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tion of this book as “eine erste Zwischenbilanz des Materials” (p. 271) displays an ideal proportion of modesty.

Three appendices (pp. 273–328) contain indispensable concordance lists of all properly published (in *CMS* and associated publications) Mycenaean sealings. The bibliography (pp. 329–347) is full up to 2011, with only one entry not updated before the submission of the manuscript at the end of 2012: ‘Hallager im Druck b’ (p. 334) was published in 2011.

The abundance, high quality and informativeness of the illustrations (most of them plans and graphs in colour) accompanying the data presentation (mostly in Chapters 3–5) deserve high praise. Overall, this excellent monograph should be consulted and carefully considered by anyone with a serious interest in understanding the workings of the Mycenaean palatial administrations. While maintaining the interest of the expert reader, it can now also be recommended as the best introduction to Mycenaean sealing practice to students and non-expert professionals alike.

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S. Vargas Vázquez, *Diseños geométricos en los mosaicos de Écija (Sevilla)* (BAR-IS, 2654), Oxford: Archaeopress 2014. 202 pp., 21 figs., 48 plates, 53 geometric drawings. ISBN 978-1-4073-1296-5.

This innovative book focuses on the geometric mosaics of the Roman city of Colonia Augusta Firma Astigi, modern Écija in Andalusia, Spain. The study presents a way to reconstruct the geometric patterns on mosaic floors in an accessible arrangement. Most importantly, the book gives a convincing picture of the creative process of imaginative geometricians and skilled craftsmen. This work is a substantial achievement founded on the decoding of the geometric compositions through a system of construction drawings developed on AutoCAD by the author. They show how the basic forms relate and in ever-changing combinations generate new patterns of great complexity and visual attraction.

The publication is a shortened version of the author’s extensive thesis defended at the University of Pablo Olavide, Seville in 2013/2014. Written in Spanish, the volume comprises an informative abstract in English, an introduction, and six chapters, followed by black and white plates, graphic documentation, and a bibliography. The catalogue contains 48 selected well-conserved geometric mosaics among the originally collected 78 of the city, as those that are lost or fragmented are omitted in this publication.

In the introduction and abstract the author presents an informative setting of the study and its place in a larger future project covering the geometric mosaics of the whole region of Bética. An overall aim is set to increase the interest in and heighten the value of geometric motifs in Roman mosaics, which have been overshadowed by figurative motifs in previous studies. The author rightly remarks that this is in contrast to the role geometry held in the contemporary Roman world. As one of the practical branches of mathematics, geometry was central for the advancements in architecture, engineering, urban planning, and surveying, not to mention the role it played in the embellishing of different sorts of material.

Chapter 1 (“Methodology”) (the following titles are the reviewer’s translation) introduces the arrangement of the book and the catalogue, described in more detail below. Chapter 2 (“Historic contexts”) presents the ancient settings for the mosaics, the city of Astigi, which played a significant role in the history of economic success of Bética and dating from Emperor Augustus time, about AD 14 onwards. Situated in one of the most fertile areas of the Iberian peninsula and ideally placed in the centre of the region, Astigi’s production of olive oil, which constituted the main base for its wealth, reached its peak under Emperor Hadrian. This coincides with the city’s maximum size and its monumental architecture between the 1st century BC and the 2nd century AD. The period of abundant mosaic production is longer, extending from the 1st to the 4th centuries AD.

Chapter 3 (“Current state of research”) affirms that the mosaics of the city equal those of other large cities in the Roman Empire, but their number, quality, and originality differ from the rest of Bética and they have evoked great interest since their discovery. The excavation history starts in the 1940s resulting in the first publication in 1951 (Hernandez Sanchez Collantes de Terán), which according to the custom of the time, primarily focused on well-known mosaics with mythological motifs. New studies took place during the 1950s and the interest continued in the 1970s and 1980s. G. López Monteagudo is mentioned as a forerunner who has explored the area since 1992 emphasizing the iconographic uniqueness of the figurative motifs.

Chapter 4 (“Catalogue”) presents in the first part the 48 mosaic panels, which are organized according to their location. The second part presents the plates with photographs or drawings of the mosaic panels found in Écija that display the patterns focused on by the study. The catalogue includes a general description with an overview of the geometric area, followed by a closer presentation of the basic geometric structures and a chronology. The establishment of a timeline presented larger problems than expected, since fundamental and reliable information was missing and geometric motifs were used over an extensive time-span.

