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Inscriptions on Romano-British Mosaics and Wall-Paintings

By ROGER LING

The topic of inscriptions on Roman mosaics and wall-paintings is one that deserves more study than it has received. Some attention has been given to dedications and signatures,[1] but the somewhat larger category of texts that elucidate or comment on visual images has been strangely neglected.[2] They raise a number of interesting questions. What were they designed to achieve? Who was expected to read them? Why do some images carry texts and not others? What do the texts tell us about literacy and responses to art in the Roman world? A study on such questions has been promised by Angelique Notermans, but she has so far, to my knowledge, published no more than a brief conference paper.[3]

The object of the present study is to review the inscriptions from Britain, to determine the categories into which they fall, and to see what they tell us about literacy and culture in the province. Here a new opportunity is presented by the corpus of Romano-British mosaics being compiled by D.S. Neal and S.R. Cosh, the first two volumes of which have now appeared.[4] Together with the material already collected for the relevant section of the corpus of inscriptions in Roman Britain (*RIB*)[5] and for my own catalogue of Romano-British wall-painting,[6] this provides potentially fruitful evidence for such an enquiry.

I am, of course, limiting myself to inscriptions which were purposely supplied, for various reasons, by the mosaicist or the painter, and ignore graffiti or dipinti added 'after the event'. I also pass over fragments of inscriptions which are illegible or too incomplete for interpretation.[7] This leaves a total of ten mosaics and one painting. The material in question covers the standard range: artists' signatures, the names of patrons who have commissioned a work, dedications to deities, labels identifying figures and objects depicted, and quotations from literature or pseudo-literary comments relating to scenes depicted. Three of the examples I have already discussed in a couple of earlier articles where new or variant readings are proposed.[8] For the remaining items I have few radical reinterpretations to offer, but in some cases there is a need to adjudicate between the conflicting opinions of earlier commentators.

1 See e.g. Donderer 1989; Dunbabin 1999a, 270–7.

2 For some general comments see Dunbabin 1999b, 741–4. For verse inscriptions on mosaics of the early Christian period see Février 1994.

3 Notermans 2001.

4 Neal and Cosh 2002; Cosh and Neal 2005.

5 Frere and Tomlin 1992.

6 Davey and Ling 1982.

7 This applies to most of the examples listed in Davey and Ling 1982, 44, where only odd letters survive. The tiny inscription at Kingscote there referred to is indecipherable and may have belonged to a tablet or the like which formed part of the actual figure-scene. Among the inscriptions on mosaics I omit three examples which are either indecipherable or known only from descriptions: Frere and Tomlin 1992, nos 2448.4 (Winterton), 10 (Colerne), and 12 (Littleton).

8 Ling 2003 and 2005.

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SIGNATURES AND DEDICATIONS

BIGNOR, SUSSEX

The one inscription that is regularly cited as the signature of an artist is $\overset{\frown}{\text{TER}}$, said to be the abbreviated form of a name such as Terentius, on a mosaic at Bignor (FIG. 1). But a recent article by Stephen Cosh has challenged the traditional interpretation and suggested alternative possibilities.[9]

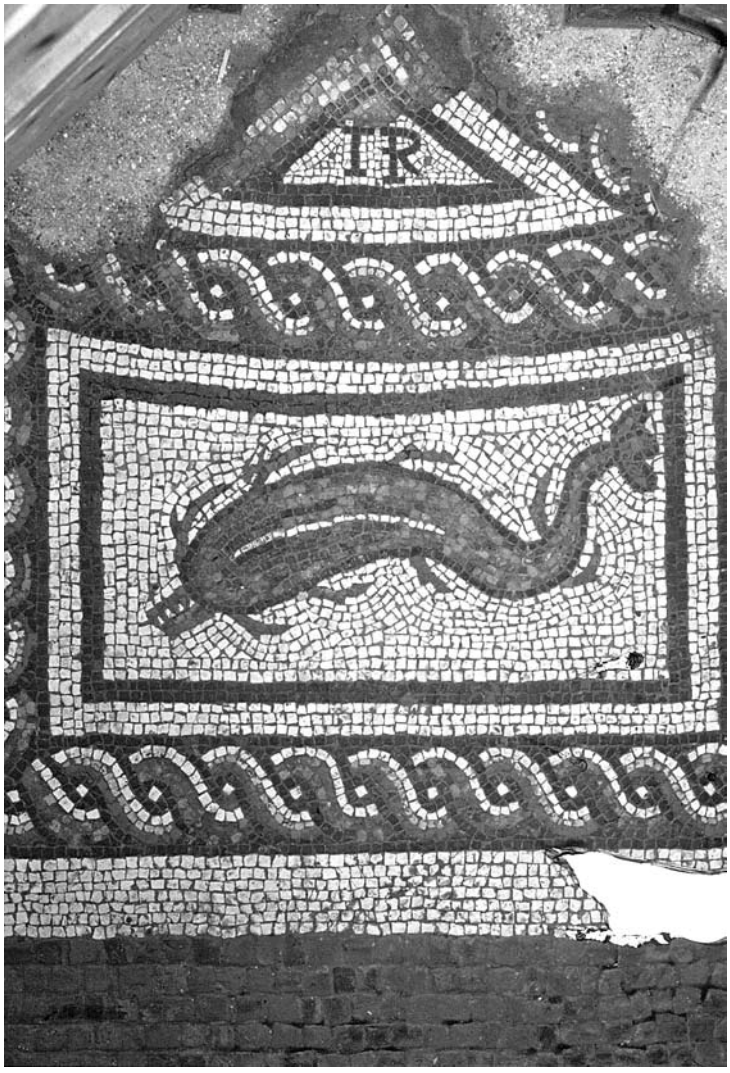

FIG. 1. Bignor (Sussex), villa, Room 26: fragment of mosaic with inscription TER. (*Photo: S.R. Cosh*)

[9] Cosh 2001. Interpretation as a signature: see most recently Donderer 1989, 111–12, no. A 87, pl. 51, 1. Generally on the inscription: Frere and Tomlin 1992, 91, no. 2448.11.

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The inscription appears in a small triangular panel, the sole survivor of what was probably a series of eight such panels set within the circumference of a large roundel. Virtually all of the interior of this roundel was already destroyed when the pavement was excavated in 1811; but according to the reconstruction of the excavator, Samuel Lysons, the triangles would have alternated with eight hexagonal fields grouped round a central octagon.[10] The fact that only one triangle has survived leaves open the possibility that all eight carried inscriptions, in which case TER is unlikely to have been a signature, but was rather one of eight labels defining the contents of the adjacent hexagons. Cosh suggests three alternative readings. First, TER could be short for *tertius* and signify the third day of the eight-day market week, with appropriate planetary deities in the hexagons, as in a villa at nearby Bramdean (Hants.).[11] Secondly, it could stand for Terpsichore in a sequence of nine Muses (the ninth occupying the central field). Thirdly, it could be the second half of AVSTER (the South Wind) divided between two triangles. Here Cosh links the label not with one of the hexagons but with a 'Cupid-like' figure in an elliptical field outside the roundel, at the corner of the room; but any bipartite inscription would more logically have referred to a figure in the hexagon bracketed by the two triangles concerned.

The argument is seductive, because it would be a remarkable coincidence if the surviving triangle were precisely the only one with an inscription. But none of Cosh's proposals is fully convincing. Against the *tertius* restoration is the lack of a parallel for the use of a number in place of a name for a day of the week. Against Terpsichore is the abbreviated form of the name, which not only omits most of the letters but also has a ligature of E and R: would the viewer really have understood the abbreviation? Against Auster is the difficulty — assuming that the label relates to one of the hexagons — of finding candidates for the four additional (and unlabelled) figures which must have alternated with the four Winds to make up a complement of eight equally weighted subjects; and, again, would the viewer have found it easy to understand the bipartite labels, which would presumably have taken such forms as ZEPH and YRVS, EVR and VS, and AQV and ILO? These difficulties have now been discussed in an article by Roger Wilson, who points out, more importantly, that it is not normal for identifying labels in Roman mosaics to be set in a separate panel from that of the figure or scene that they elucidate.[12] The question of the meaning of TER must remain unresolved, but for the moment it is best to continue to regard it as the signature of the craftsman, whether Terentius or another (Tertius? Tertullus?).

LONDON

Another candidate for a craftsman's signature is a fragmentary inscription on a mosaic in London known only from a drawing of the nineteenth century (FIG. 2).[13] The text, which displays parts of four lines set within what was probably an octagonal or half-octagonal panel, is partly incomprehensible, and one suspects that there are errors in the transcription. The reason is not hard to seek. The original drawing, preserved in a portfolio volume in the library of the Society of Antiquaries of London, is accompanied by the legend 'Henry Hodge made this drawing from Mr J.W. Tolly's sketch and the fragments then in his possession'.[14] Mr Tolly's sketch is probably

[10] Lysons 1817b, pl. XIII left.

[11] Smith 1977, 111, no. 15; 116–17, nos 32–3; 117, no. 36; 119, no. 46; 128, no. 79; 133, no. 98; 134, no. 103. As there were only seven planetary deities, an extra deity or personification must have been introduced in the eighth field: Toynbee (1964, 258) and Smith (1977, 111, no. 15) propose Fortuna or the like.

[12] Wilson 2004, 18–19.

[13] Frere and Tomlin 1992, 92, no. 2448.13; cf. Royal Commission on Historical Monuments 1928, 176, no. 60, fig. 88.

[14] Red Portfolio London IV (P–Z), folio 1 *verso*. I am grateful to the President, Fellows and Librarian of the Society for allowing me to examine it.

