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**Antonella Coralini (ed.), *DHER. Domus Herculaneensis Rationes: sito, archivio, museo. Studi e scavi, nuova serie, 30*. Bologna: Ante Quem, 2011. Pp. 548. ISBN 9788878490475. €55.00 (pb).**

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The book collects the results of almost ten years of research of “Domus Herculaneensis Rationes” (DHER), a project housed at the University of Bologna on the architecture, decoration, and preservation of ancient domestic buildings in Herculaneum. DHER has been developed within the framework of “Vesuviana”, an initiative to foster and organize the knowledge of the archaeological sites in the area of the Mount Vesuvius.

The first ten years of activities of “Vesuviana” are summarized in a volume published in 2009, *Archeologie a confronto* (reviewed in BMCR [2010.11.21](#)). Following the same path, the book under review here revolves around the leitmotif of documentation. The interest in documentation, the editor explains, develops along three lines: data collection, processing, and presentation. The book addresses a clear set of questions: how can we read the diverse documentation offered by Herculaneum and the neighboring sites (which Coralini fittingly calls

“palimpsest sites”)? How can we deal with multiple layers of information? Which perspectives may trigger a dialogue between the disciplines involved today in the study of the Vesuvian sites? The book engages with these questions through six sections, preceded by a lengthy essay by the editor, defining the aims of DHER: 1, the comprehensive study of a significant area of Herculaneum, and 2, the analytical documentation of its floor and wall decoration.

Section One ("Extra situm") assesses the potential of archival research. Riccardo Helg and Maria Giurato examine documents about the excavations in Herculaneum under the Bourbons, with particular reference to a fund ("Azienda Scavi") from the State Archive of Naples, which records work over nearly fifty years in 1740-1785. Before listing all pertinent entries (each accompanied by individual bibliography), the authors sketch the cultural and historical context for this register and the early explorations of the site. Mirco Mungari proceeds to a meticulous account of the history of studies, in form of a commentated bibliography from Venuti's 1748 *Descrizione* until recent scholarship. Whereas the historical sources are discussed in detail, the account of recent publications is regrettably organized as a mere list. A more selective choice, complemented by an extensive bibliography, would have broadened the scope of this article and strengthened its many relevant points. The second part of the paper introduces the case study of DHER, the *Insula* III of Herculaneum, by listing its building units and sketching the history of excavations.

The buildings in this *Insula* are examined in Chapter Two ("In situ"), which accounts for the experience of DHER in the field of architectural surveying and explores the potential of geomatics, i.e., the discipline of gathering, processing, and delivering spatially referenced information. The first contribution (by Gabriele Bitelli *et al.*) reports on three investigations from large to very limited areas: spatially referenced photogrammetry on the

scale of the entire site, tri-dimensional photogrammetric mapping of one building (the façade of the Casa del Tramezzo di Legno) and of individual objects (the nymphaeum and lararium of the Casa dello Scheletro). The article that follows expands on this point and offers a detailed presentation of the survey of the façade of the Casa del Tramezzo di Legno, chosen as a case study because of its size, the traces of an upper floor, the deformations in the surface and the remains of plaster layouts (by Camilla Colla *et alii*). Particular attention is paid to a set of non-destructive advanced investigation techniques such as sonic testing, impact-echo testing, ground penetrating radar (GPR), and thermography. The last paper by Alessandro Capra, Marco Dubbini, and Chiara Pascucci focuses on methods for digital surface modeling (DSM) as applied to the vaulted ceiling of the *cubiculum diurnum* (D) in the Casa del Salone Nero (pp. 163-177). The relevance of this section lies, above all, in the successful effort to explain the techniques and their potential (e.g. at pp. 175-176 different methods are compared according to their strengths and the requirements of the research project).

Chapter Three returns to a more 'traditional' approach to the archaeology of Roman domestic spaces ("Cultura dell'abitare: gli apparati decorativi"). The focus on individual buildings is abandoned in favor of a city-wide perspective. Following a lengthy introduction by the editor, four papers address as many themes about wall-painting and mosaic art. Coralini comments on the challenges and perspectives of a systematic study of wall-painting in Herculaneum: after introducing sources and instruments, she outlines issues of chronology, quality, choice of themes, similarity and discrepancies between public and private spaces (especially in relationship to the myth of Hercules). Her remarks on the individuality of the Herculaneum repertoire vis-a-vis that of Pompeii and on iconographic choices provide an exemplary introduction to the subject. In the following paper,

Valentina Tomei deals with the Herculaneum sample of still-life paintings; an explicit comparison with the Pompeian material might have opened interesting perspectives, stressing 'site choices' within a category often dismissed as 'genre-painting'. Two articles by Marilena Griesi and Chiara Pascucci introduce widespread themes in the wall-painting of Herculaneum: images of Dionysus and his retinue and of Cupids. All these contributions include well-organized catalogues for both the paintings preserved in the National Archaeological Museum of Naples and those still *in situ*. The last article in this section follows a different approach and concentrates on one *Insula* alone to analyze the zoological repertoire of Herculaneum (by Ivano Ansaloni *et alii*). The paper, which unfortunately offers no insight about the relationship with domestic spaces or other elements of the decor, provides nevertheless a useful starting point for the study of zoological variety in Roman painting.

