

Book Review - Kitap İncelemesi

Luigi QUATTROCCHI*

Mosaicos romanos en el espacio rural: Investigación y puesta en valor, Luz Neira Jiménez (ed.), 374 pages, 294 figures colour & black and white. L'ERMA di BRETSCHNEIDER, Hispania Antigua. Serie Arqueologica 10, 2019, € 340,00 ISBN 9788891318909 (printed book), € 272,00 ISBN 9788891318923 (pdf version).

The volume published (fig. 1) by “L’Erma di Bretschneider” originated from the I+D+i project: “Patrimonio Arqueológico, Nuevas Tecnologías, Turismo, Educación y Rentabilización Social: Un nexo necesario para el yacimiento rural” (PATTERN). HAR2015-68059C2-2 (MINECO / FEDER, EU) directed by coordinator Luz Neira Jiménez and could count on the support of many academics from different institutions of Spain and Europe in general. It is therefore the result of four intense years of study which are enclosed in 18 contributions: the majority of them are about the site of the Roman villa of Fuente Álamo (Puente Genil, Córdoba), others explore other archaeological sites that help defining the general context of rural Roman mosaics.

Hispania always arose a big interest for the great conservation state of its mosaics and the extraordinary coexistence of large urban centres with as many rural centres with big manor villas flanked by an immense estate. The studies in this volume try to explain this latter peculiarity by focusing on the villa of Fuente Álamo, highlighting the distinctive traits of the rural environment and the importance of promoting such an archaeological heritage.

The volume is divided into two distinct sections but with some aspects in common:

- Villas and mosaics of France, Portugal, and Spain
- Fuente Álamo

The collection of essays opens with the contribution of the French researcher Véronique Vassal entitled: “Mortier, béton de tuileau, de chaux (Opus signinum ou Terrazzo signinum) à décor de fleuron et de quadrillage losangé dans les villas rurales et les agglomérations du sud de la Gaule” in which she tries to shed a light on a particular typology of signino, of which we have few accounts and which can be found in the rural villas of southern Gaul. The researcher focuses on the floors having the typical fleuron and lozenge decoration, reviewing the main evidences of the territory under examination, analysing both the floors still in place and those now exposed in museums. Particularly interesting is the comparison of a mosaic decoration, in a beautiful “terre de Sienne foncée” colour found in the “Premier baptistère” of Marseille, with the fossil of a sea urchin (*Paracentrotus lividus*).

Peculiar for the promotion of Roman villas is also the article signed by Filomena Limão and Rodrigo Pereira: “Research and value; the roman mosaic of the *Villa* of Santiago da Guarda (Ansião, Portugal)”; the team composed of the municipality of Santiago da Guarda and the staff of the museum of the Monumental Complex operates not only on the research but also on the conservation of the mosaic floors still in place. The operators are trying to protect, preserve, and promote the mosaics of the IV-V century Roman villa, which are inserted in a subsequent manor of the XV-XVI century, to allow reviving the history of the site in a chronological path from Antiquity to the modern era.

* Luigi Quattrocchi, Instituto de Cultura y Tecnología, UC3M, Italy.  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9219-1905>. E-mail: l.quattrocchi@hotmail.it

João Pedro Bernardes in his article “Os mosaicos romanos nas *villae* do território do Algarve” examines twenty different archaeological sites with as many mosaic floors. In the researcher’s cartography it is interesting to note that most of the mosaic remains are located along or near the Atlantic coast and they present a considerable amount of marine decorations. The scholar then complains about the use in the 1930s of concrete supports with an iron structure, mainly used for the mosaics of Milreu and Cerro da Vila, pointing out how hardly reversible this solution is. On the other hand, modern and advanced conservation solutions and techniques were used in the Boca do Rio site.

The article “Elementos significativos en los mosaicos de determinadas villas de Cataluña. Importancia de su difusión y valoración” by Mercedes Durán Penedo then deals with four different cases of Roman villas of the *Tarraconensis*. The most interesting case is the Centcelles one, especially for the ludic-didactic material designed for schoolchildren that turns the archaeological site into an excellent place to experiment educational workshops suitable for all ages and attract the learners’ interest from an early age. The researcher underlines the potential of the four investigated villas and hopes that they will receive the conservation, promotion and even advertisement they deserve.

