

VARGAS VÁZQUEZ, S., LÓPEZ MONTEAGUDO, G. and GARCÍA-DILS DE LA VEGA, S. (2017), *Mosaicos romanos de Écija (Sevilla)*, Corpus de Mosaicos Romanos de España, 14, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas/Real Academia de Ciencias, Bellas Artes y Buenas Letras Luis Vélez de Guevara, Madrid, 220 pp., ISBN 978-84-00-10197-8.

Since the initial and systematic attempts to investigate the Roman past beginning in the 18th century, and the genesis of classical archaeology as a discipline, the study of tessellated and other types of mosaic pavements has received sustained attention in the Roman world. As noted by Scott (2006: 628-643), this interest was mainly characterised by understanding them as artworks, drawn from an aesthetic approach anchored in the development of modern art history at the time (see also Bermejo, 2007: 41-42). Thus, till the second half of the 20th century, approaches to mosaics from Roman Spain were mainly characterised by a descriptive and iconographic discourse, resulting in a focus on influences, identifying individual craftsmen and manufacturing process.

Though different studies on Romano-Spanish mosaics were published during the 20th century (e.g. Pita's notes on mosaic regional distribution [1969: 31-61]), the origin of a continuous body of scholarship and a common project is linked to the elaboration of the Corpus de Mosaicos Romanos de España<sup>1</sup>. It was initiated in the late 1970s with Blanco Freijeiro's first issue on the Roman mosaics from Mérida (1978). Forty years later, the publication of *Mosaicos Romanos de Écija (Sevilla)* constitutes the fourteenth issue of a still unfinished corpus that aims to catalogue and study all mosaics from Roman Spain. Between both works, the lacuna on Romano-Spanish mosaics has been filled not only by other volumes within the CMRE corpus, but with other specialized studies that have overcome the mere cataloguing approach by moving from traditional, descriptive analyses and stylistic comparisons towards a more theoretical debate on mosaics and associated contexts at both local and regional levels. Though as part of a corpus, this book falls within the traditional category of studies and the majority of its content constitutes a detailed catalogue of the mosaics found at Écija, it incorporates information that allows for a more contextual approach to archaeological evidence and interpretation.

As capital of the *Conuentus Astigitanus*, mosaics from *Colonia Augusta Firma Astigi* (Écija) had previously been published in the fourth issue of the CMRE, dedi-

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<sup>1</sup> CMRE in the rest of the text.

cated to the provinces of Seville, Granada, Cádiz and Murcia (Blázquez, 1982). However, the urban development experienced in recent decades has provided more mosaics now presented in an updated work begun in 1992 (p. 11). In this regard, López Monteagudo and Vargas Vázquez's expertise on mosaics and García-Dils' on Roman and commercial archaeology appears magisterially intertwined in this work. Thus, the catalogue of mosaics is introduced by specific discussions provided by the authors.

Sergio García-Dils' notes on the urbanism of *Colonia Augusta Firma Astigi* (pp. 15-16) provide a brief and updated synchronic urban contextualization of remains, paying special attention to the foundation of the city. This successfully contributes, as stated by the author, to "relating the study of artistic, stylistic and decorative aspects of mosaics to the functionality of spaces where they were displayed" (p. 16)<sup>2</sup>.

Following this, Guadalupe López Monteagudo continues from García-Dils' chapter by providing discussion on the diachronic urban development of the city and chronologically contextualising the creation of the mosaics presented in the book in two phases: first phase (1st end of 2nd century AD) and second phase (end of 2nd century, beginning of 3rd century AD) (p. 19). She then provides a general overview on the mosaic remains (pp. 19-24) ascribing specific examples to each phase. In general, López Monteagudo highlights the Bacchic character of the rich collection of catalogued mosaics and mentions the presence of examples boasting marine creatures and mythologies in contexts associated with water supply or the recent partially discovered circus mosaic (p. 24).

In the next section, Sebastián Vargas Vázquez provides some notes on the geometry of the mosaics from Écija (pp. 27-31). His discussion on the occurrence of geometric elements and their scarce repetition in terms of designs is worth noting (pp. 29-30). One minor criticism of this work pertains the repetition of information already mentioned in the previous section by López Monteagudo, such as the Bacchic character of tessellated pavements from Écija (p. 28) or aspects regarding craftsmen and the making of mosaics (pp. 30-31); perhaps a common approach to both topics would have provided the reader with a more complete understanding of the subject. In addition, another criticism pertains to the lack of clarification on the potentially problematic application of the modern term 'workshop' ("taller" in Spanish) or 'school' ("escuela" in Spanish) to the Roman world, an aspect cautiously considered by other authors (Allison, 1991; Guardia, 1992: 431; Mañas, 2010: 120, n. 681; Scott, 2000: 27). In general, the three different sections, however, form an essential contextualising introduction to the catalogue itself, which constitutes the major part of the book (pp. 33-124).

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<sup>2</sup> "Relacionar el estudio de las vertientes puramente artísticas, estilísticas y decorativas de los mosaicos con la funcionalidad de las estancias en las que se situaban" (p. 16; translated into English by R. MONTOYA).

The catalogue is chronologically structured according to the discovery of the mosaic or the space to which different mosaics belonged; these criteria follow the format set out by García-Dils (2015) in his study of the urbanism of Écija. In addition to the location of the mosaic, a numerical code between brackets that coincides with the entries registered in the *AstiGIS* GIS project is provided (see e.g. García-Dils and Ordóñez, 2008). Within the catalogue, the mosaics are grouped according to their location within or without the walls of Hispano-Roman city. Within each spatial location, one or more mosaics are presented depending on their attribution to the same spatial unit; in addition, the authors differentiate between lost or undocumented mosaics (pp. 121-122); mosaics presenting unknown provenience (p. 122); or pavement made in *opus figlinum* (pp. 122-124). Each individual mosaic entry contains references to the mosaic: (i) dimensions; (ii) tesserae; (iii) colours; (iv) description with stylistic, iconographic and spatial – when applying – information; (v) chronology; (vi) current location; and (vii) bibliography. In addition, references to figures are provided at the beginning and throughout different entries.

A noteworthy aspect of this catalogue is that its authors present in total 94 mosaics, for which they provide, according to the state of preservation of evidence, a thorough and detailed study with references to associated contexts. In addition, the well-structured organisation of the catalogue demonstrate the progress made by Spanish scholars in the field, taking this work beyond a superficial character attributed by some scholars to the *CMRE* (see Ling, 2015: 283).

Overall, this book represents an excellent and accurate study of mosaics from *Colonia Augusta Firma Astigi* (Écija). The author's work makes a substantial quantity and quality of data available and provide thorough stylistic, iconographic and spatial information that surmounts limitations observed in some of the previous issues of the *CMRE*. The work is complemented by a copious quantity of photos in colour and black and white, as well as some drawings of mosaics and plans of the associated spatial contexts to which they belong. In general, the catalogue is well referenced, and only minor editorial mistakes are present, such as the absence of bold font to highlight the section "colours" in the initial entries (pp. 35, 37). Despite this and the aforementioned critiques, this volume is a welcome and long overdue successful addition to the study of Hispano-Roman, and especially Baetican mosaics; this work will constitute the basis for continued publication of further issues of the *CMRE*.

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