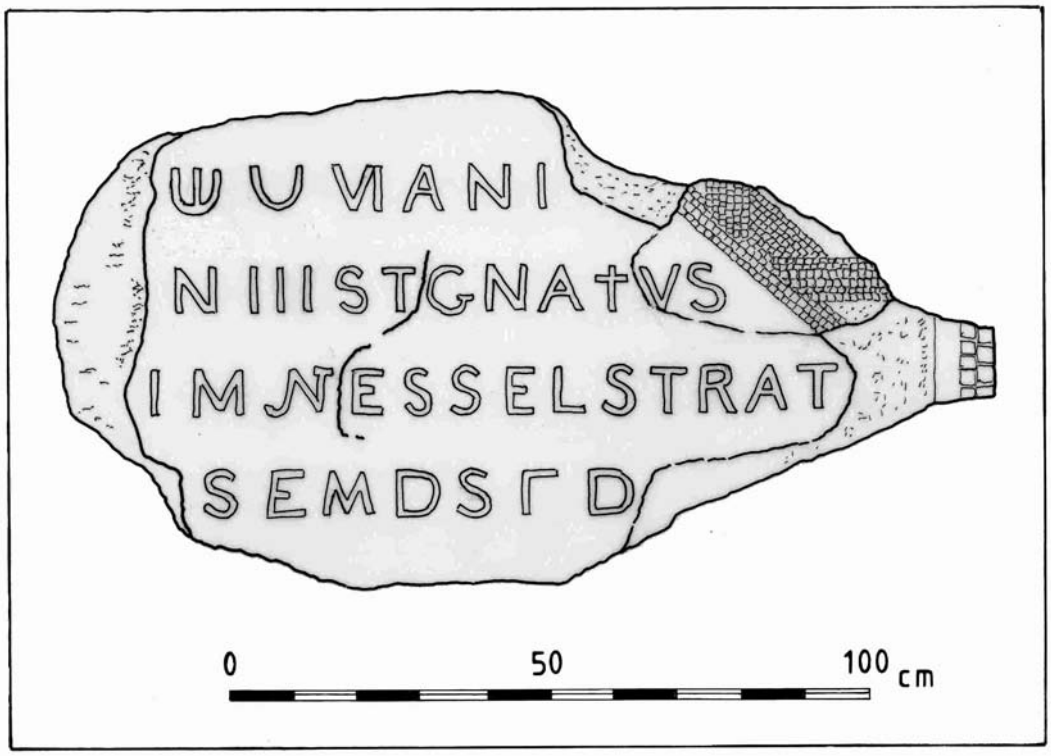

FIG. 2. London, remains of inscription on a mosaic found between Botolph Lane and Pudding Lane in 1887. (Adapted from RCHM, *Roman London*, fig. 88)

the separate drawing stuck to the same folio at the left, which shows just the elements at the right-hand tip of the larger drawing: the letters …VS and …T plus the adjacent piece of the framing geometric pattern. One suspects that the additional fragments have been wrongly assembled. There are signs of a crack which may represent a missing section at the middle (to the left of G and ESSEL in the two middle lines). But the phrase [PAV]IMENT(VM) <T>ESSEL(LATVM) STRAT(VM) ('… tessellated pavement laid …') is a plausible reconstruction, and there seems to be part of a personal name <E>GNATIVS in the line above. Was this pavement the work of a mosaicist named Egnatius?

Unfortunately the rest of the inscription is too defective for restoration. However, the letters DSTD at the end of the fourth line may possibly, as suggested by the editors of *RIB*, be corrected to DSPD (*de sua pecunia dedit*).[15] This, together with the large scale of the lettering, with each character about 7 cm high and the longest line at least 1.10 m in length, makes it likely that Egnatius and any co-signatories were the sponsors rather than the practitioners of the mosaic. In other words, this inscription should be classified as the record of a donation or dedication rather than a signature.[16]

[15] Frere and Tomlin 1992, 92.

[16] For a similar formula in a mosaic at Avenches in Switzerland see von Gonzenbach 1961, 72, no. 5.23, pl. 26; Bögli 1984, 35, fig. 36; Fuchs 1994: M(ARCVS) FL(AVIVS) MARC[IA]NV[S] …./ MEDIA[M] …. / ET EXEDR[AM] …. / TESSELLA(TO) STRAV[IT] …. / D(E) S(VA) [P(ECVNIA)] [D(EDIT)]. Cf. Donderer 1989, 29, 30. The restoration *tessella(to)* is mine. I am grateful to Stephen Cosh for reminding me of this parallel.

THRUXTON, HANTS.

The inscription *Quintus Natalius Natalinus et Bodeni* on a mosaic from the Roman villa at Thruxton, partly preserved in the British Museum (FIG. 3), is in such large letters (nearly 20 cm

FIG. 3. Thruxton (Hants.), villa, Bacchus mosaic. Engraving by John Lickman (1823–24). (*Photo: S.R. Cosh*)

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high) and such a conspicuous position that it is once again unlikely to be the signature of an artist or artists, but must name the patron or patrons.[17] This would appear to be reinforced by the remains of letters on the opposite side of the pavement, visible at the time of its excavation, which have been interpreted as belonging to a line ending in the phrase [EX] V[OT]O. Various commentators have provided a preceding verb: *fecerunt*, *dederunt*, *posuerunt*, or *promiserunt*.[18] Q. Natalius Natalinus and Bodeni … would therefore have commissioned the mosaic in fulfilment of a vow. But the phrase *ex voto* is normally found in religious contexts, and there are no grounds for believing that the room at Thruxton functioned in any sense as a temple, as believed in the nineteenth century, or served a domestic cult, as argued in a recent study.[19] There is, in fact, no compelling reason to restore …]V[..]O to make *ex voto*: it is not even certain that the O is the last letter. We have no means of knowing what was in the second line. It could have given further names after *Bodeni*, and indeed have provided the missing part of the name *Bodeni*, which is likely to be incomplete rather than a nominative plural (the Bodeni, father and son? two brothers?) or a genitive (son of Bodenius?).[20] In any case this does not affect our basic conclusion that the names in the first line are those of the mosaic's sponsors.

LYDNEY, GLOS.

Certainly dedicated in honour of a deity was a mosaic inscription found in 1805 in front of the triple shrine within the cella of the temple at Lydney. This temple has been identified from a

FIG. 4. Lydney Park (Glos.), temple: inscription in mosaic pavement of cella. (From W.H. Bathurst and C.W. King, *Roman Antiquities at Lydney Park* (1879), pl. VIII)

17 Frere and Tomlin 1992, 90–1, no. 2448.9. Cf. Donderer 1989, 147–8, no. C 31, pl. 63, 3. Generally on the mosaic: Henig and Soffe 1993.

18 See Henig and Soffe 1993, 4–5.

19 Henig and Soffe 1993, 4–7. Against this view Smith 1977, 109–10.

20 For different interpretations of BODENI see Frere and Tomlin 1992, 91; Henig and Soffe 1993, 4. An argument against the second line having continued the names is the change of letter size and spacing suggested by the two surviving letters: it looks as though the lettering of the first line is more tightly packed to cram in the names and leave the second line free to record the act of sponsorship.

number of dedications as that of a native deity, Nodens, who was assimilated to Mars, and the inscription (now destroyed but known from an early drawing: FIG. 4) can be restored as *D(eo) M(arti) N(odenti) T(itus) Flavius Senilis pr(aepositus?) rel(igionum?) ex stipibus pos<s>uit o[pitu]lante Victorino interp[re]tiante*: 'to the god Mars Nodens Titus Flavius Senilis, superintendent of rites(?), had this laid from offerings, with the assistance of Victorinus the interpreter (of dreams?)'.[21] It refers to the mosaic pavement of the temple's cella, which included guilloche-framed roundels and a frieze of marine fauna.

HAWKESBURY, GLOS.

Part of a fragmentary inscription REG[…]S̩ from the border of a mosaic pavement was found in excavations of a villa site in 2003 and 2004 (FIG. 5). A vertical element after the 'G' could belong to an 'I' and Roger Tomlin comments that his best guess would be the name REG[INV]S, a 'common *cognomen*' and one 'favoured in Celtic-speaking provinces'.[22] The size is startling: the letters are 30 cm high and the inscription 1.70 m long. This can hardly be a signature, so, if it does represent a name, it is probably that of a donor or patron.[23]

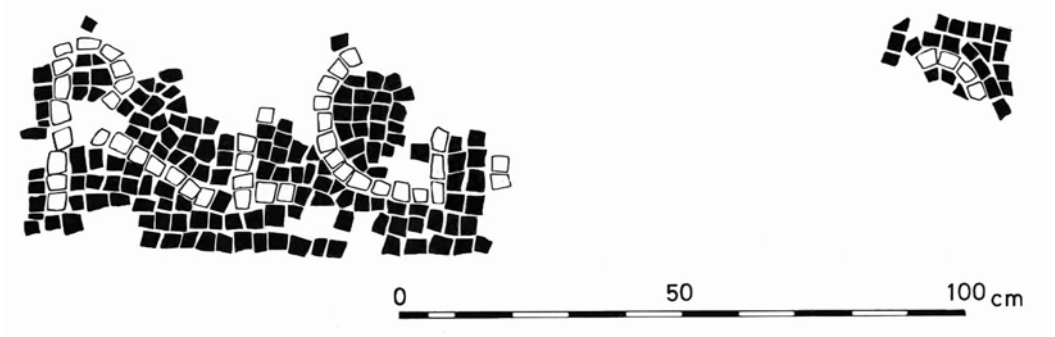

FIG. 5. Hawkesbury (Glos.), villa: remains of inscription in mosaic pavement. (*After a drawing by S.R. Cosh*)

GOOD LUCK MESSAGES

WOODCHESTER, GLOS.

In Room 10 of the grand fourth-century villa at Woodchester is a mosaic pavement with a scheme of five octagonal panels set in a quincunx formation. Large parts of the pavement had already

21 Frere and Tomlin 1992, 84, no. 2448.3.

22 For the mosaic and its inscription see Cosh 2004, 4–5, figs 1–2. Tomlin's opinion is cited by Cosh in the Association for the Study and Preservation of Roman Mosaics *Newsletter* 45 (September 2004), 2. Cf. now Tomlin and Hassall 2005, 483 and n. 30; Cosh 2005, 4, fig. 3.

23 The inscription seems to have turned the corner of the room, with a new line beginning with V, and Tomlin and Hassall (2005, 483 n. 30) and Cosh (2005, 4) consider an alternative restoration REG[IBV]S V[…, which could be part of a literary quotation; but the large scale and marginal position of the inscription make a quotation seem unlikely.

