roundel surrounded by friezes of parading birds and animals. These are ascribed to D. J. Smith's so-called Corinian Orpheus school of mosaicists, but Cosh and Neal cautiously and sensibly play down the closeness of the links between them (see further below): they rightly point out that only the Woodchester pavement, the similar (but much smaller) mosaic from Barton Farm near Cirencester, and the Bacchic and Seasons mosaic at Chedworth can confidently be assigned to the same team of craftsmen.

Alongside the Corinian Orpheus mosaics, the largely geometric pavements of the Corinian Saltire School are subjected to careful scrutiny (19-21), and once again the authors are careful to avoid over-rigid categorisation; but they draw attention to a number of outliers beyond the immediate region, notably at Halstock (Dorset), Lopen and Queen Camel (Somerset) and, more remarkably, at Old Broad Street in London. For these they postulate a possible sub-group based in Ilchester rather than Cirencester. The isolation of the London example, however, points to a special commission for which the mosaicists were brought from a considerable distance because of a lack of craftsmen closer at hand.

Of the new discoveries included in Appendix I a few merit special mention. Further excavation of the mosaic at Croughton (vol. I, mosaic 86.1) has revealed more of the elaborate framing patterns round the scene of Bellerophon slaying the Chimaera.[5] At Pillerton Priors (Warks.), a plough-damaged pavement features a central *crater* in a tondo with stylised floral motifs in lunettes at the sides and quadrants in the corners. At Dinnington (Somerset) (vol. II, mosaics 196.1-2), more material has been discovered, including figured fragments one of which shows the upper part of a female apparently sprouting leaves, so possibly to be interpreted as Daphne.[6] Most remarkable amongst the new finds, however, is a pavement at Yarford (Somerset), excavated in 2003-4; its scheme of large concentric rings of pattern which seem to pass behind a rectangular grid is paralleled elsewhere only in 2nd-c. mosaics at Colchester and Verulamium in the east of Britain, yet not only is Yarford in the southwest, it also seems to date to the 4th c.

The Caerleon "thyrsolonchus"

There are few iconographic issues on which I would wish to challenge Cosh and Neal, but one exception concerns an object in the corner of a pavement in the legionary baths at Caerleon (334-37, mosaic 482.3).[7] Pear-shaped with a long tapering point, it is grey-black in colour but carries vein-like markings in white, red, yellow and grey-blue, while black and white 'streamers' fly out from it to left and right. For some years, following an idea of G. C. Boon, this object has been identified as the terminal of a *thyrsus* (or, rather, of a

5 To the bibliography cited on 394 can now be added M. Dawson and D. S. Neal, "Fragments and further excavation of the Bellerophon mosaic from Croughton," *Britannia* 41 (2010) 313-16.

6 Here the interpretation of fragment B (fig. 417b) as a left-handed lyre-player is very unconvincing.

7 Cf. R. Ling, "Mosaics for the military: the evidence from Caerleon," *Mosaic* 35 (2008) 16-22.

thyrsolonchus, a spear disguised as a *thyrsus*) whose shaft is hidden,[8] but it is doubtful whether the crowning element on its own would have been sufficient to enable the ancient viewer to make the necessary identification. Cosh and Neal have a radically different theory. They think that the object is "a flat fish with rounded eyes and reed-like fins" such as is found on an aquatic mosaic at Great Witcombe (mosaic 433.2). Similar objects are carved on a tombstone from Alchester (Oxon.) commemorating a veteran of *legio II Augusta* which was stationed at Caerleon, so perhaps the fish in question was an emblem of the legion, alongside the better-known capricorn.