Chapter 5 ("Geometric construction drawings") is divided into two parts and comprises the core of the study with the aim to individualize, deconstruct, and reconstruct the different geometric designs found in Écija in their ideal forms. The first part encompasses a presentation, classification, and definition of the geometric forms used, the "letters" in the geometric alphabet; these range from simpler forms to those that are more complex. The 48 presented geometric mosaics of the city are classified into twelve groups, A to L, representing the different forms of basic design which dominate in each mosaic, such as linear (A), circular (B), and triangular (C).

In this part, different ways of constructing a geometric pattern from the basic geometric figures are attempted. As a consequence the author is also able to suggest how geometric patterns might have been created and applied on the mosaic floors. The first stage shows the complete geometric construction, while the following present shortcuts of constructing and transferring the patterns, which nevertheless both require a fine understanding of and division of space. The methods employed could have included creating the figures from a grid of lines or repeating basic geometric figures, with so called modules. Both ways are easy to vary and can therefore be seen as a kind of pattern generator. Using a module, the forms, such as a square, hexagon or triangle, would have been repeated through the use of a set of tools common in many crafts, including compass, ruler, and matrices/templates. Here the author illustrates how a composition develops from a previous one, and how compositions which in appearance look very different could have a common geometric base.

The second part "the graphic documentation" constitutes a compilation of construction drawings, arranged according to the geometric forms. They illustrate how complex combinations can be developed from a simpler one. The patterns are here recreated in their ideal form, as proto models, with the measurements corresponding to a mosaic without construction faults. The drawings display how an impressive number of new patterns from, for example a simple figure of a square, can be created and varied.

In the last part ("Final considerations") the author identifies the originality and quality of the mosaics of the city, where no two mosaic floors have a similar composition. Such a variety means that researchers need to develop new analytical methods, in order to identify workshops or establish a chronology. One solution is integral studies of each mosaic, which include lesser decorative components and boards (the lines forming the panels with the geometric design.. This has already been done in the current study with convincing results, tracing seemingly disparate panels to the same building and the same period.

In an interesting section, the author suggests that we ought to regard the creators of the original compositions as dedicat-

ed geometric masters with inquiring minds and with freedom to experiment, although we do not know for what media or material. It can be pointed out here that geometry was one of the four branches of mathematics included in the *artes liberales*, together with arithmetic, music, and astronomy, and the reviewer becomes curious to know more about the link between the original creations and their development in mosaics. Possibly the compositions displayed can be thought of as equivalent to the dynamic store of geometric patterns that workshops most likely used in order to adapt to any floor, taste, and circumstance. Hence, the craftsmen were equally creative and boldly experimental. As the author suggests, what we see is a "play with geometry", in constant search for new variations and solutions.

As always, the colours are missing in BAR, which in this case brings some disadvantages but also advantages. On one hand the excellent drawings would have been eye-catching in colour, however, on the other hand the black and white print increases contrasts and lines, so they now become more distinct and the patterns more legible.

To conclude, the great advantage of the book is that it gives the reader a key to understand and decipher the geometric figures, forms, and compositions. The study also gives an idea of how little was needed to create new patterns, sometimes with astonishing optic effects, by changing scale, proportions, contrasts, and chromatics, producing a strong impact on the viewer. It will positively contribute to a paradigm shift in our understanding of the making of geometric mosaics and their makers. This, I would say, is the great benefit of the study, which will hopefully add to the ever-growing opinion of the mosaic art as unceasingly inventive.

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E.J. Watts, *The final pagan generation* (Transformation of the Classical Heritage, 53), Oakland: University of California Press 2015. 327 pp. ISBN 978-0-520-28370-1.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of the Christianization of the Roman Empire in the 4th century. Understandably, it has been an object of study for multitudes of scholars, and continues to be so. *The final pagan generation* by Watts both is and is not a contribution to this field. On the one hand it deals with the consequences of advancing Christianity, how the structures of empire became increasingly Christian in the course of the 4th century. On the other hand its purpose is to study those who did not take an active part in this process,