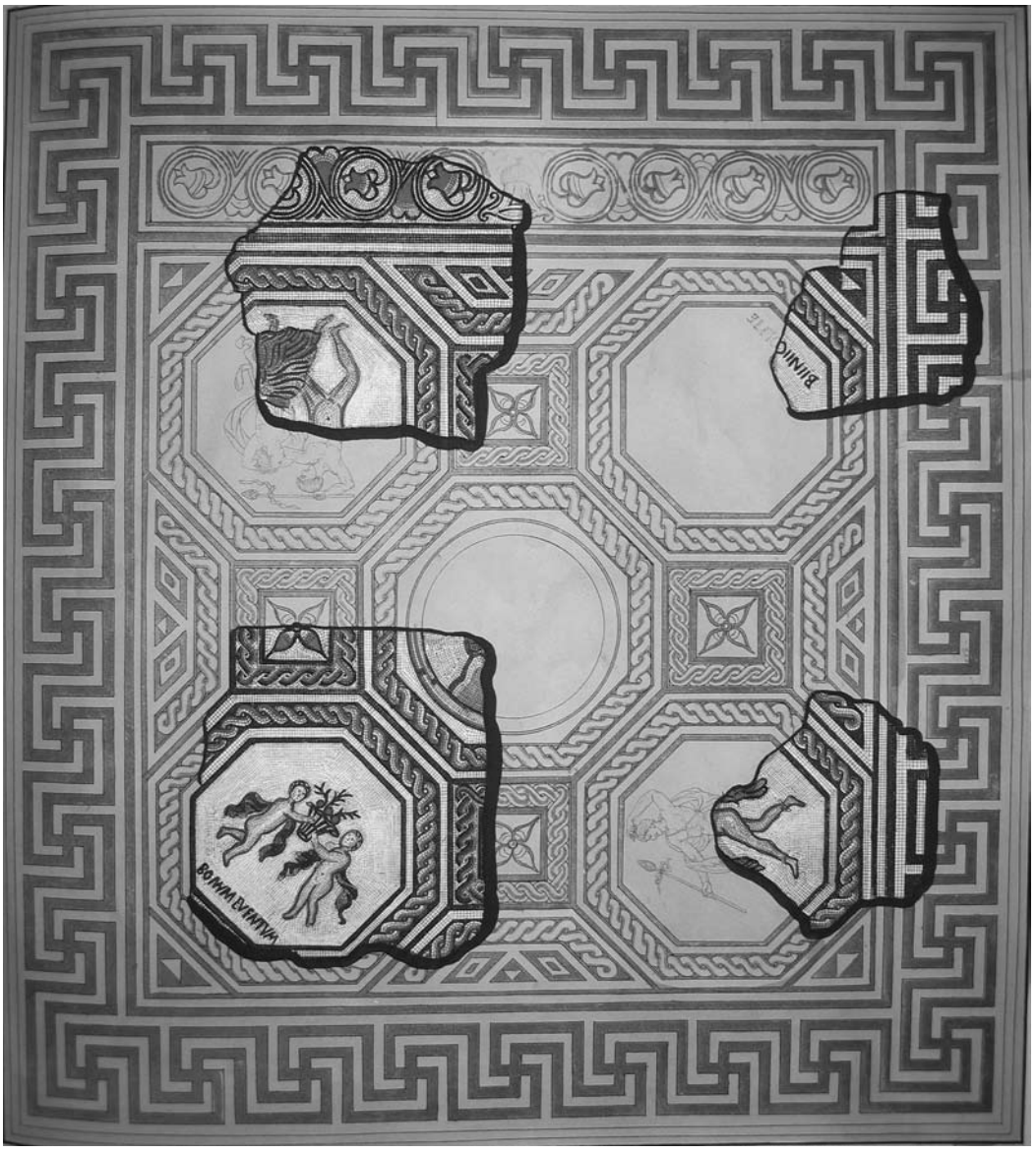

FIG. 6. Woodchester (Glos.), villa: mosaic pavement in Room 10. Coloured engraving by Samuel Lysons (*Roman Antiquities at Woodchester* (1797), pl. XIX). (*Photo: P.A. Witts*)

been destroyed when it was drawn by Lysons at the end of the eighteenth century (FIG. 6),[24] but enough survived to reveal that one of the corner octagons contained a dancing couple, almost

[24] Lysons 1797, 6–7, pl. XIX; 1817a, pl. XXIII bottom. See also Smith 1977, 114, no. 25; 142–3, no. 127; pl. 6.XXXIc. What remains of the pavement is now reburied and inaccessible.

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certainly a satyr and a bacchante, while its diagonally opposite counterpart preserved the legs of a further male figure who may (or may not) have been accompanied by a partner. A third octagon, at the south-west corner, showed a pair of Cupids holding a basket of fruit, and beneath them appeared the inscription BONVM EVENTVM. In the north-east octagon no figures remained, but there was part of another inscription: BIINII C[....].

The second inscription was restored by Lysons as *bene colite*, and combined with the first to form a single exhortation *Bonum Eventum bene colite*: 'worship Bonus Eventus in the due way'.[25] If this is right, the message would be a religious one. Bonus Eventus ('good outcome' or 'success') was a deity traditionally worshipped in Italy by farmers anxious to ensure a successful harvest, as testified in the agricultural treatises of Cato and Varro; and in Imperial times his image sometimes appeared on coins, where he was shown as a youth pouring a libation while holding ears of corn, or sometimes a cornucopia, in his free hand.[26] That he was the subject of cult in Britain is demonstrated by two dedications inscribed on stone, one from York and the other from Caerleon.[27] However, in both cases the dedication combined Bonus Eventus with Fortuna, and at Caerleon it is accompanied by a relief of the two deities standing side by side. There is as yet no firm evidence for a Romano-British cult of Bonus Eventus in isolation.[28] Moreover, the two halves of the putative Woodchester exhortation are at opposite corners of the pavement and face in opposite directions. They could not have been read simultaneously but would have required the viewer to transfer from one side of the room to the other. It is more plausible, therefore, to regard them not as a single phrase but as two separate messages wishing the visitor good fortune and happiness: '(May you enjoy) success' and 'Have a good time'.[29] It is worth bearing in mind, however, that *bene colite* is not an inevitable restoration: possible alternatives are *bene canite*, *bene cupite*, or even perhaps the less salubrious *bene cacate*.

LABELS

ALDBOROUGH, YORKS.

A series of standing figures set in rectangular panels within the apse of what was probably a dining-room is identified as the nine Muses by a Greek inscription next to the last one: it reads ΕΛΗΚΩΝ and clearly labels the vague red and grey shape beneath it as a schematic rendering of Mount Helicon.[30] Of the Muses parts of the sixth and the ninth survived at the time of discovery in the mid-nineteenth century (FIG. 7), but all that now remains are fragments of the last — the one standing next to the mountain. She holds an open scroll and has previously been identified as Clio — though, in fact, an open scroll would be equally appropriate to Calliope.[31] This identification must, however, be abandoned in the light of new evidence: a glass lantern slide taken some time around 1900, which re-emerged in 1996–97 (FIG. 8).[32] This shows features now lost, notably a

[25] Lysons 1797, 7; cf. pl. XX, fig. 1. This interpretation has been widely accepted: see Morgan 1886, 77; Smith 1977, 114; Frere and Tomlin 1992, 83, no. 2448.2; Henig and Soffe 1993, 2.

[26] Wissowa 1912, 267–8; Arias 1986.

[27] Collingwood and Wright 1965, 109, no. 318 (Caerleon); 215, no. 642 (York).

[28] A figure identified as Bonus Eventus is known on gems from Britain: see e.g. Johns 1997, 85–7 (nos 112–33), 96–7 (nos 228–32); Goodburn and Henig 1998; Henig 2004. But the representation of a deity on gems does not necessarily confirm the existence of a cult.

[29] Toynbee 1964, 274.

[30] For this mosaic see Neal and Cosh 2002, 314–18, no. 123.15.

[31] See the survey of the attributes of the Muses in Lancha 1997, 318–23.

[32] Neal and Cosh 2002, 316, fig. 278c. Cf. now Tomlin and Hassall 2005, 496.

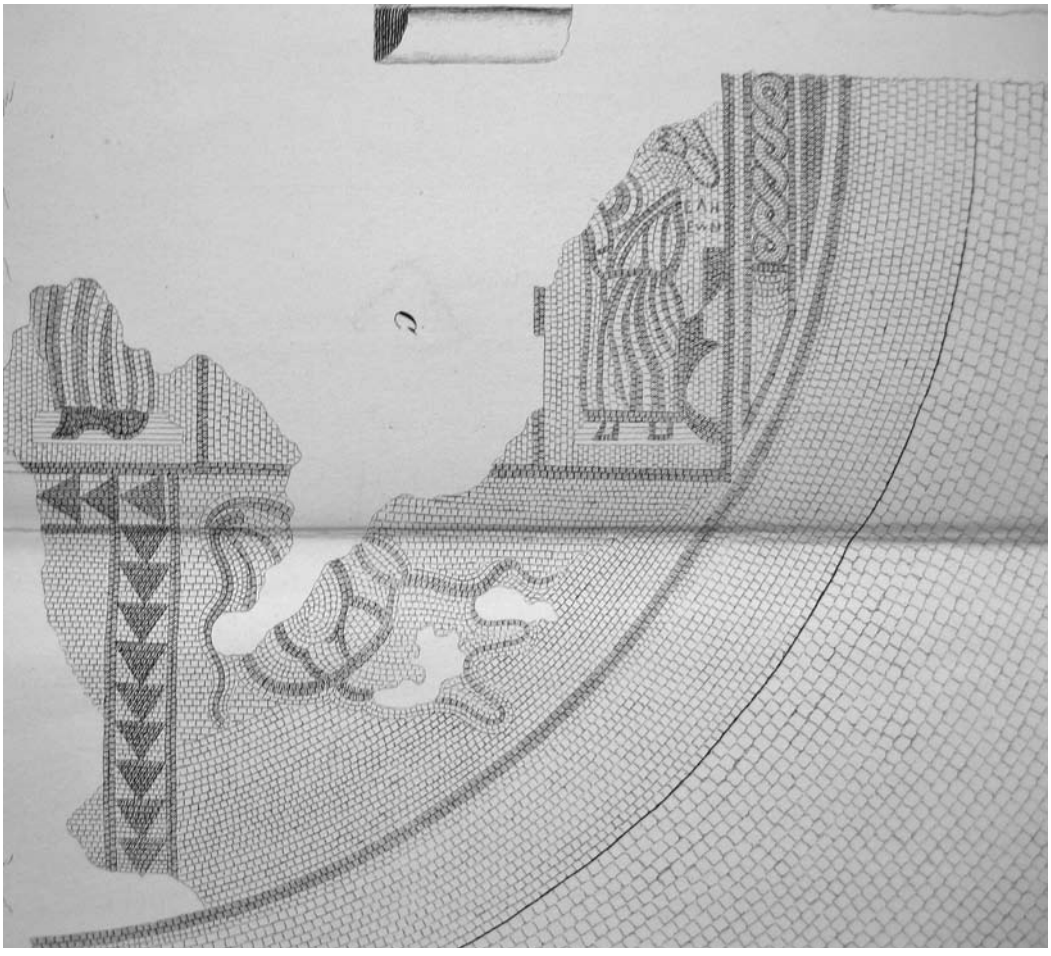

FIG. 7. Aldborough (Yorks.), house: fragment of a mosaic showing a Muse with Mount Helicon. H. Ecroyd Smith, *Reliquiae Isurianae* (1852), pl. XVIII (engraving by M.N. Hessey). (*Photo: P.A. Witts*)

crude theatrical mask suspended at the figure's right side and part of an inscription on the open scroll. The mask identifies the figure unequivocally as either Melpomene, the Muse of Tragedy, or Thalia, the Muse of Comedy. The scroll is not a normal attribute of either Melpomene or Thalia, but it cannot outweigh the evidence of the mask; its presence, if it is not simply the result of a confusion, may be to provide a space for the inscription. It is conceivable, as Neal and Cosh suggest, that all of the figures held scrolls with identifying inscriptions.[33]

