

Reviews

contemporary conceptions of earthly Rome and celestial Jerusalem.

The fourth chapter marks a change of approach, moving the focus from the Wall to its impact on the city and its inhabitants. The building of the Wall profoundly changed the city's topography, by blocking streets and causing the demolition of public and private buildings, as well as by contributing to a new conception of urban space. The Aurelian Wall soon became a defining element in city-life, a fact that is most clearly perceived in the definition of sacred space. This is the topic of chapter five, which moves us further into the history of the city: as Dey argues, the Wall was a key element in Late Antique distinctions between *intra* and *extra urbem*, marking the transition between the city of the living and the city of the holy dead, the martyrs. The Wall played a crucial role again in the eighth century, when, under the threat of thieves and invaders, relics were transferred to churches inside the city. The sixth and final chapter discusses the involvement of popes with the preservation and restoration of the Wall, showing how, in spite of its importance, it was only in the eighth century that popes Hadrian I and Leo IV really took over the monument. The Wall was then seen as a symbol of Rome's greatness and, by extension, of the pope's eminent position in western Christendom. At the same time, works on the Wall secured papal dominance in the city, employing men, building materials and the loyalty of a Christian population.

The book is well illustrated, with maps and photographs that make the argument and the descriptions clear even to non-specialists. Unsurprisingly, the argument for the centrality of the Wall is more successful whenever Dey is discussing its 'practical' issues (chapters 1–3 and 6): construction, organisation of labour and impact on topography, for example. One feels that Dey might be overstating his case in his discussion of the conceptual impact of the Wall, but this does not mean that he is wrong. Even if the Wall was not "a sacred monument unto itself, a macrocosm of the restored churches inside" (p. 238), it is clear that the very presence of the Wall contributed to the redefinition of the city's sacred geography. Perhaps more importantly, the book makes a powerful case for seeing the Wall as much more than bricks, tufa and mortar. As Dey convincingly shows, the Aurelian Wall was, from its very inception, connected to different aspects of city-life, consuming human and physical resources, involving building corporations and officials of the ecclesiastic and civil

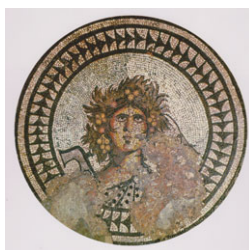
administration, as well as redefining the relationship between Romans, their own city, and the world that surrounded them.

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STEPHEN R. COSH & DAVID S. NEAL. *Roman mosaics of Britain. Volume IV: Western Britain*. xvii+453 pages, 435 b&cw & colour illustrations. 2010. London: Society of Antiquaries of London; 978-0-85431-294-8 hardback £160.



It is always a feast for the eyes and an important scholarly event to open a volume of the series dedicated to the corpus of Roman mosaics in Britain. The last in the series is the exemplary

conclusion of a Herculean task, carried out by two respected specialists of mosaics in antiquity. Keeping to a tradition developed since 2002, Neal's illustration technique, and the book's high-quality production, are a delight. The purpose is clear from the outset: to catalogue the decorated pavements of the counties of western *Britannia*, with text and images given equal billing. Indeed the book starts with the figure list of the current issue and ends with a most valuable appendix listing the illustrations found in all four volumes of the corpus; the latter also contains an explanation of the techniques employed by the authors and biographies of all the illustrators who have contributed to building this corpus, from the sixteenth century to today, for example Samuel Lysons (1763–1819) who was most active in Gloucestershire, or Norman Davey (1900–2002), perhaps better known for his restorations of Roman wall paintings.

