



Greek and Roman Mosaics

Umberto Pappalardo, Rosaria Ciardiello

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Mosaic has been called “painting for eternity,” and it is in fact one of the few arts of antiquity to survive in something like its original condition and variety. Mosaic pavements with geometric and figural motifs first appeared in Greece at the end of the fifth century BC and subsequently spread throughout the entire classical world, from the palaces of the Greco-Bactrian rulers of present-day Afghanistan to the villas of Roman Britain. Local workshops cultivated many distinctive regional styles, while traveling teams of Hellenistic craftsmen produced figural mosaics of stunning refinement, often modeled after famous paintings; indeed, their work constitutes one of our only records of classical Greek painting, which has been almost entirely lost.

The styles and techniques of the ancient mosaicist’s art are given a concise yet authoritative exposition in the first part of this handsome volume. The second, and larger, part conducts the reader on a chronological tour of the most important centers of the art form’s development, from the Macedonian capital of Pella, whose compositions in natural pebbles set a high artistic standard for mosaics at the very beginning of their history, to the Basilica of San Vitale at Ravenna, whose wall and vault mosaics, with their glittering vision of a triumphant Christianity, mark the transition between antiquity and the Middle Ages. Special attention is given to Pompeii and its surroundings, where the eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79 preserved intact an astonishing variety of mosaics, including such ambitious figural scenes as the famous Alexander mosaic, composed of some four million miniscule tesserae, as well as characteristically Roman pavements in black and white, and the brightly colored wall mosaics of garden grottoes.

Featuring more than two hundred newly commissioned photographs, Greek and Roman Mosaics is the first survey of its subject to be illustrated in full color. It will be a necessary addition to every art lover’s library, and a worthy companion to Abbeville’s Italian Mosaics: 300–1300.

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