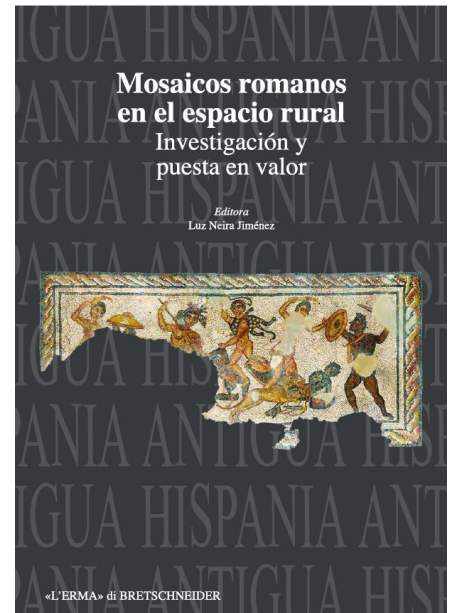
Catalonia is the subject of the article “El programa musivario de la villa del Romeral (Albesa, Lleida): un proyecto integral de investigación y preservación” signed by Lluís Marí Sala and Víctor Revilla Calvo. The Villa del Romeral is a paradigmatic example of good archaeological and scientific practice as the excavation was done together with interventions of restoration and protection of the architectural structures, including mosaics. The site was recovered in two phases and intensified mostly in the last phase with the construction of a roof that respected two principles: the protection of the archaeological remains, especially the mosaics, and the partial reintegration of the ancient building volumes and spaces. Columns in the peristyle were used to make the modern construction more credible.

Scholars Sara Azuara Galve, Beatriz Ezquerro Lebrón, and Carolina Villagordo Ros concentrated on Urrea de Gaén with their work: “La villa romana de La Loma del Regadío (Urrea de Gaén, Teruel): Investigación y Musealización”. The contribution highlights the complex *in situ* musealization of the rural villa divided into *pars rustica* and *pars urbana*. They also note the site’s promotion strategies, such as participating in the *Fiera Internazionale del Turismo* and in the *Red de Villas*.

“Los mosaicos de la villa romana de Almenara de Adaja-Puras (Valladolid). Consideraciones sobre su programa ornamental” by Carmen García-Merino and Margarita Sánchez Simón takes us to the discovery of the mosaic floors of the rural villa of Almenara de Adaja-Puras, south of Valladolid. They don’t limit themselves to the study of mosaics but they also insert them in a very precise architectural framework.

The contribution of Gonzalo García Vegas also matches the theme of promotion: “Recuperando ‘el saucedo’: La reconstrucción virtual de un pavimento musivario de la villa lusitana bajoimperial”. The scholar uses 3D technology and tools to revive the 15th room of the Saucedo villa by also placing contemporary furnishings.

The article by Miguel Ángel Valero Tévar is about technological avant-gardes: “Aportaciones de las nuevas tecnologías y los estudios multidisciplinares en la investigación del mosaico de Noheda”. The Noheda villa is an endless source



of experimentation, multidisciplinary and new technologies, a rare example in the European studies panorama. Photogrammetry applied to planimetry, aerophotogrammetry with drones, and 3D scanners are the technologies used in this archaeological site that helped studying the glass tiles that make up the now famous mosaic, suggesting that there could have been a temporary *officinae vitreorum* supplying the artisans involved in the realization of the mosaic floor.

Exquisitely iconographic is the work of Irene Mañas Romero: “El fenómeno de la autorrepresentación social de las élites en mosaicos de las villae romanas tardoantiguas” which studies some mosaics portraits of the Iberian Peninsula and hypothesizes they may have been useful images to perpetuate both individual and familiar memories.

“Los mosaicos de la villa romana de Salar (Granada). Campañas de excavación de 2017 y 2018” is the title of the article by the team composed by Maria Isabel Fernández García, Julio M. Román Punzón, Manuel Moreno Alcaide, Pabro Ruiz Montes, and Julio Ramos Noguera. The work takes us to *Baetica*, in the province of Granada, and reports us on the very recent excavation campaigns of 2017 and 2018, specifically highlighting the well-preserved cinegetic mosaic of the villa.