Unfortunately, the inscription visible on the slide is incomplete and difficult to interpret. The

[33] Neal and Cosh 2002, 317–18. An example of a Muse holding a scroll with the name Melpomene inscribed on it occurred in a painted decoration in the Casa del Ristorante at Pompeii: *Pompei* 1999, 628–9, figs 45–6. But this was clearly an error on the part of the painter, since the other Muses in the same room had their conventional attributes (and included one with Melpomene's tragic mask).

FIG. 8. Aldborough (Yorks.), Muse mosaic recorded on a glass slide (Kendall slide collection Vol. IV/1). (*Photo: English Heritage B971021. Crown Copyright reserved*)

remaining letters, seen upside down and at an oblique angle, look like ..]IETA>. Neal and Cosh incline to the reading ..]IETAS and suggest that the word is Latin (*pietas*?), but are troubled by the resultant mixture of Latin and Greek (the label of Helicon) in the same panel.[34] An

[34] Neal and Cosh 2002, 317. But bilingualism may be less of a problem than they think. For another mosaic with labels partly in Greek and partly in Latin see Neira and Mañanes 1998, 36–46, no. 17, fig. 5, pls 17, 35 (Cabezón de Pisuerga). Here the Greek seems to be a quotation from Homer while the Latin is designed to explain the subject to non-Greek-speaking viewers.

alternative Greek reading ..]IEIA is dismissed because of the difficulty of explaining the > shape at the end. The latter is indeed problematic. It cannot be the terminal *ansa* of a *tabula ansata*, one possibility considered by Neal and Cosh, because this would face the other way, and there is no indication of a frame round the remaining letters. Nor does it look like a Latin 'S'. However, if we ignore it, the rest of the inscription can be interpreted as the end of the name ΘΑΛΕΙΑ, similar to the label on the bust of this Muse in the Menander mosaic at Mytilene.[35] The 'I' could be the remnant of a *lambda*, the 'T' an *iota* with serifs. The first two letters ΘΑ, for which there is insufficient space at the left, may have been in the line above, where fragments of further letters are visible. But how do we explain the terminal >? I had thought that it might be a badly drafted *sigma* and that the name could be read as a genitive dependent on some such noun as τέχνη, but Joyce Reynolds is rightly sceptical, pointing out (pers. comm.) that, in the kind of lettering used at Aldborough, a *sigma* is likely to have been in the form 'C'. It is also debatable whether the scroll would have allowed space for an additional word before ΘΑΛΕΙΑC. Another possibility is that the > is a concluding stop, a debased form of one of the ivy leaves or other motifs which often serve as punctuation marks in inscriptions.[36] This is speculative and other possibilities remain (for instance, that the inscription names a comic drama or the like) but it provides one plausible way of confronting the problem.

RUDSTON, YORKS.

In the Venus mosaic from Rudston[37] labels are used, as on some North African mosaics, to define animals exhibited in the amphitheatre (FIG. 9). The inscription accompanying the figure of a lion transfixed by a spear has normally been restored as [LEO] F[R]AMMEFER (= *framefer*), 'the spear-bearing lion' or 'the lion (called) spear-bearer'.[38] The epithet is supposedly derived from the word *framea*, a type of spear used by Germans, and it is assumed that the doubling of the 'M' is due to the illiteracy of the mosaicist, whose calligraphy and general draftsmanship leave much to be desired. But I have never been convinced by this reading. Even assuming that a *framea* was part of the vocabulary of the amphitheatre in the North-Western provinces and sufficiently familiar to be incorporated in the description or name of a beast which took part in a *venatio*, it is difficult to believe that a lion should be labelled 'spear-bearing' or 'spear-bearer' when the presence of the spear was presumably the cause of its death. More important, the restoration is doubtful: the drawing and photograph published by Neal and Cosh, both of which pre-date the lifting of the mosaic and its transference to Hull Museum,[39] show that there was too little space for the 'R'. Smith's claim that 'part of the tail of the R can still be seen' is dismissed by the editors of *RIB*.[40]

The reading accepted by earlier commentators, and perhaps the obvious one, is F[L]AMMEFER (for *flammifer*), meaning 'flame-bearing'; and this has been revived by Roger Wilson in a recently published article.[41] I myself have previously rejected this reading on the grounds that the space between 'F' and 'A' seems too cramped even for an 'L'.[42] My suggestion was that the word

35 Charitonidis, Kahil and Ginouvès 1970, pls 3.3, 18.1.

36 See e.g. the mosaic of Menander and Glycera at Antioch or that showing the birth of Aphrodite at Zeugma: Early *et al*. 2003, 88, fig. 11; 94, fig. 27. Crescent- and pelta-shaped interpuncts appear in a carved inscription from Alchester, Oxon.: Sauer 2005, 171.

37 Neal and Cosh 2002, 353–6, no. 143.2.

38 Neal and Cosh 2002, 354; cf. Smith 1980, 134 n. 3; Frere and Tomlin 1992, 87, no. 2448.7(a).

39 Neal and Cosh 2002, figs 325, 326b.

40 See Frere and Tomlin 1992, 87, commenting on Smith 1980, 134 n. 3.

41 Wilson 2003; supported by Tomlin and Hassall 2003, 382, n. 83.

42 Ling 2003, 15.

FIG. 9. Rudston (Yorks.), villa: Venus mosaic before lifting. (*Photo: Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England) BB 76/2869: Crown Copyright reserved*)

should be read simply as FAMMEFER, to be interpreted either as *famafer*, meaning 'fame-bearer', i.e. famous, or as *famifer*, meaning 'hunger-bearer', i.e. hungry. However, neither word is attested, and it would be more satisfactory if we could reinstate *flammifer*, which has the virtue both of being a recognised term and of being spelt with two 'M's. Wilson has shown in his article how a small 'L' can (with difficulty) be squeezed into the space between 'F' and 'A' (FIG. 10); and he has now produced an additional argument in support of his reading.[43] This is based on the expert opinion of a modern animal-handler who has advised him that lions, whether or not they were hungry, would not readily have left the security of a cage for the noise of the arena without being driven out of it by a firebrand. Oppian, in the second century A.D., reports how lions are terrified of fire, and the Hippo Regius hunt mosaic shows the use of torches in big-cat capture.[44] But a lion's fur is highly combustible, and there was a danger that a spark from a torch might set it alight just as the animal was about to be released into the arena; so in some cases the audience may have been treated to the sight of a beast already enraged and on fire when it came into the

[43] Wilson 2004, 19–21.
[44] Oppian, *Cynegetica* 4.133–4. Hippo Regius: Dunbabin 1978, 55, pl. 29.

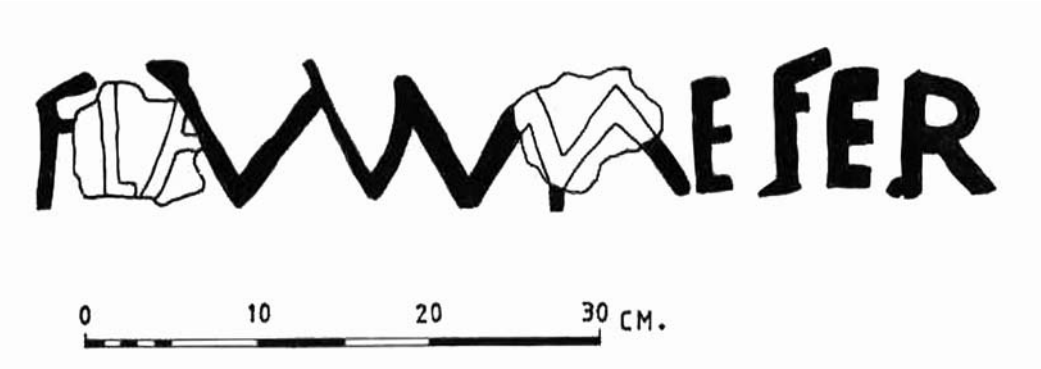

FIG. 10. Rudston (Yorks.), villa: part of mosaic inscription as restored by R.J.A. Wilson.

arena. If such occurrences were relatively common, or were even deliberately provoked to give the spectacle added drama, Flammifer ('Flame-carrier') would have been a highly suggestive — as well as suitable — stage-name for a lion.[45]

The Rudston lion could thus have had a colourful sobriquet appropriate to the spectacles of the amphitheatre, just as the bull depicted in an adjacent panel in the same pavement carries the fearsome title OMICIDA (attested also for a bear on a mosaic from Carthage[46]). The owner of the mosaic would have kept a perpetual reminder of the flaming lion and the man-killing bull that he had once seen perform in a *venatio*.[47]

LITERARY OR PSEUDO-LITERARY QUOTATIONS

OTFORD, KENT

The clearest example of a quotation from literature is a fragmentary inscription in a wall-painting from a villa at Otford in Kent.[48] Remains of plaster showing parts of small-scale human figures and letters include one piece with the right arm and side of a warrior wielding a spear (FIG. 11) and three joining fragments carrying the legend BINA MANV (FIG. 12). These words open three lines in the *Aeneid*; but the vertical stroke which remains of the first letter of the next word effectively reduces the options to two (1.313; 12.165), since it suggests 'L' for LATO rather than 'F' for FVLVOS (7.688). The full line would thus be *bina manu lato crispans hastilia ferro*, which refers in one context to Aeneas exploring the land round Carthage in company with Achates, in the other to Turnus coming forward in his chariot for

45 Patricia Witts has pointed out to me that Aelian (*De Natura Animalium* 12.7) refers to a popular belief, apparently deriving from Egypt, that the lion partook of the nature of fire; she suggests that this in itself would justify the name Flammifer: cf. Witts 2005, 150. This is possible, but *flammifer* seems more appropriate to an animal that was physically ablaze than do the Greek terms διάπυρον and πυρῶδες used by Aelian. A more telling argument against Wilson's idea is the lack of any evidence for blazing lions in artistic representations of *venationes*.

