
Im ganzen: eine verdienstvolle Arbeit, die mit einem übersichtlichen Katalog und Register versehen ist. Dem Leser wäre aber auch ein Sachverzeichnis von grossem Nutzen gewesen. Es ist sehr erfreulich, dass der Autor eine Publikation über die spätantiken Privatporträts vorbereitet.

Mika Kajava


It is regrettable that the title of this study, although completely in keeping with the theme of the research, may not succeed in arousing the interest of larger circles than the students and specialists of Byzantine art. The book indeed has a great deal to offer to scholars of theology and aesthetics, and, in general, to anyone interested in the history of ideas in the Byzantine world.

The aim of the study is to discover and define some basic principles underlying representations of human figure and composite pictures in Byzantine church art. These principles also have a bearing on medieval art in the Latin West. The first Chapter contains an excellent discussion of the concept of art and the artist, as well as of the divine message conveyed in religious paintings. Chapter II is devoted to the literary sources that provide instructions as to the measurements to be used in painting a human figure. Here the author has been able to bring some new evidence in that he presents the first translation of a previously overlooked paragraph in the so-called 'Source A' of the Painter's Manual of Mount Athos entitled 'Explanation of the measurements according to nature'. As regards the literary sources, it would have been profitable to print the Greek texts in full (e.g. in the form of an Appendix). The inclusion of the original texts, which
are generally of difficult access, could certainly have facilitated eventual terminological studies.

Using the above-mentioned passage as his guide, the author then analyses various paintings, starting from the representations of single heads and arriving at the construction of monumental systems of decoration. In this connection a few words could have been added to explain the principle used in the selection of the reference material.

Highly rewarding is the part where the ideological basis for the use of the modules and the geometrical system is studied. To a great extent the answers can be sought in the writings of Ps.-Dionysius the Areopagite which are characterized by a strong Neoplatonic flavour. Accordingly, the art is seen as imitation, not only of visible objects but also the ideas behind the objects, the heavenly archetypes, and the artist is under certain circumstances able to approach the unchangeable world of ideas. The proportional regularity of the whole cosmic order, the macrocosm, is repeated in a single painting by the underlying geometrical system.

In the last part of the work the author searches for the origins of the Byzantine system and ends up with the explanation that it derives from Egyptian art. There remains, however, a chronological and, in spite of the introduction of the concept of Hellenism, to some extent also a cultural gap between Egyptian art and the Byzantine period, and, as the author is well aware, much preliminary work should be made in tracing the intermediary stages in Greco-Roman art. At any rate, the symbolism of the method cannot be attributed to an Egyptian basis.

Jaakko Aronen