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Review of *L'età classica*, by Giovanni Becatti

Brunilde S. Ridgway
Bryn Mawr College, bridgway@brynmawr.edu

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MUSÉE NATIONAL DU LOUVRE. CATALOGUE DES ÉTOFFES COPTES, I, by *Pierre du Bourguet*. Pp. 671, color pls. 6, pls. with transparencies 6, numerous figs. Edition des Musées Nationaux, Paris, 1964.

This is the first part of a catalogue in two volumes of the important collection of Coptic textiles in the Louvre. It consists of an introduction and the catalogue of acquisitions preceding the transfer to the Louvre of the collection of the Musée Guimet.

The Introduction (pp. 1-43) contains much original information about techniques of weaving, chronology, themes and motifs, to which an up-to-date bibliography is added. What the author modestly calls "observations" (pp. 8-16) form an elaborate study of the materials (dyed wool and undyed linen), technique of weaving (originally linen, gradually evolving into tapestry, 7th-8th centuries A.D.), the use of the vertical loom probably as large as 2 x 3 m., division of work between young hands and master-weaver, and the weaving processes—illustrated with 17 line sketches and 6 plates of macrophotographs doubled with transparencies indicating in red outline the characteristic details. Though the majority of the collection consists of fragments it is still one of the richest in complete weaves. In the chronological classification (pp. 17-21), du Bourguet's most original contribution is the relative chronology characterized by lower dates, which he proposed in 1953 and which has since been accepted. In discussing the chronology of the collection (pp. 22-35) the various criteria pertaining to each century are compared with stylistic and motif elements from Antioch mosaics. Only a few pieces can be ascribed to the 3rd-4th centuries, but a larger number—figures, portraits, disks and squares with simple plant or geometric motifs—date from the 5th century. In the 6th more accurate characteristics can be found in the geometric design and interlace, disks and squares with large-eyed figures and medallions ornamented with animals, hunt scenes, peopled scrolls and Nilotic scenes. The $\frac{3}{4}$ leaf of the 6th-century scroll spreads out and is flattened in the 7th, while stems curve into medallions. The eyes are squarish. In the 8th century the medallions are independent, the eyes are huge squares and the hair is shaped like a sack. This last becomes one of the features for the 9th century, together with diagonal grids forming a central lozenge enclosing a plant, bands with a sequence of flowers bordered by half-flowers, an individual flower within a frame which follows its outline, and the appearance of the so-called skeletal, stylized animals and plants. In the 10th century the skeletal style is fully developed into a wiry design of figures with mop hair, allied to dancing girls of a debased style with broad hips and short limbs, lac-dye red ground and elements of costume showing Byzantine influence. The 11th century features one group with blue or violet-purple ground filled with various motifs in a *horror vacui* debased style, and another group with spear-shaped motifs and

series of animals, all reminiscent of the Fatimide style. In the 12th century the so-called Peruvian dancers appear associated with 8-lobed rosettes and cocks in an intersperse with scalloped edges. A last chapter, "Themes and Motifs" (pp. 36-42), deals with inscriptions used in textiles, Pharaonic survivals like that of the bow in E 61 (not B 61, p. 38) and the grain shaped like an Egyptian eye, not necessarily an *wdjat*-eye (E 119, p. 38), and Christian subjects, where du Bourguet perhaps overemphasizes his cautiousness—even to not recognizing the cruciform flowers as symbolic of the cross (p. 39). Among unique themes he lists Nile and Euthenia near a Nilometer (D 37), Dionysos and a girl with cymbals (B 24), the three Graces (D 46), Aphrodite Anadyomene (C 76), Eros archer (E 61) and the Seasons of Winter and Spring (B 25). Some of the highlights in the evolution of themes are mentioned: mythological and geometric motifs appearing briefly in the early centuries, others from the Christian period evolving with Islam, while the majority originating from Hellenistic or even Egyptian ones survive into the Islamic period (Erotes, portraits, dancing girls, riders).

The second part of the volume, by far the larger (pp. 47-672), classifies the pieces by centuries and gives at least one photograph of every one, often complemented by an enlargement, description of the piece, origin of the theme, technical analysis, measurements, bibliography, preservation and provenance. Such a thorough study compensates for the dullness of some of the offset reproductions. Enlarged details accompany the original illustration or are found at the end (pp. 657-663). This is not the place to discuss problems of dating, but the wool tapestry G 353 (10th century A.D., p. 484), if Coptic, should probably be placed in the 5th century (compare B 25, pp. 29, 75). A general index, plus one of costume elements, and a technical index provide adequate reference.

The work ranks as the best among basic catalogues of Coptic textiles such as A. F. Kendrick, *Catalogue of Textiles from Burying Grounds in Egypt*, I-III (London, Victoria and Albert Museum, 1920-1922), and A. Wulff and W. F. Volbach, *Spätantike und Koptische Stoffe aus ägyptischen Grabfunden in den Staatlichen Museum Berlin* (1926). It reflects the author's special background as an Egyptologist and Coptologist and his long years of research, as well as his original approach to chronology. The superb quality and refined taste of the publication, except for some of the offset illustrations, are beyond praise.