46 Merlin and Poinssot 1934, 129, fig. 1; Poinssot and Quoniam, 1951–2, 144, fig. 8.

47 In regard to labels another possible example is the name of a charioteer SERVIVS or SEVERVS supposedly seen in 1838 on a mosaic (now lost) at Colerne, Wilts.: Frere and Tomlin 1992, 91, no. 2448.10.

48 Davey and Ling 1982, 146–8; Frere and Tomlin 1992, 67, no. 2447.9.

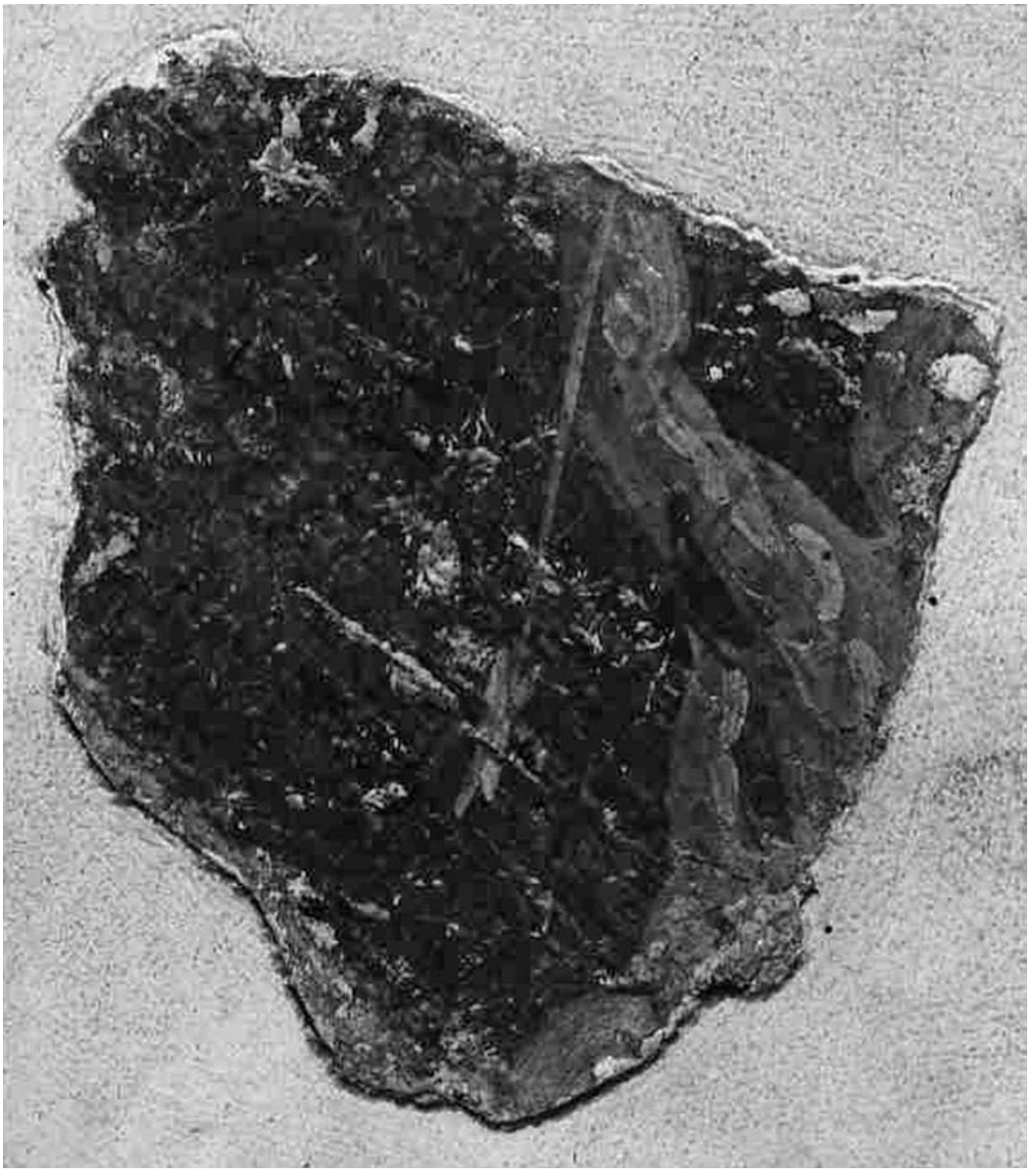

FIG. 11. Otford (Kent), villa: fragment of painting with warrior holding a spear. Now in British Museum. (*Photo: British Museum*)

the final reckoning with Aeneas. Taking account of the other fragments, one can postulate a series of scenes from the *Aeneid*, perhaps a continuous frieze, with a commentary in the form of quotations from the poem; the quotations would probably have been placed above the heads of the figures.

FIG. 12. Otford (Kent), villa: fragment of painted inscription. Now in British Museum. (*Photo British Museum*)

LULLINGSTONE, KENT

Also in Kent, an elegiac couplet provides a literary gloss to the scene of the rape of Europa in the mosaic of the dining-room in the Lullingstone villa (FIG. 13):[49]

INVIDA SI TA[VRI] VIDISSET IVNO NATATVS
IVSTIVS AEOLIAS ISSET ADVSQVE DOMOS

('If jealous Juno had seen the swimming of the bull, more justly would she have gone to the palace of Aeolus').

The purpose of the message, which was oriented towards an apse with a broad border for a dining couch, was presumably to appeal to the taste of educated guests, who would have recognised the allusion to events described in *Aeneid* 1. At the same time, as A.A. Barrett points out, the metre and style of the couplet are Ovidian, so would have evoked literary resonances of another kind for the diners.[50] Whether the verses represented a well-known tag frequently associated with depictions of the rape of Europa, or whether they were made up by or for the patron at Lullingstone, are of course questions that we cannot hope to answer. But we should certainly reject a recent suggestion that the couplet contains crypto-Christian references which can be read

[49] Frere and Tomlin 1992, 86, no. 2448.6. Generally on the mosaic Toynbee 1962, 200, no. 192, pl. 229; 1964, 263–4, pl. LX a; Meates 1979, 75–8, frontispiece and pl. XV b.
[50] Barrett 1978, 311–13.

FIG. 13. Lullingstone (Kent), villa: mosaic with Europa and the bull. (*Photo: M.B. Cookson; courtesy of National Monuments Record*)

by excerpting every eighth letter.[51] Coded messages may possibly have had a place in the ancient world, but there is no reason to suspect one here.

FRAMPTON, DORSET

The largest and most elaborate of a series of mosaic pavements found in a villa at Frampton in Dorset at the beginning of the nineteenth century carried verses commenting on depictions of a pair of classical deities. Since the mosaic no longer survives, our knowledge of the inscriptions is based on the engraving of Samuel Lysons published in 1813 (FIG. 14).[52] The more complete accompanied a head of Neptune, two lines to the left of it, two to the right:

NEPTVNI VERTEX REGMEN
SORTITI MOBILE VENTIS
SCVLTVM CVI CERVLEA ES[T]
DELFINIS CINCTA DVOB[VS]

51 Henig 1997 and 2000. Cf. Thomas 1998, 47–54.
52 Lysons 1813, part III, pl. V. Cf. Cosh and Neal 2005, 134–7, no. 168.2.

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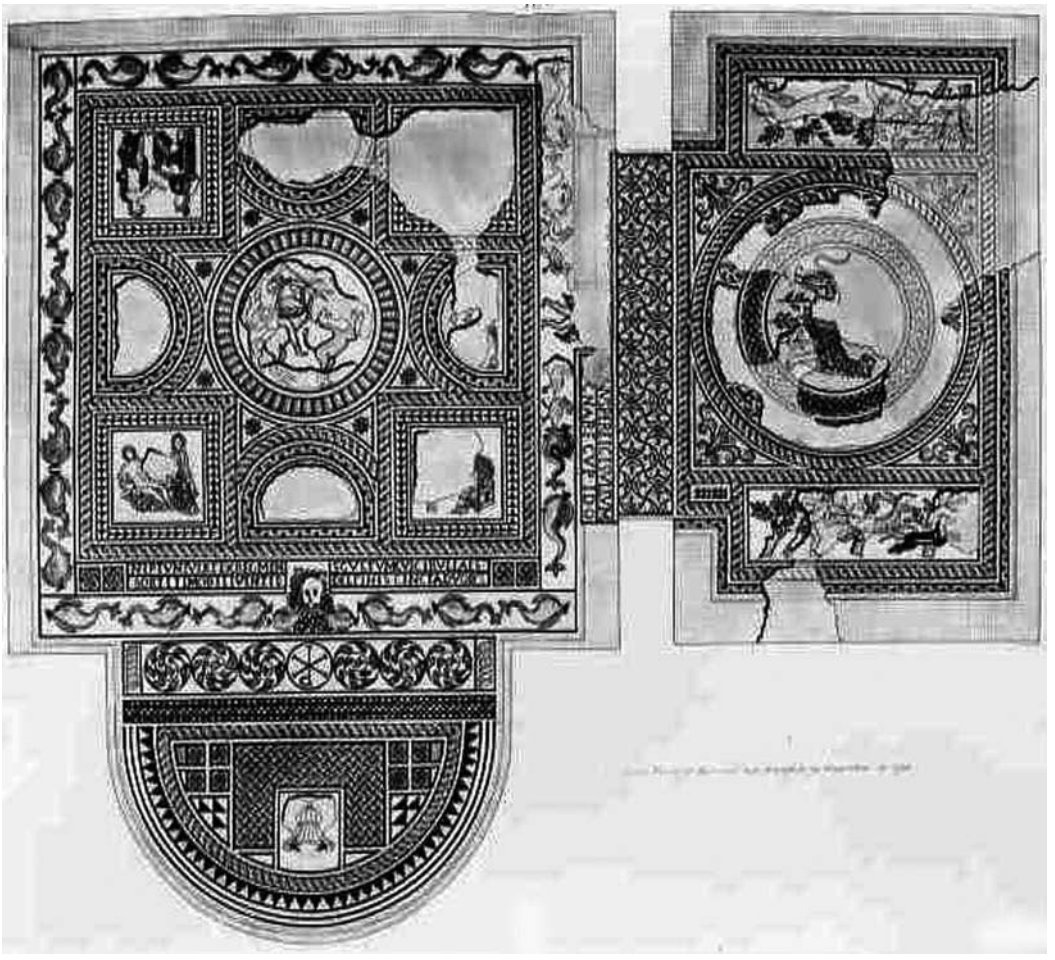

FIG. 14. Frampton (Dorset), villa: mosaic pavement with mythological subjects. Coloured engraving by Samuel Lysons (*Reliquiae Britannico-Romanae I*, 1813, part III, pl. V).