Section Four develops one key aspect of DHER: the research in the fields of archaeometry and applied chemistry ("Cultura materiale e archeometria della produzione"). The first article about the toning of colors is particularly suited to open the chapter and bridge the divide between different – yet mutually complementing – methods for the study of ancient wall-painting (Pietro Baraldi, Silvia Minghelli, Daniela Scagliarini Corlàita). The study has been conducted on samples from the houses 'dello Scheletro', 'del Gran Portale', and 'dei Cervi'. On the one hand, microscopic analysis provided information on the chemical composition of the painted layers and the techniques of wall-painting (particularly the use of plaster). On the other hand, it gave insight into the effects of the 79 A.D. eruption and the pyroclastic surges on the buildings of Herculaneum. The next paper concentrates again on the Casa dello Scheletro and the mosaic *tesserae* which cover its lararium (by Cristina Pilolli *et alii*). The *tesserae* are divided into four groups:

Egyptian blue, glass paste, painted stone, stone. The accurate chemical definition of each provides a solid basis for further research on mosaic production in the Vesuvian area. Gilda Assenti is the author of a lengthy, exhaustive and well illustrated account of the glazed pottery from Herculaneum and Pompeii, focusing on materials from the excavations' storages of the two sites. The article includes a tabular summary of archaeometric analyses, which are described in further detail by Giuseppe E. De Benedetto *et alii*. A similar pattern is repeated for the following couple of papers, which offer a comprehensive account of thin-walled pottery from Herculaneum (by Carolina Ascari Raccagni) and related archaeometric assessment (by Annarosa Mangone *et alii*). The last contribution exemplifies the potential of synergies between art-historical research and applied sciences, by testing strategies to investigate the contents of five glass ampullae from Herculaneum (by Elisa Campani *et alii*).

Chapter Five, "Archeografia", collects a set of papers which develop a further core feature of "Vesuviana" and DHER: the issues of visualization, communication, and accessibility of both documentation and scientific results. The aims and perspectives are summarized by Daniela Scagliarini Corlàita, who introduces the criteria followed to create an interactive database of wall-painting in Herculaneum. The subjects of data processing and visualization are further explored in a paper about the role of virtual and augmented reality in designing a database able to support the multiple needs and directions of a wide-ranging project such as DHER (by Antonella Guidazzoli *et alii*). Riccardo Helg and Silvia Di Cristina report on one fundamental aspect for university-based projects, often overlooked in scientific publications: didactic tools. They present the experience of a didactic laboratory launched in 1999 to assist in the acquisition of data about the painted walls of the Casa del Centenario at Pompeii. By describing the contribution of this laboratory

to that research, the authors make a case for the chances that the Vesuvian sites offer to experiment new forms of learning and acquire professional skills.

The final Chapter Six, "Sodales", leaves the site of Herculaneum to include three studies on a larger geographical area. Gioconda di Luca and Armando Cristilli trace the origins and development of the so-called *opus africanum*. This building technique seems attested in the Eastern Mediterranean since the mid- to late Bronze Age and to have spread across the Mediterranean following the Phoenician expansion. The penetration in Campania between the mid- fourth and the late third century B.C. is seen as a consequence of the Etruscan influence. The second paper provides an account of wall-painting techniques in the Casa dei Dioscuri at Pompeii, instrumental in investigating the use of spaces and their changes through time (by Ernesto De Carolis and Maria Pia Corsale). The final article by Rosaria Ciardiello is a broad and insightful survey on the features and craftsmanship of silverware in the Roman world. Although essentially focused on the holds of the National Archaeological Museum of Naples, the essay sets this production within a broader historical and cultural framework.

A useful appendix catalogue, edited by Riccardo Helg and Chiara Pascucci, provides a register of wall-paintings from Herculaneum in the National Archaeological Museum of Naples, structured according to the three themes dealt with in Chapter Three: still-lives, the world of Dionysus and *pueri Veneris*. The editor laudably chose to attach a CD- ROM to the volume. There, the entire content is available in form of both searchable .html pages and .pdf files, which sensibly facilitate collective use in research libraries. The searchable electronic version compensates for the lack of a general subject index helpful to both the occasional reader and those who look for specific information (individual subject indexes are provided for some of the articles, e.g. pp. 104-105). In

the electronic book, images are in color, which substantially increases readability and usability for research. Furthermore, the CD-ROM includes high-quality color images for all items of the catalogue appendix, a precious contribution to the corpus of ancient Roman painting.

In sum, the book largely fulfils the purposes described in the introduction. On the one hand, it collects a wealth of information on the site of Herculaneum and its history. On the other hand, it provides a specimen of excellent research from a variety of perspectives and methods. More importantly, the results of “Vesuviana” and DHR may foster a wide- ranging debate on the purposes and instruments of large academic projects in the Vesuvian sites. The articles collected in Chapters Two, Four, and Five, which report on experimental technologies for data collecting and processing, deserve further mention. Here, authors have exemplarily fulfilled the task of both presenting individual results and discussing the relative merits of their methods. Their efforts have produced a precious repository of experiences for further research.

Assuming previous detailed knowledge on the subject, this book appeals chiefly to a professional readership. Readers with a specific interest in Herculaneum and the neighboring sites will find in these pages a wealth of information, updates on current research and, more importantly, inputs on the challenges and methods of Vesuvian archaeology. The relevance of the issues discussed, as well as the impressive quantity of information about the site of Herculaneum and its buildings, makes this volume a welcome addition to the ever-growing body of scholarship dedicated to the history, art, and preservation of the ancient Vesuvian cities.

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