

Carola Jäggi, *Ravenna: Kunst und Kultur einer spätantiken Residenzstadt; die Bauten und Mosaiken des 5. und 6. Jahrhunderts*, Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner Verlag, 2013

The book by Carola Jäggi, Professor of Art History at the University of Zurich, can be situated among the summary works to appear in recent years dealing with the history and art production of Ravenna, focusing on the period of its greatest glory (i. e., fifth and sixth centuries)¹. One of the principal aims of these publications is to combine updated art historical research with new archaeological excavations and written sources to provide an overview of the development of this important late antique city. Jäggi wrote her book for the general reading public as well as for the scholars of Christian archeology, for whom knowledge of Ravenna is a cornerstone of their studies.

Jäggi's book follows more than a century's ongoing study of Ravenna's history, which research began with the foundation, in 1897, of the *Soprintendenza ai Monumenti di Ravenna*. The most important and scientifically most valuable art historical works of this important political, administrative, and religious center of the late antique period continue to be the research published by Giuseppe Bovini² and Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann³. Earlier syntheses were devoted to the creation and decoration of monuments⁴. The copious production of luxurious artifacts was then a subject of single monographs⁵. Since the publication, in 1989, of Deichmann's last volume of *Ravenna: Hauptstadt des spätantiken Abendlandes* a great deal of other archaeological research has been conducted, and this new knowledge led to the need for a new synthesis in the 1990s. The most important works from this period include the series, *Storia di Ravenna* (1990–1996), published under the general guidance of Domenico Berardi, which bestowed on Ravenna a historiography of six major volumes containing historical, art historical, and archaeological studies in a wide timeframe from the Roman period to modern times. Two of these volumes are dedicated to the late antique

period⁶. Among the other significant achievements were the conference held in 2004 in Spoleto, the results of which were published as *Ravenna: da capitale imperiale a capitale esarcale*⁷, and the conference organized by historians and archaeologists under the title *Ravenna tra Oriente e Occidente* in 2006⁸.

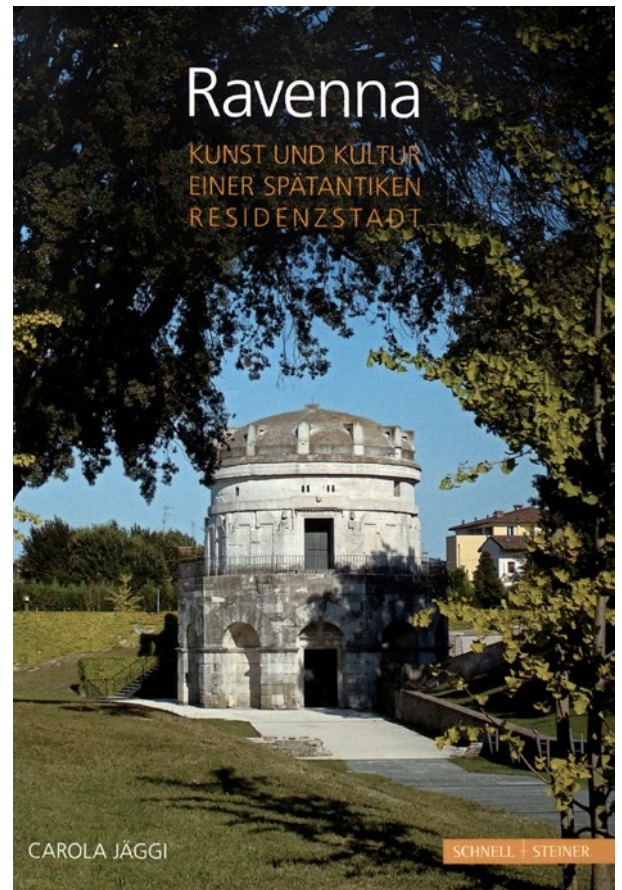
New trends in the historiography of Ravenna are represented by publications aimed at a wider, not just scholarly, audience; these are usually accompanied by high quality reproductions⁹. They include, for example, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity* by Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis (2010), *The Early Christian Monuments of Ravenna* by Mariëtte Verhoeven (2011), *Il mosaico a Ravenna: ideologia e arte* by Clementina Rizzardi (2011), and *Eternal Ravenna: from the Etruscans to the Venetians* by Massimiliano David (2013). These publications differ because of the individual authors' *foci* and their languages. Jäggi's archaeological approach is an important addition, enriching the art historical debates about the early Christian monuments of Ravenna and the circumstances of their creation.

In her introduction, Jäggi defines the three most important phases in the history of late antique Ravenna: the period when Ravenna was the seat of the West-Roman Emperors (first half of the fifth century), the era of Theoderic (493–526), and the period of Byzantine rule (540–751). These historical phases determine the structure of the book, which asks: What position did Ravenna occupy in the domain of art between the two poles, northern Italy and Constantinople? Is it possible to talk about "Ravennate art," in which media "foreign influences" were taken over, and if so, how were they manifested? Who was responsible for the commissions? And how did various historical circumstances and social status influence the form of the commissions?

Without listing the content of each chapter here, it is worth highlighting only those portions that seem to contribute most to the historiography of Ravenna. In particular, the introductory chapters successfully attempt to acquaint lay readers with some of the specifics in the studies of Ravenna. Briefly but accurately, Jäggi not only describes the political events that gave rise to individual monuments, but also gives a lot of space to topography because of the monuments' importance in archeology and the explication of some of the difficulties for archaeologists (especially the constant struggle with rising water levels). Likewise, the author briefly and concisely provides her readers with

the written sources, which offer a glance back at the resplendent past of Ravenna, especially since almost everything we know today about Ravenna of the fifth and sixth centuries we owe to Andreas Agnellus's a chronicle of the bishops of Ravenna between 831 and 846–847, following the pattern of the Roman *Liber pontificalis* (*Liber Pontificalis Ecclesiae Ravennatis*)¹⁰.