I am unconvinced. The flat fish represented (twice or thrice) on the Great Witcombe mosaic is probably to be identified as a torpedo fish (*torpedo torpedo*), defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "having an almost circular body with tapering tail". There are certainly similarities between this creature and the Caerleon object, but the latter does not seem to have eyes, and the streamers trailing from it seem too long for the "reed-like fins". Furthermore, it has a neck and loop-like attachment at the rounded end, for which a torpedo offers no parallel. Most important, it appears far too stiff and inflexible to have passed as a fish. The object was surely not a fish but an amphora. This would account for the rigidity and for the long tapering point, designed to be inserted in the ground; it would also explain the loop, which would have been one of a pair of handles attached at the neck (the other has not survived). The streamers are surely fronds of seaweed, indicating that the vessel has been raised from the sea. Such a marine subject would be no less appropriate for the decoration of a room in the baths than Cosh and Neal's flat fish. Although I can point to no precise parallel for an artistic depiction of a seaweed-festooned amphora, there is abundant testimony, both from literary sources and from underwater excavations, that goods were recovered from shipwrecks in antiquity, just as they have been in modern times. We hear of professional divers who undertook salvage operations in return for keeping a proportion of what they brought up.[9] A visual reference to this practice may be offered by a mosaic in the House of the Cryptoportico at Pompeii, which shows a pair of swimmers trying unsuccessfully to retrieve an amphora, which is breaking in two as they lift it.[10] It is unreasonable to reject the evidence of this mosaic, as Cosh and Neal do, on the grounds that "it" [presumably the amphora] "would be meaningless without the swimmers". The presence of the seaweed would have been a sufficient visual clue to enable viewers to make the link with marine salvage, especially in the context of a mosaic that also featured marine fauna (a red crescent-shaped object in an adjacent field is best interpreted as the tail of a fish or some genus of sea-creature).

What next?

The corpus of Romano-British mosaics is a truly monumental achievement. The bare statistics reported in a recent newsletter (March 2011) of ASPRoM, the *Association for the Study and Preservation of Roman Mosaics* (the British branch of AIEMA, the *Association Internationale pour l'Étude de la Mosaïque Antique*) ("a total of 1944 pages and 2842 images published in four volumes which list 1949 mosaics") hardly begin to do justice to the scale of the undertaking. Its beginnings go back to 1959 when D. S. Neal carried out his first 1 : 10 drawing of a Roman mosaic at Verulamium. Over the following half-century, he and S. R. Cosh (who began his career as a mosaics illustrator in the early 1980s) have hand-painted a large proportion of the mosaic pavements discovered in the province. They have been actively working on the publication of their record for nearly 20 years. Its completion represents, in a real sense, the culmination of the study of Romano-British mosaics; but it is also a starting point, for it provides the raw material for deeper analysis. In what areas should further research develop?

Alongside the basic recording, the major contribution of the authors (and particularly of Cosh) has been to refine our picture of the regional groupings of mosaicists working in Britain.

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8 G. C. Boon, "The design of the Backhall Street mosaic," in J. D. Zienkiewicz, *The legionary baths at Caerleon* I. *The buildings* (Cardiff 1986) 273-76.

9 See *Dig.* 14.2.4.1; generally on the activities of ancient divers see E. Nardi, "*De urinatoribus*: ovvero dei 'sub' nell'antichità," *RendAccSciBologna* 73 (1984-85) 51-63. Modern excavators of shipwrecks have observed signs of amphorae having been salvaged in antiquity: see, e.g., A. Tchernia *et al.*, *L'épave romaine de la Madrague de Giens (Var) (campagnes 1972-1975)* (Gallia Suppl. 34, 1978) 29-31. I am grateful to A. Marzano for giving me advice on this topic.

10 *Pompei: pitture e mosaici* I: *Regio I, parte prima* (Rome 1990) 274-77, figs. 144-49.