The introductory pages provide the explanations necessary for a good navigation of the volume. The inventory consists of 266 mosaics recorded in Gloucestershire, 55 in Oxfordshire, 42 in Cheshire, Hereford and Worcester, and Shropshire (combined in one chapter), and 82 in Wales. There the mosaics become sparser, except along the coast and the river Usk, with highlights such as the sites of Caerleon/*Isca Silurum* and Caerwent/*Venta Silurum*. An appendix provides information on new mosaics, supplementary data and errata relevant to the first three volumes

of the corpus. Let us salute in this respect the care the authors have taken to be as complete as possible, listing the newest discoveries, from the Bellerophon mosaic of Croughton in Northamptonshire, revisited in 2008, to the Butleigh mosaic in Somerset, whose design of swastika meanders was uncovered in autumn 2009, via a complementary note on the mosaic of the western portico of the Chedworth *villa*, based on observations made in summer 2010 (p. 53).

The first 31 pages summarise the history of Western Britain during the Roman period, the history of the discovery of the mosaics and the latter's stylistic evolution; there is also a synthesis of the types of buildings and rooms in which mosaics are found, the workshops which made them, the composition schemes employed and the materials used. It is of note that, outside baths buildings and houses in towns or fortresses and extra-urban *villae*, there are only two instances of decorated pavements on temple sites, at Uley (cat. 449.1) in the form of loose *tesserae*, and at Lydney (cat. 440.21) where a mosaic featuring aquatic scenes is accompanied by an inscribed dedication to Mars Nodens. In the chapter devoted to figurative pavements, the authors emphasise the frequency of representations of Orpheus in the fourth century in Gloucestershire, its prime exponent being one of the largest mosaics known north of the Alps, the mosaic from the *villa* of Woodchester (cat. 456.1) whose magnificent illustration concludes the volume. Could the success of this image be linked to the Christian notion of the Good Shepherd? No Christian object or symbol has ever been recovered on sites with Orpheus mosaics. The same also applies to another Christian theme, the kantharos surrounded by two peacocks, as it appears in Building 1 of Insula XII at Cirencester/*Corinium Dobunorum* — if one accepts that it is peacocks rather than pheasants that are represented.

In this respect, one may regret the extreme caution the authors exercise in their interpretations and a discussion that is almost entirely limited to British mosaics: references to the rich corpus of mosaics known from the Roman world, those of *Hispania*, *Gallia* or *Germania* alone, are very rare. The authors' concern to present an accurate description and illustration of the pavements is laudable, but reference to external examples could allow connexions to be made and enable the authors to develop or nuance their discussion. The mosaic cat. 456.3 from Woodchester can only be interpreted as depicting a satyr and a maenad, given the position of the

male figure and the fawn-skin garment (*nebris*) visible behind his shoulder, following a scheme that incidentally is also found at Chedworth (cat 418.2). Although the mosaics are the product of the four or five 'schools' identified on British soil, some compositions use figurative motifs and schemes known on the continent, particularly at the end of the second century and during the third century, strangely absent from *Britannia* except for cat. nos. 421.5, 421.8 and 431.25. That charge of insularity apart, the four volumes of the completed corpus constitute an indispensable work of reference. With over 2000 mosaics now carefully catalogued, it forms the basis for much future research.

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MICHAEL RICHTER. *Bobbio in the Early Middle Ages: the abiding legacy of Columbanus*. 212 pages, 12 figures. 2008. Dublin: Four Courts; 978-1-84682-103-5 hardback €55.



The monastery of Bobbio, founded by Columbanus in north-western Italy in AD 612, was, in the Early Middle Ages, the most important Irish monastery on the continent, but, until Richter's study,

little discussion of the sources for its early history and economy has been available for English readers.

The structure of the book, in twelve concise chapters and an Epilogue, reflects the evidence available and also to some degree the author's interests. The first four chapters demonstrate the wealth of the early textual sources: chapter 1 contains a consideration of the four earliest documents for its history: a grant by the Lombard king Agilulf of the basilica of St Peter of Bobbio, with a supporting grant of land in perpetuity to the community of Columbanus and his successors, a confirmation of the grant to two successive abbots by King Adaloald, and a papal exemption. Additional sources for later chapters include Columbanus' own letters, a seventh-century *Vita* of Columbanus and a late tenth-century text