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Photo on the front cover:

Nemi theatre, fresco from room G showing stage properties

(foto Luciano Mandato, Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma).

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Preface

The editors are happy to present in this volume the proceedings of the XIIth International Conference of the *Association Internationale pour la Peinture Murale Antique*, held at Athens from September 16 to September 20, 2013. The board of the AIPMA, with the first editor as a president, has suggested participants concentrate their papers on the theme 'Context and Meaning', combining the themes of the fifth and sixth congresses, held in Amsterdam (1992) and Bologna (1995) respectively. Since paintings were a standard element in many buildings in the classical world from the archaic period onwards, they offer an excellent means to study them as a determining factor in the decoration and furnishing of an environment in which ancient people lived, worked, and rested after their death.

When we cast a look at the very long history of research on ancient wall painting, going back to the mid 19th century, we come across a lot of discussions about specific styles, decorative schemes, and iconographic programmes destined for specific classes of buildings such as houses and tombs. In recent decades we have seen a growing interest among researchers in the analysis of paintings in terms of their context rather than as expressions of art in and for itself. It therefore seems the right time for a synthetic approach to figural themes, and to the iconographical and iconological problems of paintings considered in relation to their specific contexts. The main questions posed in the Conference were what messages images in wall painting, from the archaic to the late-antique (ca 700 BC-AD 500) convey to contemporary viewers in specific contexts and how they were received.

Over the past 35 years, the AIPMA conferences have also provided challenging platforms to present decorations from the country where the congress was taking place, which has yielded splendid results in relatively understudied regions like Hungary and Austria (proceedings of the VIIth congress edited by László Borhy), and Asia Minor (proceedings of the XIth congress edited by Norbert Zimmermann). Therefore, at this congress Greece played a major role in various presentations, beginning with the keynote lectures by Olga Palagia from the National and Capodistrian University in Athens and by Hariclia Brecoulaki from the National Hellenic Research Foundation. Palagia sketches the development of mural painting in the classical and Hellenistic world and has to cope with a very unequal set of data: written sources for the earlier phases and material mainly from funeral complexes during the late classical and early Hellenistic periods. She makes clear that the roots of a *koine* valid for the entire Mediterranean era were developed here. Brecoulaki and her colleagues give new insights into the making of one of the earliest testimonies of panel paintings on wood, the Pitsa plaques.

The remainder of the papers have been divided into groups which partly correspond with the articulation of the programme as realized in Athens. The briefer contributions - during the congress presented in a poster session - have also been subdivided into the sections to which they belong.

The first section is devoted to 'Text, Site, and Context' and includes various studies on ancient sources that were about painting or applicable to painting, running from the classical period through to early Christianity (Blanc & Eristov, Ghedini & Colpo, Herbert de la Portbarré-Viard). Some older finds of paintings have their place in a museum context (Burlot & Roger, Coutelas et al.). When we come to the relationship with the architectural context, various papers are relevant. Although included in other sections, studies on paintings in temples and early Christian churches (Pagani & Mariani, Bianchi & Rossi, Harsányi & Kurovszky, Didonè) testify to the specific decorative forms, as do those in tombs. A vexed question is that of the meaning of funerary paintings. Since we do not exactly know how the ancients thought about afterlife and the symbolism of the passing from life to afterlife (if that existed at all), we can only tentatively try to unravel iconographic programmes in tombs (Salvadori & Zimmermann, Fugger, Vavlekas, Michaeli, Guimier-Sorbets, Santucci, Neyme, Bedello Tata, Tortorella). One set of papers is dedicated to Hellenistic tombs in Macedonia (Avlonitou, Pencheva, Tsimbidou-Avlonitou, Tzanavari, Baggio). These papers show that the iconographical choices were very personal and could be taken from a wide array of motifs. Even in Christian tombs, for which theological texts are at hand, the relationship with funerary imagery is not always self-evident (Fugger). Some themes are peculiar for their presence in house contexts and therefore receive specific attention. We recall theatre scenes in a supposed wardrobe room (Boldrighini) and elsewhere (Leach), references to Alexander the Great (Grimaldi) and other military victories (D'Auria), music (Perrot), and circus games (Bianchi). The garden paintings of the House of Venus in the Shell in Pompeii receives a fine analysis (Carucci).