ALEXANDER M. BADAWY

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

L'ETÀ CLASSICA, by *Giovanni Becatti*. (Le Grandi Epoche dell'Arte, vol. 3.) Pp. 421, figs. 359, color pls. 32. Sansoni ed., Florence, 1965. Lit. 10,000.

We have witnessed in recent years a splendid development of archaeological books "for the general public." This definition usually implies a text covering a wide

range of subjects and periods, accompanied by lavish and excellent illustrations; the content aims at reaching the educated and interested reader who lacks specialized knowledge in the field and therefore the author must refrain from discussing problems in depth and express straightforward opinions on many issues. Becatti's book corresponds in large part to this definition, and yet it is also much more and thus deserves specific mention in an archaeological journal.

The originality of this work (which ranges from the end of the Mycenaean period to ca. A.D. 400) lies in the attempt to point out the "classical element" in art within a chronological framework but regardless of geographical distribution. We thus find Phrygian pottery from Gordion discussed in the same chapter as Greek Geometric vases, Etruscan Orientalizing art grouped with Corinthian and Protoattic, and so on down in time to a treatment of Roman provincial sculpture in France and England and of the more sophisticated production in the capital itself. The usual treatment isolates each civilization in a compartment of its own and results in a juxtaposition of artistic productions, but Becatti's approach gives cross-sections of the ancient world at various given moments, examining "levels" rather than areas of culture.

This "excavational" method is open to the hazards of *de facto* excavation. Stratigraphy is hardly ever homogeneous, and not all aspects of a civilization can be found in each layer; in the book the unevenness stems from the author's choice, so that certain geographical areas appear and disappear from the spotlight according not to their span of productivity but to their claim to interest. Conversely, certain artistic manifestations are followed through in time regardless of the particular chronological section in which they are initially discussed. For instance, the paintings at Doura Europos are first mentioned in the chapter on Antonine art (pp. 343-344), but their development is immediately outlined through the Severan period down to the introduction of Sassanian influence; the Basilica at Paestum and the plans of other Italian temples are analyzed shortly after a description of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia (pp. 153-154).

The inclusion or exclusion of certain monuments is also necessarily a matter of choice, and Becatti wisely has sometimes avoided the obvious and the spectacular in favor of less-known works. There is a shorter discussion of the Periklean buildings than of Apulian and Campanian pottery, more emphasis on Roman coinage and metalware than on the Ara Pacis. The author at times devotes only a few sentences to each selection, but invariably his choice of words is illuminating and to the point: the informed reader finds his mental picture sharpened, the uninformed is spurred to investigate further. Indeed, one of the main characteristics of the book is that it presupposes a great deal of knowledge, or invites one to acquire it, since even the generous photographic commentary cannot keep pace with the author's erudition.

The guiding principle of the book is perhaps expressed on p. 223: since for the archaic period we lack

adequate information on artistic personalities, we must turn to the objects themselves; but when great masters begin to emerge, we may follow them to establish the leading artistic trends of their time. Accordingly, a great variety of artistic manifestations is explored from the eighth to the sixth century B.C., but subsequent periods are focused around the major names of the time and the selection becomes progressively narrower and more subjective. To me personally, the philological approach of correlating literary sources with extant monuments and the attempt to attribute specific works to specific artists seem purely intellectual and often thankless exercises. I therefore enjoy Becatti's pages most when he discusses the "nameless" production of the early periods, or when Roman artistic anonymity forces him into broad and powerful depictions of trends and productions. He is really at his best in Roman art, especially when he highlights the contrast between Greek influences and Roman ideals; but the section on classical Greek art follows somewhat too closely the path of traditional and conservative scholarship, except for occasional deviations on issues of particular interest to the author. For example, Becatti still prefers to date the Pheidias Zeus before the Athena Parthenos, rejecting the circumstantial evidence of recent finds at Olympia. In other cases one may wonder whether the author is also expressing a personal opinion or whether perhaps new information came too late to be included. Though generally up to date both in text and photographs, the book still associates the acanthus column in Delphi with the earthquake of 373 B.C.; the reclining figure of the Geneleos group is still identified as female; the Zeus of the Siphnian Treasury pediment is still called Athena; the akroterion from Epidauros is still labelled Epione; the Niobids are thought to derive from Skopasian-Praxitelean currents in the third century B.C., and so on. Finally, the captions to several illustrations are wrong, but the blame in this case cannot rest with Becatti, for he often gives the correct information in the text or in the list of photographs at the end. It is surprising that in a volume of such elegant format there should be misspellings of foreign names in the bibliography, omission of words in the text and even mistaken dates in the captions. Some photographs have also been retouched in order to differentiate the statuary from the dark background, with unsatisfactory results. Serial numbering of illustrations (instead of page reference), a map and a few more imperial dates could be welcome additions.

These minor criticisms would not have been worth mentioning, had it not been for the announcement in book catalogues of a forthcoming English edition of this work. *L'Età Classica* is so much more than a picture book and so close to being a very useful handbook of ancient art, that one can only welcome its translation and hope that these minor flaws will be corrected and eliminated.

BRUNILDE SISMONDO RIDGWAY

BRYN MAWR COLLEGE