The groundwork for this research was laid by Smith, who in a series of articles published between the late 1950s and early 1980s identified a series of what he called schools or workshops based in different parts of the province.[11] For the 2nd c. he postulated two groups, one working broadly in the east of Britain (the Eastern Tradition), the other in the west (the Western Tradition). For the 4th c. (the 3rd c. represents something of a hiatus in British mosaic production) he proposed 5 main schools, two based in Cirencester (the Corinian Orpheus and Corinian Saltire Schools), and one each at Dorchester (Dorset) (the Durnovarian School), at Brough on Humber (Yorks.) (the Petuarian School), and at Water Newton (Cambs.) (the Durobrivan School), to which he subsequently added a grouping identified by D. Johnston, the Central Southern Group. Smith's classification was drawn with broad brushstrokes. Close examination suggests a much more complex scenario of loosely affiliated craftsmen who travelled from one place to another, exchanging patterns and ideas, sometimes joining forces on big commissions, but often working in isolation. Neal and Cosh from the start have preferred to talk of 'groups' rather than 'schools' or 'workshops', with their connotations of close-knit organisation. They have validated this approach by a more sophisticated analysis of the distribution of patterns and motifs, which has led to the identification of sub-groups within the main groups. There is doubtless more refinement to be achieved in pursuing this analysis, especially as new mosaics are discovered; but we shall probably never understand the picture in detail, and there is a danger that we may become preoccupied with minutiae. Indeed, it is possible to argue that we have gone as far as we profitably can without making progress in other directions.

One crucial desideratum for further progress is a search for objective dating evidence. Far too few mosaics are currently datable from stratified finds such as sealed pottery or coins; and, even where such finds are present, their value can be challenged. Perhaps the most useful evidence is samian pottery, whether sealed beneath a mosaic or, more especially, cut to form tesserae within it: as these are not likely to have been held in stock for long, they give close dating parameters. In the volume under review one can cite two pavements at Cirencester (mosaics 421.17 and 58) where the samian tesserae suggest laying in the late Hadrianic or early Antonine periods. Coins sealed in the mortar make-up of a mosaic are also useful, though it is often difficult to determine how long they were in circulation before they were buried: at best, they offer only a *terminus post quem* (as in the case of mosaic 421.54 at Cirencester, dated after A.D. 330). Sometimes it is not clear whether a coin found beneath a mosaic is not a residual object from an earlier phase of the site, in which case it could be considerably earlier than the laying of the pavement. The Orpheus pavement at Barton Farm near Cirencester has long been dated around 300-320 on the basis of two late-3rd c. issues found beneath it, but Cosh and Neal point out (20, 129) that these coins were in an accumulation of débris on a concrete floor that existed before the house was constructed, and therefore argue that the date of the mosaic — and of other pavements such as the Woodchester Orpheus which are ascribed to the same craftsmen — should be lowered perhaps as far as the middle of the 4th c. This uncertainty poses a problem; nonetheless, without the coins we should be in a far murkier position regarding dating. It would be an enormous help to have more stratified coins, even if they leave a fairly wide range of possibilities. If we had more information on dates, we could establish firmer chronologies to follow through inferences on the development and transmission of patterns. There may even be a case for selective re-excavation of known buried mosaics to seek additional dating evidence.

Another area where more research might be worthwhile is in the analysis of the relationship between mosaics in Britain and those in neighbouring provinces. In 1997 I drew attention to some Continental parallels for British mosaics, notably in Trier and its region in the 4th c.[12] Some of my examples were picked up by Cosh and Neal in one of their previous volumes (II, 36),

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11 His mature thoughts are summarised in a conference paper: D. J. Smith, "Roman mosaics in Britain: a synthesis," in R. Farioli Campanati (ed.), *Il mosaico antico. III Colloquio Int. sul Mosaico Antico, 1980* (Ravenna 1984) 357-80.