By combining archaeological research and the study of written sources, as well as analysis of the surviving monuments, the author creates a portrait of the late antique city. Jäggi often reminds readers that only a small fraction of this important center's former glory survives today. Some of the buildings were destroyed in the Middle Ages, others during the second half of the fifteenth century, when Ravenna came under the rule of the Venetian rulers and underwent an urbanistic modernization. Many of the monuments were irrevocably destroyed during waves of historicizing restoration in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries in misguided efforts to return them to their "original state". The last straw for Ravenna's monuments was the Second World War, when the city was bombed. With this in mind, the author does not set an arbitrary limit at the late antique period, but, with ease,



- 1 Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge [u. a.] 2010; Mariëtte Verhoeven, *The Early Christian Monuments of Ravenna: Transformations and Memory*, Turnhout 2011; Clementina Rizzardi, *Il mosaico a Ravenna: ideologia e arte*, Bologna 2011 (Studi e scavi; 32); Massimiliano David, *Eternal Ravenna: from the Etruscans to the Venetians*, Turnhout 2013.
- 2 E.g. Giuseppe Bovini, *Mosaici di Ravenna. Mausoleo di Galla Placidia, Battistero della Cattedrale, Cappella Arcivescovile, Battistero degli Ariani, Sant' Apollinare Nuovo, San Vitale, Sant' Apollinare in Classe*, Milano s. a.; Idem, *Ravenna: Kunst und Geschichte*, Ravenna 1978.
- 3 Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann, *Ravenna: Hauptstadt des spätantiken Abendlandes. Geschichte und Monumente*, Wiesbaden 1969; Idem, *Ravenna: Hauptstadt des spätantiken Abendlandes. Kommentar* (4 vols), Wiesbaden 1974–1989.
- 4 E.g. Bovini (n. 2); Spiro Kostof, *The orthodox baptistery of Ravenna*, London 1965; Clementina Rizzardi, *Il Mausoleo di Galla Placidia a Ravenna*, Modena 1996.
- 5 E.g. Sarcophagi: "Corpus" della scultura paleocristiana bizantina ed alto-medioevale di Ravenna, Giuseppe Bovini ed., Roma 1968–1969; Marion Lawrence, *The Sarcophagi of Ravenna*, Roma 1970; Ivories: Wolfgang Fritz Vollbach, *Avori di scuola ravennate nel v e vi secolo*, Ravenna 1977.
- 6 *Storia di Ravenna*, 1. *L'èvo antico*, Giancarlo Susini ed., Venezia 1990; *Storia di Ravenna*, 2. *Dall'età bizantina all'età ottoniana*, Antonio Carile ed., 2 vols, Venezia 1991–1992.
- 7 *Ravenna, da capitale imperiale a capitale esarcale: atti del xvii Congresso internazionale di studio sull'alto medioevo* (Ravenna, 6–12 giugno 2004), Spoleto 2005.
- 8 *Ravenna tra Oriente e Occidente, storia e archeologia. Ciclo di conferenze* (Ravenna, 11 maggio – 8 giugno 2006), Andrea Augenti ed., Ravenna 2006.
- 9 See n. 1.
- 10 Agnellus, *The book of pontiffs of the church of Ravenna. Agnellus of Ravenna*, transl. with an introd. and notes by Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis, Washington D.C. 2004; Agnellus, *Agnelli Ravennatis Liber pontificalis ecclesiae Ravennatis*, Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis ed., Turnhout 2006.



includes information on later reconstructions and use of *spolia* on new buildings constructed on the sites of destroyed monuments. Jäggi thus introduces lay readers to art historical and archaeological methods to identify these lost buildings.

Jäggi does not neglect the importance of the historiography of Ravenna for the formation of the Italian state. She notes the increasing interest in Ravenna in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries for political purposes. As the onetime seat of the Western imperial family and the ideological counterpart to papal Rome, Ravenna was a particularly important site in the unification of Italy in 1861 and played an important role in determining the identity of the young Italian nation. The nineteenth century debate “Orient oder Rom” was an attempt to divert attention from Rome as an art center towards the East and Byzantine art. From that time, Ravenna was studied as a part of the Byzantine realm. Despite the brevity with which her book deals with these issues, that Jäggi attempts to introduce her readers the critical importance of historiography and art history in such matters as state formation is laudable.

From the formal point of view it is necessary to call attention to the very reader-friendly extended captions that, had they been part of the text, would have interfered with its fluidity and readability. The additional explanatory texts that deal with such specific issues, as Arianism, the technical procedures for the construction of Theoderic’s mausoleum including illustrative descriptive drawings, etc. have

the same function. In some cases, these additional texts contain Agnellus’s descriptions or brief summaries of the knowledge of the individual artifacts, including the author’s own arguments. The book, in spite of several simplifications, remains scientifically honest and, thanks to the extensive bibliography (twenty-eight pages), also useful for students of Early Christian art. The alert reader is finally able to deal with the questions that the author asks at the beginning of the book.

In conclusion, I only ask a general question: Was there a need for a synthesis of this type given the fact that, in recent years, the market has been replete with publications with more or less the same content? Is it not a manifestation of the fact that it is necessary to begin to look for new approaches that would build on the high-quality scientific art historical research of the leading researchers of Ravenna mentioned briefly in the introduction of this review and that would be a further shift in the understanding of this important late antique city? Even if Carola Jäggi’s book is an example of general art historical summaries of known research, it provides a clear introduction to the history and art of this important late antique city, written in a concise and intelligible form that holds the readers for whom it was written.

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