Nuria de la O Vidal Teruel and Juan M. Campos Carrasco tell us about the mosaics of Onuba in: “Musivaria romana de carácter rural en el territorio onubense: apuntes y reflexiones”. In addition to published ones, new excavations uncovered some unpublished mosaics. The study of small fragments is accompanied by that of large mosaic floors such as *Ilipla 4*, having an interesting decorative apparatus of *kantharoi* and human faces.

The section specifically dedicated to Fuente Álamo begins with the article by Manuel Delgado Torres and David Jaén Cubero: “La Fuente del Álamo: historia y arqueología de un lugar excepcional (Puente Genil, Córdoba)”. The contribution retraces the work stages on the Villa, from the discovery to the present day, an exciting *excursus*, thanks also to the descriptions provided by the surrounding countryside. The journey starts with pioneer Antonio Aguilar y Cano, precursor of the archaeological research in Puente Genil, continues with interesting drawings and photos from the era until it eventually reaches and elaborates on the new focuses and perspectives to follow in the future.

“Economías domésticas y patrones de consumo en la villa romana de Fuente Álamo: estudio comparativo de las fases altoimperial y tardoantigua” by Jesús Bermejo Tirado, Fernando Moreno Nacarro, and Lúdia Colominas investigates the material culture of the Roman Villa of Fuente Álamo, hence providing valuable data for the dating of the structures. The researchers did not just study the material culture and archaeozoological remains, but also applied the *household archaeology* technique which allowed to define the characteristics of two different communities: the upper imperial phase and the lower imperial phase, thus highlighting a significant change in the domestic economy of the community who lived in this rural villa.

Of course there is also a complete and exhaustive study of the mosaic floors found in the Villa of Fuente Álamo, specifically the work of Luz Neira Jiménez titled: “Los mosaicos romanos del yacimiento rural de Fuente Álamo (Puente Genil, Córdoba): Investigación y puesta en valor”. The project director reviews both the geometric and figurative mosaic floors, pointing out how difficult it is to make strict comparisons among geometric mosaics, suggesting that the mosaicists may had to adapt to the architectural spaces and make creative choices

sometimes. The author enriches the work by studying some drawings, preserved at the Real Academia de la Historia, depicting some mosaic floors which have now disappeared. The contribution helps us having a clear overview of the both the lost and *in situ* mosaics of the Villa of Fuente Álamo that can be agreed on.

The studies on Fuente Álamo further enrich with the contribution of Alessandro Teatini: “Riflessioni sul mosaico nilotico di Fuente Álamo: il mosaico nel suo contesto”, which studies a particular mosaic placed in a quadri-apse room and of which we can still appreciate the central scene and the scenes placed in two apses. He then hypothesizes a new chronology and reading of the narrated episodes, underlining possible discrepancies in the narration and its disposition in space.

Antonio Ibba writes on the Nilotic mosaic as well, this time with an epigraphic study: “Riflessioni sul mosaico nilotico di Fuente Álamo: dalle immagini alle parole”. He proposes a new reading based on parody with frequent sexual allusions, which seem to be inspired by the art of miming and the Latin comedy.

The collection ends with the article by Isabel Rodríguez: “Música y danza en las representaciones del triunfo báquico. A propósito del Mosaico de Fuente Álamo (Puente Genil, Córdoba)”. The work offers an iconographic study starting from the mosaic of the Trionfo di Bacco, focusing mostly on musical iconography, and makes comparisons with other mosaics of the imperial era.

The volume is the culmination of a multi-year project coordinated by Luz Neira Jiménez, but is also a starting point to better preserve, promote, and raise awareness on the archaeological heritage, not only the one of the Iberian Peninsula.

It is interesting to note how the villas analysed in the contributions are far from the “society” circuit of Iberian tourism, and this is the reason why the enhancement and effort put in place to attract both locals and school groups is worth sharing. The archaeological tourism has great potential, is extremely versatile and adaptable to all ages, and this volume gives a taste of the guidelines being adopted in the Iberian Peninsula for archaeological excavations, research, musealization, enhancement, and promotion of the archaeological heritage.