12 *Britannia* 28 (1997) 268-69; cf. *AJA* 105 (2001) 327.

and in the latest volume they have added one or two new ones, this time in Spain and Gaul. A pavement in Mérida, for instance, features the same composition of a lyre-playing Orpheus in a roundel surrounded by a frieze of parading birds and beasts as characterises the Orpheus mosaics of the Corinian group.[13] Particularly close are the links between the border patterns of the Woodchester Orpheus and a pavement from Palastplatz in Trier. These were first noted by K. Parlasca in the 1950s, and debate has raged over which way the influence travelled: Parlasca initially favoured Woodchester as the source, later Trier; Smith stuck with Woodchester.[14] The question is revisited here by Cosh and Neal and they incline towards the view that the Woodchester mosaicists moved to Trier, rather than that craftsmen came from Trier to work at Woodchester: "given that only one parallel for the work of this group [the Corinian Orpheus Group] can be cited from Trier while several occur in Britain, it is perhaps more likely that Romano-British craftsmen worked in Trier ...." (18). The logic of this argument is debatable: the presence of only one parallel at Trier could be due to all sorts of reasons, including the accidents of survival, while the plurality of occurrences in Britain could indicate that craftsmen who came from Trier to the Cirencester region enjoyed such success that they stayed there and carried out a number of commissions over the ensuing years. On the whole, it is more likely that patterns would be disseminated from an imperial capital such as Trier to a peripheral region than *vice versa;* and the Woodchester villa was of such magnificence in terms of its architecture and appointments that it could well (as has often been noted) have been the residence of some high official seconded to Britain from the imperial court, or at least of a patron with the wealth and desire to emulate the decorative arts of the capital. In addition, the 'swastika-peltae' motif which plays an important rôle in the two patterns was, as Parlasca pointed out,[15] a great favourite in the pavements of Trier before it achieved its maximum popularity in Britain. Ultimately, the question of priority is unresolvable, but it is worth noting that in the case of another parallel between pavements in Trier and Britain — the Olewiger Strasse mosaic in Trier and the Christ and Bellerophon mosaic at Hinton St Mary (Dorset) — the Continental example is dated about 250, a century earlier than its British counterpart.[16] This would again be consonant with the movement of craftsmen from the centre to the periphery. Further searches for parallels, coupled with careful assessment of the chronology of the pavements in question, can be expected to yield interesting ideas on the movement of craftsmen, or at least the transmission of patterns, between Britain and the other NW provinces.

An important line of enquiry which is barely broached by the present corpus is the use of scientific analysis to provenance the materials of tesserae. The value of this approach was demonstrated nearly 20 years ago, in relation to Switzerland, by D. Schmid's monograph on the mosaics of Augst and Kaiseraugst, which included a detailed classification of tesserae on the basis of Munsell colour references and geological identifications.[17] From her data she was able to build up a picture of which materials were obtained from close at hand, and which were imported from further afield, thus providing an insight into the organisation and economics of production. In recent years, research of this kind, now benefiting from increasingly sophisticated petrological techniques, has been applied to several mosaics in Britain. Particularly im-

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13 J. M. Alvarez Martínez, in P. Johnson, R. Ling and D. J. Smith (edd.), *Fifth Int. Colloquium on Ancient Mosaics held at Bath, 1987* (JRA Suppl. 9, 1994) vol. 1, 211-16, figs. 1 and 4-5.

14 K. Parlasca, *Die römischen Mosaiken in Deutschland* (Berlin 1959) 50, pl. 50; id., in *La mosaïque gréco-romaine, 1963* (Paris 1965) 80 and 115; D. J. Smith, ibid. 113-14; id., in A. L. F. Rivet (ed.), *The Roman villa in Britain* (London 1969) 116; id. (supra n.11) 368.

15 Parlasca 1965 (supra n.14) 115; cf. id. 1959 (supra n.14) 132-34.

16 P. Hoffmann, J. Hupe and K. Goethert, *Katalog der römischen Mosaike aus Trier und dem Umland* (Trier 1999) 136-37, no. 100, pls. 59-61; Cosh and Neal's vol. II (2005) 156-60, mosaic 172.1. Their downdating of the Corinian Orpheus mosaics (see above) tends to weaken their own arguments for Woodchester preceding Trier.