The inscription was clearly meant to be metrical, but there is some doubt as to what metre was intended. Since 1875 most writers, including the editors of *RIB*, have followed Studemund in regarding it as four lines of catalectic anapaestic dimeters (paroemiacs);[53] but Jocelyn Toynbee in 1962 went back to the older view of Hübner that it was a couplet of heptameters, one on each side of the head: *Neptuni vertex regmen sortiti mobile ventis / scultum cui cerulea es[t] delfinis cincta duob[us]*.[54] This is more plausible, since paroemiacs are very rare, being associated more with Greek choral lyrics than with Latin epigrams; but only the first line is strictly a heptameter: the second is one syllable short. The truth is probably that the metre has gone awry. Colleagues that

[53] Studemund 1875; Bücheler 1897, 720–1, no. 1524; Frere and Tomlin 1992, 89, no. 2448.8(b).
[54] Toynbee 1962, 203 n. 1; 1964, 250 n. 4. Cf. Hübner 1872, 14, no. 2.

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I have consulted in the University of Manchester incline to the view that the verses are 'botched hexameters'. In the later Roman period many writers of hexameters, especially inscriptional hexameters, had little understanding of the patterns of the first part of the line and retained only the distinctive rhythm of the last two feet.[55] The author of our couplet set out to write hexameters but failed for one reason or another to cope with the technicalities of the metre.

Leaving aside the question of metre, there are problems with the syntax of the second line, because there is no feminine noun for *c(a)erulea* or *cincta* to agree with, while both the function and gender of *scul(p)tum* ('carved') are difficult to explain. Hübner, who believed that the line should be a heptameter, assumed a mistake on the part of the mosaicist and replaced *scul(p)tum* with *scul(p)tura*, apparently in the ablative case,[56] but still needed to understand another noun such as *barba* ('beard') to act as the subject of *est*. In any case, if the inscription is referring to the actual image in the mosaic, *sculptura* hardly seems the most appropriate term. The solution of those commentators who believed that the verses were paroemiacs was to supply *frons* after *est*, and to link *scul(p)tum* with *vertex* in the first line ('the head … is carved'), arguing that the writer has used the neuter form in error (whether because he was confused by the presence of *reg(i)men* or because he was thinking of *caput*).[57] But this produces an awkward structure and still does not explain the odd use of the verb *sculpere* to refer to mosaic. The sense ideally seems to require a word for 'face' (*frons*, *facies*) or 'beard' (*barba*) instead of *scul(p)tum*, producing the meaning 'The head of Neptune allotted the kingdom tossed by winds, whose face/beard is dark blue and girt by twin dolphins'. Using *frons* would actually produce a perfect hexameter: FRONS CVI CAERVLEA EST DELFINIS CINCTA DVOBVS. Alternatively, we could get the same meaning by replacing *scultum* with *vultus* and restore the line as VVLTVS CVI CAERVLEA EST DELFINIS CINCTA DVOBVS. The metre would remain faulty and *vultus* is masculine rather than feminine, but it is more easy to understand how the noun could have been corrupted to *scultum*.

The second set of verses, of which all that survived were the ends of the lines at the right, accompanied a figure of Cupid:

…]NVS PERFICIS VLLVM
…]GNARE CVPIDO

The editors of *RIB*, believing that the lines were paroemiacs, restore *[nec mu]nus perficis ullum [si di]gnare Cupido* ('… and you do not perform any service if you deign to, Cupid'), but point out that metre and sense require the negative sense *si non dignare* ('if you do *not* deign to').[58] Assuming that Lysons recorded the spacing accurately (which, given his normal high standards, is a reasonable assumption), there is no space for the negative, and one must conclude that the mosaicist overlooked it. But there is a similar problem with *[nec mu]nus*, for which the space again seems insufficient. Since Lysons' own proposal *[faci]nus* makes poor sense and conflicts with the metre, we are no further forward. But it is notable that the two lines both end in the characteristic rhythm of the last feet of a hexameter. Rather than being split into two halves, the first to the left and the second to the right, could the inscription have been a pair of hexameters running continuously from left to right across the image of Cupid? It is a possibility worth considering. Another possibility, however, if we accept that the Cupid formed a division between two lines, is that the sentiment was not negative but positive: *[mu]nus perficis ullum [si di]gnare*

[55] See Allen 1973, 346–7. I am grateful to Roy Gibson, David Langslow, and Alison Sharrock for giving me their advice on this matter.
[56] Hübner 1872, 14, no. 2.
[57] Studemund 1875; Bücheler 1897, 720–1, no. 1524.
[58] Frere and Tomlin 1992, 89, no. 2448.8(c).

Cupido ('you perform any service if you deign to, Cupid'). Though not elegant, this would scan and make reasonable sense ('love can achieve anything'), besides fitting the available space. For what was said in the line to the left of the figure there is no clue, and speculation is unprofitable.

COLCHESTER, ESSEX

A fragmentary mosaic from Lion Walk in Colchester features a large roundel occupied by wedge-shaped fields, each of which contained figures with inscriptions above their heads. All that survives are parts of two fields, but on the basis of their position and of the width of one field revealed by fragments of its frames, David Neal concluded that there were originally eight fields in all, alternating with narrower panels decorated with plant motifs.[59] The inscriptions are woefully incomplete and badly discoloured by burning, but Neal's drawings, executed while the remains of the mosaic were still *in situ*, salvaged such information as was available (FIG. 15).[60] From this the editors of *RIB* have produced the following readings: (a) AD[.]ṆP̣VIA[…, (b) ...]DR(*or*IC)I.[…/…]LLIC̣[…[61]

Given their placing and probable length, together with the fact that they seem to relate to two-figure (or possibly three-figure) scenes, there seem to me three possible ways of reading the inscriptions:

(1) they label the figures depicted below;

(2) they are quotations from literature, as in the Otford wall-paintings, or pseudo-literary comments, like those on the mosaics at Lullingstone and Frampton;

(3) they label works of literature on which the scenes are based (as in the scenes on the Menander mosaic at Mytilene).

The last possibility would almost certainly involve identifying the subjects as scenes from plays, which are the only works of literature regularly depicted directly in the visual arts (presumably because they were enacted as visual spectacles, not just read or recited). Unfortunately, part of only one figure-scene survives — a pair of figures facing right, one a female with billowing drapery, beneath the first inscription — and this is insufficient to shed light on the subject.

It is hard to begin to suggest any interpretation of the AD…VIA inscription, given the difficulty of reading the three damaged letters. But the other is more promising. The letters in the first line are, in my view, definitely DRI and not DICI.[62] The letter group DRI is not very common in Latin. After the emperor's name HADRIANVS, the most obvious occurrence is in the genitive of Latinised forms of Greek names ending …ANDER, such as Alexander, Lysander, and Menander. In the present context it is attractive to believe that what we have is the end of MENANDRI followed by the title of one of his plays. Alternatively, the letters may belong to the title of an actual play of Menander, better known from its translation into Latin by Terence, the *Andria*.

For the letters LLIC below there are various possibilities, including derivatives of *allicio*, *illicitus*, *pollex*, *polliceor*, or *sollicito*. Another, perhaps more obvious, candidate is the demonstrative pronoun or adverb ILLIC ('he or that there' or 'there'). The form *illic* is most common in Latin of the Republican period, and especially in the plays of Plautus and Terence. One could easily find quotations from Terence's *Andria* incorporating the word, e.g. 'ubi illic est scelus?' ('where is that rogue?': *Andria* 3.5.1). In other words, perhaps the Colchester mosaic shows a scene from the *Andria*, duly labelled, with a pertinent quotation below.

[59] See Neal 1981, 73–4, no. 41; cf. Smith 1984, figs 46–7.

[60] I am grateful to David Neal for letting me have a copy of his field drawing.

[61] Frere and Tomlin 1992, 83, no. 2448.1.

[62] This alternative was not mentioned in the initial publication, which also adds a further letter: ...]DRIA[...: Wright and Hassall 1973, 331, no. 20.

