SVENSKA INSTITUTEN I ATHEN OCH ROM
INSTITUTUM ATHENIENSE ATQUE INSTITUTUM ROMANUM REGNI SUECIAE

Opuscula

Annual of the Swedish Institutes at Athens and Rome

9
2016

STOCKHOLM

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Published with the aid of a grant from The Swedish Research Council
The English text was revised by Rebecca Montague, Hindon, Salisbury, UK

Opuscula is a peer reviewed journal. Contributions to *Opuscula* should be sent to the Secretary of the Editorial Committee before 1 November every year. Contributors are requested to include an abstract summarizing the main points and principal conclusions of their article. For style of references to be adopted, see www.ecsi.se/guides-contributors. Books for review should be sent to the Secretary of the Editorial Committee.

ISSN 2000-0898
ISBN 978-91-977798-8-3

Printed by Elanders, Sverige AB, Mölnlycke 2016
Cover illustration from Blid *et al*. in this volume, p. 188

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 dedicated 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,

but who continued to live lives in which religious controversy was not the dominant factor. What Watts wants to do is to show that such concerns, the struggle between a triumphant Christianity and a retreating paganism, did not feature as large in the lives of the majority of Romans at the time as the sources would have us think, or at least, they didn't matter in the same way. He particularly wants to track the concerns of an older generation, that which was old in the 390s and which had been active for most of the middle of the 4th century. This generation was born in the 310s or early 320s when the empire was still firmly pagan and Christianity was merely the favourite cult of the emperor Constantine. This is the final pagan generation of the book's title, and it included both Christians and pagans.

In the Introduction Watts states that this book is about the silent majority of the 4th century Roman empire, those who in an analogy with the 1960s "spent the fourth century doing the equivalent of going to work, washing their cars, and mowing the lawn while their children participated in the unfolding of a revolutionary age" (p. 9). However, the main protagonists are far from representatives of the silent majority. The book follows the fates of Praetextatus, Ausonius, Themistitus, and Libanius, as they progress through their lives from childhood and school, through university and public careers, to their old age. Each chapter deals with the different stages of their lives, setting out the political and religious framework in which they lived and worked, and how these affected their fortunes. Since they were very prominent individuals much information about them has been preserved, particularly from their own writings, but they represent only the very small minority of the aristocracy, and in Praetextatus' case the even tinier minority of the "senators of Rome".

Theirs was the final generation brought up in a world in which paganism was the norm. In the first two chapters Watts tells of their childhood and education, making the point that the world in which they grew up was firmly pagan. From an early age children were surrounded by the divine, by its rituals, smells, and sacred objects, as well as admonitions to respect the gods. In the 320s they moved on to university, but although Constantine had by this time started to move against the practice of pagan cults, Watts argues that they failed to be concerned by the emperor's restrictions, or to engage with them. Their lives revolved around their teachers, probably all pagans, and their fellow students. The world at large and which religious policies the emperor was promoting at any one time were, according to Watts, far from their minds.

In the next four chapters Watts describes first the imperial system of the 4th century (Chapter 3) and how the final pagan generation began to interact with the wider world (Chapter 4) and rose to prominent positions within the empire's hierarchies (Chapters 5–6). The empire they grew up in was one of great opportunity and wealth for the provincial upper classes, as imperial administration expanded in the emperors' attempts to channel the talents of provincial aristocracies towards the good of the empire. They were concerned with working within the system and with maintaining it. Religious questions and struggles, although they were aware of them and engaged with them to a degree, were not as high on their agenda as other concerns, such as political careers and social standing. One of the more interesting points made by Watts is that the imperial system in which the final pagan generation worked favoured friendships and connections, both social and political, over religious issues. Most élites, whether pagan or Christian, did not welcome imperial interference when it came to their religious beliefs. For instance, many of Libanius' letters from the reign of Julian support Christian friends of his who were threatened with disruption because of the emperor's new anti-Christian policies (pp. 122–124). The maintenance of his social and political network was more important to Libanius than supporting religious measures with which he actually sympathized. Attitudes such as this lent the system a certain inertia, which softened the effectiveness of imperial attempts to legislate on religion.

The following generation was much more anxious about religious matters, and thus more inclined to get involved in religious struggles. In an interesting chapter (Chapter 7), Watts show how many Christian aristocratic youths in the second half of the 4th century chose to abandon the careers of their fathers for which they were training to join the clergy (e.g. Ambrose) or to become ascetics. Watts calls them "dropouts". Not only did Christians begin to realize the full consequences of their monotheistic religion and its incompatibility with paganism, but there was also an increase of opportunities to exert influence outside the imperial system. From Constantine onwards churches and bishoprics accumulated large resources, giving bishops the means to compete for influence and patronage. When individuals from local nobility, like Ambrose, became bishops this further increased the prestige of the Church and thus its influence. The growing power and prestige of bishops meant that they could challenge the authority of the imperial system.

The last three chapters (Chapters 8–10) tell the story of how the final pagan generation in the reign of Gratian and Theodosius was gradually being replaced in positions of authority by members of this younger generation with less faith in the imperial system. By this time the game had begun to change. So long as the social and administrative imperial system functioned without a serious rival, people like Libanius were successful in limiting the anti-pagan measures of Christian emperors (and in limiting the anti-Christian measures of Julian). But with the growing influence of the Church and Christian "drop-outs" they were less successful, as threats to

pagan activities and buildings came from outside the system, and were consequently less vulnerable to counter-measures from within it. Nevertheless, members of the final pagan generation continued to live their lives pretty much as they always had, albeit experiencing a gradual lessening of their influence due to old age and rival power structures.

Watts' book is an important contribution to our understanding of why Roman society at the end of the 4th century experienced and was receptive to a firmer stance against paganism, both from the emperors and from the Church. Earlier attempts to clamp down on pagan practices were ineffective because of the inherent inertia of the imperial system, its desire to maintain status quo. By the 370s forces outside the system began acting against pagan cults with the tacit approval of the emperors, emperors who were themselves products of the age which produced Christian "dropouts".

No less important, however, is Watts' argument that for most Romans the religious upheavals of the 4th century were not the main focus of their lives. On the contrary, both Christians and pagans continued much as before, living their lives whilst a revolutionary age unfolded, perhaps not behind their backs, but certainly without their involvement or particular concern for the future of their own religious identities.

There are some irritating aspects of this book, however. At times it is vague and fails to follow an argument through. In several instances the treatment of the sources is hurried and the consequent conclusions simplistic. Whether the reason for this is a rushed deadline imposed by the publishers or the consequence of limited space or something else, the fact is that *The final pagan generation* would have benefitted from a more thorough discussion on several points. Furthermore, in two instances I checked the source referenced out of pure interest, and in both instances the sources were misrepresented (p. 63, n. 32, *The Life of Melania* 17; p. 169, n. 7, Amm. Marc. 28.1.57). A random sampling of references show that this is not a common occurrence, nor would I expect it to be, and at least in the second instance the discrepancy between Watts and the sources has no actual bearing on his argument, but it does seem sloppy and reinforces the sense that the book was rushed through publication, which is a pity.

But let me end on a positive note: I like this book. It has its weaknesses, which seem to be the result of too much haste more than anything else, but it offers an interesting way of looking at the process of Christianization and the social mechanics that made the triumph of Christianity at the end of the 4th century possible. And it shows that religious controversy was not at the top of the agenda for most Romans, whatever the sources would have us believe.

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