17 D. Schmid, *Die römischen Mosaiken aus Augst und Kaiseraugst* (Forsch. in Augst 17, 1993) 169-79. For more recent studies on tesserae from German and other sites, see E. Flügel and C. Flügel, "Applied microfacies analysis: provenance studies of Roman mosaic stones," *Facies* 37 (1997) 1-48; E. Flügel, "Microfacies-based provenance analysis of Roman imperial mosaic and sculpture materials from Bavaria," *Facies* 41 (1999) 197-208.

portant is the work of J. R. L. Allen on tesserae from 1st- and early 2nd-c. mosaics at Silchester and other sites in southern Britain; he has determined that the materials were derived from British sources, and principally from the Jurassic and Cretaceous rocks of the Dorset coast, especially perhaps the Poole–Purbeck region, where the exploitation of minerals may have been carried out under imperial supervision or directly by the army.[18] Similar research is being undertaken by P. White (as part of a doctoral programme) on materials in mosaics from the villa at Fishbourne; she has combined geological and archaeological methodologies to match some of the tesserae with bands of rock on the Purbeck coast, reinforcing the case for this area having played an important part in the organisation of mosaics production.[19] Finally, a team of geologists from the University of Leicester and other institutions has been concentrating on chalk tesserae, using the evidence of microfossils to establish the age of the material and, thereby, its likely provenance. Examination of tesserae at Silchester, for instance, suggests that they may again have originated in eastern Dorset, or possibly in the Portsdown area near Portsmouth; none of them was obtained from the chalk outcrops close to Silchester itself.[20] By contrast, tesserae from the villa at Brading (Isle of Wight) are likely to have derived from outcrops in the immediate neighbourhood.[21] All these (and other) projects illustrate the potential significance of scientific analysis for the study of British mosaics.[22] At the moment the picture is patchy, being biased towards the south of the province and the early years of the Roman occupation, and we must hope that future investigations will widen the geographical and chronological coverage to give a fuller perspective of changing patterns of supply and distribution across the regions and from period to period.

Two other fields for which Cosh and Neal's corpus provides a springboard for future research relate to the social significance of mosaics. First, how do mosaics help to define patterns of room usage within a house? One of the more useful features of the corpus are the overall plans of buildings showing the positions of mosaics (often with reduced-scale images dropped into the outlines of rooms). These enable the reader to see at a glance the distribution of the mosaics, and to differentiate between the rôles of the rooms. It becomes immediately apparent that mosaics tended to be concentrated in privileged suites and that, where several rooms were decorated, the types of mosaics used were graded according to the importance of the spaces: e.g., figured mosaics were laid in the most prestigious rooms, geometric in second-rank rooms. We can see this in the plan of the villa at Bignor (vol. III, fig. 459) where all the mosaics are concentrated in the NW corner of the courtyard villa and in the baths at the south-east; within these zones, figured mosaics were confined to a few, special rooms, including two bipartite spaces (7 and 26) of the type normally identified as dining-rooms, a room with an apse (3) which must again have had a special function such as dining or reception, and the *apodyterium* of the baths (56). Geometric mosaics, by contrast, decorated corridors and subsidiary rooms (6, 8, 10, 52, 53 and 55). Similarly with the villa at Brading (vol. II, fig. 246). Here all the mosaics are concentrated in the building on the W side of the court, which is thus presumably the main residence, and within this building there is a clear hierarchy: the front corridor (6) has a continuous chequerboard mosaic, apart from a panel with Orpheus at the middle, opposite the main entrance, while in the two wing rooms (3 and 12, perhaps a guest bedroom and a bipartite

18 J. R. L. Allen and M. G. Fulford, "Early Roman mosaic materials in southern Britain, with particular reference to Silchester (*Calleva Atrebatum*): a regional geological perspective," *Britannia* 35 (2004) 9-38; J. R. L. Allen, "The geology of early Roman mosaics and *opus sectile* in southernmost Britain: a summary," *Mosaic* 36 (2009) 5-10.