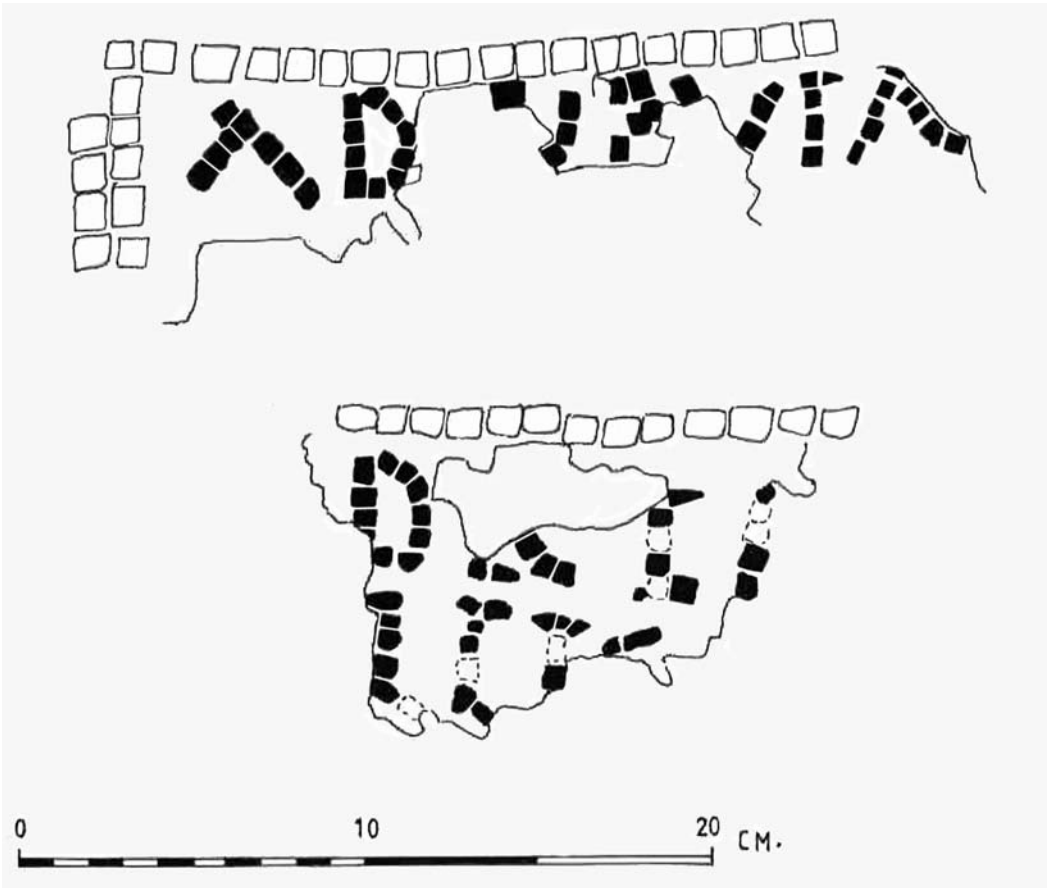

FIG. 15. Colchester (Essex), mosaic from Lion Walk: mosaic inscriptions. (*Drawn by David S. Neal*)

This is only a working hypothesis, and it would be rash to claim more. If the scene is really from a play, it is possible that LLIC might be part of the name of a character; but, if so, the *Andria* seems to be excluded — in Terence's version at least[63] — since there is no character in the cast list whose name would fit. The amount of space available for missing words is another problematic factor: the surviving letters appear to come towards the right end of the panel, which would lead one to expect another word or words before the hypothetical ANDRIA while making it difficult to fit anything after the hypothetical ILLIC. The distribution of words could, however, have been affected by the position of the heads of the figures. At Mytilene, the labels are fitted into whatever space is available and as a result are very irregular.

DISCUSSION

The foregoing survey has yielded a total of eleven inscriptions, belonging to the classes of

[63] The Roman authors who adapted plays of Menander for the Roman stage seem, where the information is available, to have changed the characters' names. Unfortunately, we do not have a *dramatis personae* for Menander's *Andria*.

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signatures and dedications, good luck messages, labels, and literary or pseudo-literary quotations. We can now go on to examine their significance under various heads.

MEDIUM

All the inscriptions bar the one at Otford occur on mosaics. This is not especially significant, for there would certainly have been many more inscribed wall-paintings had the material survived. Because of the fragility of plaster and the fact that walls collapse or disintegrate through exposure, while pavements are sealed and thus protected from weathering, paintings are disproportionately under-represented in the record.

DATING

Apart from the Otford wall-paintings, which are probably to be ascribed to the second century, all the inscriptions belong to the fourth century.[64] Part of the explanation here lies in the nature of the evidence. Most inscriptions are associated with figures and figure scenes, and there are few figured mosaics in Britain before the fourth century. At the same time, it is interesting that the Otford example, if the interpretation offered above is correct, takes the form of a literary gloss, quoting from the poem which inspired the accompanying pictures. It thus fits into a category of learned references which can be paralleled in wall-paintings in Roman Italy during the period of the late Republic and early Empire. Good examples are the series of Greek epigrams which accompany paintings in the House of the Epigrams and a Latin poem written on a picture of Micon and Pero in the House of M. Lucretius Fronto, both at Pompeii.[65] Such 'commentaries' could be derived from a tradition of labelled pictures in copy-books or even of illustrated texts of the literary works in question. The evidence is naturally inadequate as a basis for wide-ranging conclusions, but it is significant that these inscriptions do not appear to have been analogous to the later labels designed to inform the uninitiated. They seem rather to have been aimed at those who already knew the classics of Greek or Latin literature.

LITERACY

Whatever the date, the presence of an inscription or inscriptions is, of course, no proof of literacy, either on the part of the mosaicist or on that of the patron. The texts could have been copied mechanically from models. Indeed, the spelling and syntax of some inscriptions, at Frampton for example, argues for a less than perfect command of Latin (and of Latin metre). But the very fact that inscriptions were used at all betokens a climate in which literacy was expected or was socially important. Constructing letters in mosaic tesserae was a finicky and time-consuming business, so would not have been undertaken lightly. Moreover, where inscriptions were evidently designed to explain a scene or identify characters (see further below), there must have been an assumption that some at least of the viewers would have benefited from the assistance, i.e. they could read the tags. And in some cases, notably the couplet at Lullingstone, the language and the Virgilian

[64] Second-century dating for Otford: Davey and Ling 1982, 146 and 148 n. 1. For the temple complex at Lydney recent research has pushed back the early phases to the second half of the third century (Casey and Hoffmann 1999), but the inscribed mosaic belongs to a phase of reconstruction, so may still be fourth-century.

[65] House of the Epigrams: Dilthey 1876; Neutsch 1955; Strocka 1995. House of Fronto: Peters 1993, 335, fig. 246. The Odyssey frieze in Rome and the Iliadic frieze in the House of the Cryptoportico at Pompeii, in both of which the figures are labelled, reflect a similar literary taste, though here the primary function of the inscriptions may have been to confirm the Greek pedigree of the paintings (see e.g. Beyen 1960, 260–350, figs 102–6; Aurigemma 1953, 903–70, figs 901–88, pls LXXXVI–LXXXIX).

allusion imply the presence of viewers with a sophisticated knowledge of Latin poetry. That such a knowledge existed in Britain is supported by certain mosaics which are uninscribed but have subjects of a distinctly literary cast, notably another pavement at Frampton which includes the episode of Aeneas plucking the golden bough related in *Aeneid* 6, and, more importantly, the pavement from Low Ham, Somerset, which presents a narrative of Dido's love affair with Aeneas, based on the account in *Aeneid* 1 and 4. While it is possible to argue that the pictures on these mosaics were derived from visual prototypes and do not indicate a direct acquaintance with Virgil's text, most of the scenes are otherwise unattested in surviving mosaics and paintings (the nearest parallels are the illustrations in early codices, such as the Vatican Virgil, dated about A.D. 400), and it is surely preferable to see the patrons' choices as grounded in a familiarity with the literary classics.[66]

REASONS FOR ADDING INSCRIPTIONS

We may now discuss the different types of inscriptions individually.

1. Signatures and dedications were obviously commemorative; they were intended to record the name of a craftsman or craftsmen, and to document the beneficence of a donor or patron. In the latter case, especially given the size of the lettering on such pavements as those at Thruxton and Hawkesbury, we can sense a desire to pass down one's name to posterity — something that would have been well achieved by a pavement inscription in a temple, as at Lydney. There are many analogies in the early Christian mosaics of the Levant which record the names of the bishops and other sponsors who had the pavements laid. In the case of the artist or artists, the same desire to perpetuate their names may have prompted craftsmen in various parts of the Roman world to sign their work. But signatures on mosaics are relatively few and inconspicuous, and it is more plausible to think of most of them as 'trademarks', establishing authorship and possibly advertising the manufacturer's skills to potential future customers.[67] The TER at Bignor, for instance, assuming that it is a signature and not something else, would have attracted little attention and, in later generations, would have meant little to visitors, especially as the name is incomplete. It would have made sense only when the craftsman was still alive and active, and his mark was recognised as a guarantee of authenticity.

2. Good luck messages. The function of these is again self-evident: they are designed to greet the visitor and wish him or her well. The Woodchester mosaic fits into a widespread practice, illustrated for example by an inscription in the villa at Carranque, where a firm of mosaicists sign their work and wish Maternus happiness in the use of the *cubiculum* which they have decorated.[68] One may perhaps compare the empire-wide practice of placing good luck messages and apotropaic symbols in the pavements of baths, though here superstition may also have played a part: the naked bather was vulnerable and needed protection.[69]

66 Generally on the evidence for a knowledge of the literary classics in Roman Britain: Barrett 1978. Aeneas and the golden bough: Barrett 1977. Low Ham mosaic: Toynbee 1962, 203–5, no. 200, pl. 235; 1964, 241–6, pl. LVIII. Vatican Virgil: Wright 1993. For probable references to lines of Virgil on the coinage of Carausius, who ruled Britain as a military usurper from A.D. 286/7 to 293, see De la Bédoyère 1998 and 2005: he argues that Carausius 'made unequivocal use of classical literature in his propaganda campaign, and was able to rely on detailed familiarity of that literature amongst his public'. Cf. Birley 2005, 375–7.

67 See e.g. Donderer 1989, 45–7; Dunbabin 1999a, 272–3.

68 Donderer 1989, 96, A 68, fig. 40.

69 Dunbabin 1989. Another place where protection was needed, albeit for slightly different reasons, was the toilet. Paintings of Fortuna are found in at least four latrines at Pompeii: Fröhlich 1991, 40, 59, 296–7 (L 106), 301 (L 114), pls 10 (1), 50 (3); cf. Jansen 1993, 33 n. 5.

3. Labels. It is clear that the labels accompanying figures in mosaics are often genuinely didactic: they are applied to help the viewer to interpret a subject or scene. The situation is thus slightly different from that of the labelled figures in the paintings of late-Republican and early-Imperial Italy, where there is evidence for the copying of models, especially Greek models, as part of a fashion of displaying a knowledge of the literary classics. These earlier labels often seem to have been transcribed mechanically by artists who may not have been familiar with the Greek language. In the famous Odyssey landscapes from the Esquiline in Rome, for example, some of the labels are misspelt, and one of the Underworld scenes transposes the names Sisyphos and Tityos.[70] In the Homeric frieze of the House of D. Octavius Quartio at Pompeii the Greek names have been transliterated into Latin, sometimes wrongly (Achilles' horse Balius has become Badius[71]). Such labels were designed partly to flaunt the patrons' cultural credentials, partly to establish the status of the paintings themselves as derived from Greek prototypes. In some cases it is not even clear that they were meant to be seen: the Odyssey landscapes, for example, occupied the upper part of a wall so high that their labels must have been barely legible from ground-level.[72] The primary purpose can hardly thus have been informative. In any case at this date labels were never a regular feature of mythological paintings. The known examples are relatively few, and their incidence becomes very rare during the first century A.D.: the Octavius Quartio frieze represents the only use of labelled figures in Pompeian painting after the time of Augustus.