Remarks on the historical development of mural painting can be found in the lion's share of the papers. A few of them form a sort of chronological chain, from the archaic period (Ackermann &

Dubois), through the Hellenistic (Tober, Vibert-Guigue, Rozenberg), and Roman Imperial periods (Fuchs, Thomas, Tober) up to late Antiquity (Valeva).

These and other contributions show that iconography is a topic of great importance in a world full of images as was the Greco-Roman world. In these proceedings the reader finds some of these papers in the section 'Motifs in Ancient Painting', but may look in other sections as well.

Some specific tendencies of decorative motifs can be gleaned from a series of contributions, especially in combination with those of former congresses. The use of marble veneer, be it real or fictitious, is a constant element in the decoration of rooms from the 1st century BC until late Antiquity. While we observe a meticulous suggestion of real marbles in Hellenistic Greece - probably next to real marbles, now lost - we see a growing suggestion of fantasy veneers in later periods and an expansion of the motif towards all regions of the Mediterranean and beyond. It is interesting to observe how various young scholars are unravelling the questions about the fascination for that marbling and its prestige (Carrive, Van de Liefvoort) and, in that way, perfectly address the main theme of our meeting.. We may ask whether the old Greek examples really served as sources of inspiration for later applications or if there were other stimuli, like the growth of consumption of real marbles as part of interior decoration. Rome, for instance, might have served as the focus of new developments from the time it expanded as the capital of the classical world. Likewise, vegetal masks were a dominant decorative motif in many Italic murals from the late Republic and early Empire onwards (Derwael).

For many students of paintings, the Vesuvian cities remain the first and foremost source and even after some hundred and fifty years of research still provide enough material (Baronio, Carucci, Muslin, Federico). Attention is paid also to the façades of Pompeian buildings, a hitherto relatively neglected topic which might gain profit from the study of old imagery, since the paintings themselves have often faded or disappeared (Barbet, Helg & Malgieri). They accentuate the function and status of a building and are quite informative.

Some specific themes in interior decorations like *aegyptiaca* (Koponen), floating figures (Augris), working people (Barbet) and masks (Derwael, Marko) are indeed best studied in the realm of Pompeii, as is the Flora motif, addressed by Allroggen-Bedel. As to Pompeii's little sister Herculaneum, we observe a happy increase of interest and new approaches of research (Dardenay, Helg & Malghieri & Pascucci) which next to the still pioneer 2014 monograph by Domenico Esposito will bring new insights. Also, the paintings of Ostia receive a second life in scholarly appraisals, beginning with the discovery of early material from before 100 BC as well as Third- and Fourth-style material that seems as rare as that in Rome (Falzone, Conte et al., David et al., Marano, Turci). Moreover, the recontextualisation of material of the imperial era leads to new insights about the use of space in the 2nd and 3rd centuries.

The field of what is often called provincial paintings has been left out for the greater part in this conference. From Spain there are contributions by Iñiguez Berrozpe and Guiral Pelegrin et al. Northern Africa and the Near East were represented as well (Tober, Viert-Guigne, Rozenberg, Michaeli, Guimier-Sorbets, Sntucci, Bianchi). From imperial Greece there is the case of Eleusis, showing panel decorations quite similar to those in the same 2-century contexts of Italy (Vavlekas).

The provincial complexes from Venetia et Histria, Gallia, Germania, and Noricum presented, e.g. from Echzell, Magdalensberg, and Tongres, show a strong attention for figural themes, in which case the connection between topic and context cannot always be made clear (De Nicolo, Boislève, Fuchs, Thomas, Busse, Tober, Dörfler, Groetembril et al., Anđelković Grašar et al. and Harsányi & Kurovsky).

There are several contributions which pay special attention to technique and technical analysis. The use of stucco relief is again a constant topic of our meetings (see Boislève), as is the ingredient of clay (Cavari & Donati). Pigment studies form the basis for the research on painting techniques (Bugini et al.). Murgia and Zerbinatti focus on the composition of wall decorations. 3D modelling even becomes a device in painting studies as is demonstrated in case studies on Oplontis and Aquileia (Clarke, Chiabrandi et al.).

We want to thank the editorial board of BABESCH Supplements for accepting this volume and for the suggestions to improve the work given by the anonymous peer reviewers. Lily Schaafsma has done an extremely good job in formatting the book and preparing it for printing.

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