19 Cf. ASPRoM Newsletter 57 (Oct. 2010) 4, and see P. White *et al.*, "The geological provenance of coloured carbonate mosaic materials used at Fishbourne," in I. Schrüfer-Kolb (ed.), *More than just numbers? The role of science in Roman archaeology* (JRA Suppl. 91, 2012).

20 I. P. Wilkinson, M. Williams, J. R. Young, S. R. Cook, M. G. Fulford and G. K. Lott, "The application of microfossils in assessing the provenance of chalk used in the manufacture of Roman mosaics at Silchester," *JArchSci* 35 (2008) 2415-22.

21 A. Tasker, I. P. Wilkinson, M. G. Fulford and M. Williams, "Provenance of chalk tesserae from Brading Roman Villa, Isle of Wight, UK," *Proc. Geologists' Assoc.* 122 (2011) 933-37.

22 A similar piece of research, though with different objectives, is a scientific study of gold-glass tesserae from British sites (work in progress presented by J. Leigh at a symposium of ASPRoM in London, 2010).

dining room, respectively) there were figured mosaics. One might have expected to find figured mosaics also in the central rooms (7, 8 and 9) behind the front corridor but, so far as could be judged from the damaged state of this area, their mosaics seem to have had no more than geometric patterns (though later conversion to industrial use may have removed evidence of possible figure-scenes in rooms 7 and 8). At all events, it is a general rule that mosaic pavements mark out important rooms, that the degree of elaboration of the mosaics employed refines the hierarchy, and that the type of decoration fits the function of the rooms (geometric patterns have no natural focus and are capable of endless repetition, so they lead the eye onward in corridors; figural mosaics have focus and orientation, so are suited to rooms of rest or reception). There have been some recent studies on the forms of mosaics used in Romano-British dining rooms,[23] but little has been done on other types of room or on general patterns of distribution. The time is ripe for more systematic analysis of the rôle of mosaics and their repertoire in constructing internal space.

The second line of sociological enquiry regards how mosaics reveal British patrons' tastes and interests. One of the purposes of mosaics, and particularly of figured mosaics, was to impress callers — to show them that you could afford the best-quality decorations and that your tastes were in step with those of your peers. There is considerable scope for new studies of how the subject-matter of figured mosaics sheds light on contemporary fashions among the well-to-do. It is clear that, in Britain as in most parts of the empire, knowledge of the Greek myths (and of the Latin poetry in which they were recounted) was essential to the cultured lifestyle. This is vividly demonstrated by the mosaic in the dining-room at Lullingstone (Kent) (vol. III, mosaic 361.1) where the image of Europa and the bull was oriented not towards the centre of the room but towards diners on a semicircular couch against the apsidal end-wall, and was accompanied by an inscription in elegiac verse written in the style of Ovid and presupposing a knowledge of *Aeneid* Book 1: one can imagine how dinner guests at Lullingstone took pleasure in deciphering the references and engaging in literary discussions.

One question is whether the mosaics sometimes had deeper meanings. The mythological pavements belong mostly to the 4th c., a time when Britain seemed less secure (thus the strengthening of its coastal defences against raiders crossing the North and Irish Seas) and old values were being challenged by new patterns of thinking. Several writers have argued that the myths were allegorical and expressed the religious beliefs of those who commissioned them. J. M. C. Toynbee, in particular, tended to read the subjects in eschatological terms: at Lullingstone, for example, Bellerophon and the Chimaera symbolised "triumph over death and evil", and Europa and the bull "suggests the rape of the soul from the body at death and its voyage across the ocean to the Blessed Isles".[24] I don't believe that such mythological subjects were necessarily allegorical, even when the pavements incorporated references to Christianity. In the mosaic from Hinton St Mary (vol. II, mosaic 172.1), the central roundel contains a male bust set against the chi-rho monogram and flanked by pomegranates, which is usually interpreted (probably rightly) as representing Christ.[25] But the remaining subjects are traditional and pagan: the antechamber of the room features a scene of Bellerophon slaying the Chimaera, and the outlying panels show hunting dogs and the four Winds. These are all standard, and there is no need to look for hidden messages in them.