In later periods, however, there seems to have developed a real desire, both in paintings and in mosaics, to *inform* the viewer. This is especially evident in the Eastern provinces, where from the end of the second century A.D. onwards labels became increasingly common. In many cases they were almost essential. Numerous mosaics in Antioch and other centres depict subjects so obscure — scenes from little known works of literature, busts personifying otherwise indistinguishable concepts such as Soteria (Well-being), Apolausis (Enjoyment), and Ananeosis (Renewal), and elaborate allegorical compositions conveying ideological or philosophical messages — that no spectator could readily have understood them without identifications in written form.[73] Such representations are clearly expressions of a climate of learning and learned allusion shared by the well-educated classes. But labels even came to be used for figures in well-known mythological scenes and for figures with clearly identifiable attributes. In late third- and fourth-century mosaics at Paphos in Cyprus, for example, labels accompanied Theseus and the Minotaur, Apollo and Marsyas, Zeus and Leda — all subjects where the situation and attributes of the figures could have left no doubt as to the subjects represented.[74] Admittedly, many minor figures in the relevant compositions would have been more difficult to name without labels; but one senses a new concern to elucidate the subjects, whether the iconography was familiar or not. That this grew out of a belief that viewers needed help in interpreting pictures, is implied by an earlier pavement at Paphos, that of the west portico of the peristyle of the House of Dionysus, dated to the late second or early third century A.D.[75] Here there is a sequence of four mythological scenes, of which the first two (Pyramus and Thisbe, Dionysus and Icarius) have

[70] Gallina 1964, 23, 27, 28.

[71] Aurigemma 1953, 993, 995, figs 1023, 1027, pl. XCI.

[72] The height of the wall from which they were taken is recorded as about 5.50 m. For a general reconstruction of the frieze and its setting see Andreae 1962.

[73] Scenes from literature: see e.g. Levi 1947, 117–19, pl. XX, c (Metiochos and Parthenope in the House of the Man of Letters). Soteria and Apolausis: Levi 1947, 304–6, pls LXVII (d), LXVIII. Ananeosis: Levi 1947, 320–1, pl. LXXIII. Allegorical compositions: e.g. Balty 1977, 28–9, no. 9; 42–3, no. 16 (both from Philippopolis).

[74] See e.g. Michaelides 1987, 25, no. 23, pl. XI (Theseus and the Minotaur, Villa of Theseus); 29–30, no. 28, col. pl. XXII (Leda and the Swan, House of Aion); 31, no. 30, col. pl. XXIV (Apollo and Marsyas, House of Aion).

[75] Michaelides 1987, 19–21, nos 16–19, pls VII–IX; cf. Daszewski and Michaelides 1988, 37–45, figs 27–34.

labels and the other two (Poseidon and Amymone, Apollo and Daphne) do not. The most likely explanation for this disparity is that elucidation was provided only for the two obscurer subjects. Neither Dionysus' gift of wine to Icarius nor the tragic fate of Pyramus and Thisbe enjoyed widespread currency in Roman art,[76] whereas Apollo's pursuit of Daphne and Poseidon's of Amymone were so much part of the common stock that it was deemed unnecessary to assist the viewer to identify them.

The two British examples of labelled figures are more difficult to assess. The labelling of the Muses and Helicon at Aldborough could certainly be regarded as didactic if it had been in Latin, but the use of Greek gives pause. Did the diners who saw the figures while reclining on a *stibadium* in the room's apse all really know Greek, or were the labels designed to show off the patron's bilingualism? There are very few inscriptions in Greek on mosaics in the North-Western provinces. The exceptions known to me are a third-century pavement at Cologne with labelled portraits of Greek dramatists and thinkers,[77] and a late second-century one in Autun containing portraits of Epicurus, Metrodorus, and Anacreon accompanied by lengthy quotations in Greek.[78] In each case there is a conscious display of literary culture, and the Aldborough Muses must be seen in a similar light. Even if the labels were conventional, being taken without comprehension from copy-books, the very use of Greek made a statement about cultural affiliation.

At Rudston, the naming of beasts of the amphitheatre could have represented the conventional aping of a decorative formula found in Africa, where several pavements depict 'catalogues' of animals, sometimes with names attached.[79] If so, the idea may have been imported, perhaps via various stages of mediation, in copy-books. But it is difficult to believe that the labels were totally devoid of meaning. Whatever the sources of inspiration for using the motif of named animals, it is likely that the actual creatures in question had been real performers in a specific show which the owner wished to remember, whether he had financed it himself or had simply enjoyed it as a spectator.[80]

4. Quotations. These are the clearest signs of a desire to display and share a knowledge of classical culture. They would have made little sense unless some, at least, of the viewers were able to recognise the learned allusions. From a comparatively early period, the paintings at Otford may have included a frieze illustrating, with quotations, episodes from the *Aeneid* — a subject that presupposes a patron who knew Virgil (or at least wished people to think he did). In the fourth century, a desire to show one's classical education may have become even more important. At Colchester, if my theory is correct, the Lion Walk mosaic may have shown a series of labelled scenes from New Comedy, like those on the Menander mosaic at Mytilene. At Lullingstone, the inscription above the scene of Europa and the bull is from no poem that we know, but presupposes a knowledge of *Aeneid* 1, and is written in a faultless elegiac couplet in the style of Ovid. Its orientation towards diners reclining round the perimeter of the apse shows that it was specifically addressing guests at banquets and was designed to stimulate literary discussion. At Frampton, the verses are questionable in syntax and metre, and could have been made up by the patron or one of his peers — but, even if not strictly literary, they represent a determination to maintain the trappings of a literary culture. The references to the

[76] Symptomatic of the rarity of the subject is the fact that the mosaicist may have confused Pyramus with a river-god of the same name: Michaelides 1987, 19; Daszewski and Michaelides 1988, 40.

[77] Parlasca 1959, 80–2, fig. 10, pls 80–2.

[78] Blanchard and Blanchard 1973; Stern and Blanchard-Lemée 1975, 59–62, no. 213, pls XXV–XXVI.

[79] Dunbabin 1978, 71–5, pls 57–62. Some of these merely give the numbers of each species exhibited in a show, or show the species without labels; but the idea of commemoration is analogous to that of the Rudston pavement.

[80] For mosaics commemorating *venationes* sponsored by house-owners there are several possible candidates in North Africa, the clearest of which is the Magerius mosaic from Smirat: Dunbabin 1978, 67–9, pls 52–3.

powers of Neptune and Cupid, written in what purports to be hexameter verse, are unambiguous declarations of allegiance to this classical ideal.

An interesting aspect of the Frampton pavement is the presence of a chi-rho monogram, placed in close proximity (though oriented to be seen from the opposite direction) to the head of Neptune. The monogram demonstrates that the patron was in some sense an adherent of the Christian faith. It is possible that the part of the pavement containing this symbol, which belonged to an apsidal recess, was laid or relaid later than the rest;[81] but, even if this were the case, the classical motifs elsewhere in the mosaic, including not only Neptune and Cupid but also depictions of Bellerophon killing the Chimaera, Bacchus seated on a leopard, and a quartet of two-figure scenes from Greek mythology, evidently continued to be respected. However we understand the apparent contradiction — whether the pagan myths were reinterpreted in Christian terms, or whether they were retained merely as part of the aesthetic and intellectual baggage of Roman villa-life — what is beyond doubt is the evidence of a clinging to traditional forms of classical culture at a time when new sets of values were taking over.[82] The pseudo-literary texts that gloss the images of Neptune and Cupid make this abundantly clear.

SUMMARY

Eleven inscriptions is a small total on which to build general conclusions, but it is noteworthy that almost the whole range of types is present; perhaps the only major absentee is any example of the funerary inscriptions executed in mosaic which are found in the cemeteries of late Imperial and early Christian times in the Mediterranean provinces. This apart, we have signatures of artists and donors, messages of good luck, explicatory labels, and literary quotations or allusions. As elsewhere in the Empire, there seems to have been a psychological need to put written texts on walls and floors. Not all viewers may have understood them, and not every writer may have been fully in command of the Latin language (or, in metrical inscriptions, of the metre); but it is clear that there were enough people who were literate, if not well educated, to make the practice of inscribing worth while. There is even one instance of a mosaic labelled in Greek. Whether in this case the householder or his guests were really Greek-speaking, or the use of Greek was inspired by a form of intellectual snobbery — or the labels were simply transcribed uncomprehendingly from a copy-book — we cannot know. But the very existence of the inscriptions, Greek or not, is once more eloquent of the social importance of appearing to be educated. Future discoveries of inscribed paintings and mosaics will no doubt reinforce the truth of this message.

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[81] This idea, which goes back to Lysons (1813, part III, p. 3), was suggested to me by Martin Millett at a seminar which I gave in Cambridge in November 2004. For a possible parallel in Jerusalem see Ovadiah and Mucznik 1981 (a room containing an Orpheus mosaic supposedly turned into a place for Christian worship by the addition of an apse whose pavement contained a cross). However, the analogy of the Hinton St Mary mosaic, which was almost certainly the work of the same craftsmen as the one at Frampton (Smith 1965, 100–2, figs 5–6), which included similar pagan imagery (notably Bellerophon killing the Chimaera), and which has a chi-rho symbol integrally placed at the centre of the floor, weakens the force of Millett's proposal.

[82] For the persistence of pagan motifs and mythological figures in Byzantine mosaics in the Near East see e.g. Figueras 2003. Some examples occur even in the pavements of churches and synagogues.

of specific inscriptions has been given by Roy Gibson, David Langslow, Joyce Reynolds, Alison Sharrock, and Roger Wilson. Earlier versions of the paper were presented at seminars in Cambridge and Manchester, and I owe a further debt to all those who contributed to the discussions that followed. But no one other than myself should be held accountable for any wild ideas that remain.

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