At Frampton (Dorset) (vol. II, mosaic 168.2), a chi-rho occupied the central position in the chord of an apse and surely indicates that the villa-owner subscribed to the new faith. But it directly confronted a bearded head flanked by dolphins and by lines of verse identifying Neptune; the main part of the pavement evidently showed Bellerophon and the Chimaera plus two-figure scenes from Greek myths and a figure of Cupid accompanied by another verse in-

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23 P. Witts, "Mosaics and room function: the evidence from some fourth-century Romano-British villas," *Britannia* 31 (2000) 291-324; S. R. Cosh, "Seasonal dining-rooms in Romano-British houses," *Britannia* 32 (2001) 219-42.

24 J. M. C. Toynbee, *Art in Britain under the Romans* (Oxford 1964) 265.

25 For the alternative view that it is a Christian emperor such as Constantine, see S. Pearce, "The Hinton St Mary mosac pavement: Christ or emperor?," *Britannia* 39 (2008) 193-218.

scription. In the antechamber were Bacchus riding a leopard and scenes of hunting. To explain the juxtaposition of Christian and pagan motifs, Toynbee and her followers claim that the pagan motifs were given a Christian interpretation "as symbols of the after-life, of death, rebirth, and paradise".[26] A similar interpretation has been offered for Orpheus, the semi-divine musician who had the power to still the forces of nature:[27] the exceptional frequency of his appearances in British pavements (at least 9, perhaps 12 times) might imply that he had a special symbolic resonance; and the favourite scheme in which he sits in a central tondo, a source of radiating power, with birds and animals filing round him in concentric rings, might be seen as expressing an analogy with Christ. But the case is far from proven. The popularity of Orpheus and Bellerophon in British mosaics (Bellerophon occurs 4 times in Britain, elsewhere only 9 times in the whole of the empire[28]) may be non-significant, the result of the circulation of one copy-book or the influence of one workshop; apart from a couple of outliers in the Humberside region, all examples of the concentric Orpheus scheme are in the southwest, within the range of a group of mosaicists putatively based in Cirencester. Even if Bellerophon is susceptible of a Christian reading in terms of the victory of the soul over death, or good over evil, the accompanying subjects are not always so easy to accommodate within a Christian programme; indeed, at Frampton, the verses accompanying the head of Neptune and the figure of Cupid suggest a delight in pagan subjects for their own sake. An alternative view is that the Christian elements, such as the chi-rho symbol, should be seen as intruders in an otherwise conventional pagan repertoire: the villa-owners looked on Christ as just another god.[29] The issue cannot be definitively resolved, and no doubt different viewers would have put a different slant on what they saw.

These and many similar issues concerning the meanings of British mosaics offer a fertile ground for future research. Now that the essential foundations have been laid by the corpus, it will be much easier for this research to be carried out. For this we owe the two authors a profound debt of gratitude.

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26 Toynbee (supra n.24) 251. A much more complex allegorical reading is offered by D. Perring, *The Roman house in Britain* (London 2002) 133-36; id., "'Gnosticism' in fourth-century Britain: the Frampton mosaics reconsidered," *Britannia* 34 (2003) 97-127. For a response, see R. Ling, "The Bellerophon mosaic at Frampton: inscriptions and programmatic intent," *Mosaic* 34 (2007) 5-11.

27 J. M. C. Toynbee, *Art in Roman Britain* (London 1962) 14; ead. in M. W. Barley and R. P. C. Hanson (edd.), *Christianity in Roman Britain, 300-700* (Leicester 1968) 188-89.

28 *LIMC* 7 (1994) 225-26 (*s.v.* Pegasos, nos. 166-69, 172, 183).

29 "A powerful new divinity in an already established pantheon": W. H. C. Frend in S. M. Pearce (ed.), *The Early Church in western Britain and Ireland. Studies presented to C. A. Ralegh Radford* (BAR 102; Oxford 1982) 7-8.