Ellen Perry serves as a source for trying to identify Greek originals based on Roman copies. Lately, some scholars have started to look at copy criticism (or Kopienkritik) critically and completely new ways of looking and interpreting Roman art have emerged. Ellen Perry's book is a very interesting and refreshing look at Roman art; how it was created and how it was perceived by the Roman viewer.

Perry examines Roman aesthetics of imitation in order to see types of repetition, variation and visual formulae present in Roman art. In this way, she hopes to show that Roman works of art were not intended merely as copies of Greek masterpieces. Her main material is Roman Idealplastik, heroic and mythological sculpture. The beginning of the book concentrates, however, on textual evidence for the attitudes and desires of Roman patrons who ordered and displayed works of art. One of the key concepts is decorum or appropriateness of everything to its place and time. Chapter one explores decorum and tradition – how traditional Roman values were represented and replicated in art. There were no accepted rules for appropriate depictions and uses of art, but there was a requirement to respect tradition and to justify innovation. Roman visual culture is often considered conservative and the reason for this offered by Kopienkritik was the copying of Greek originals. Perry's interpretation is that the Romans instead had a formulaic visual culture, a respect for tradition and decorum, which did not encourage innovation. Chapter two explores decorum and patrons and suitability of works of art for different contexts. Architectural types and their decoration with painting and sculpture were very closely connected, so closely that the content of the decoration was interpreted by its contexts and not by its original form. Even themes and types that were clearly copied from Greek originals could be understood differently by the Roman viewer. The Roman variation of Greek originals could be considered not as "bad" copies, but as innovations, adaptations of a Greek theme to make it appropriate for a Roman context.

Chapter three explores the way in which Kopienkritik has made Roman art invisible by effectively denying its independence. Roman artists mainly tried to copy Greek originals and if the result did not resemble the original, it was to be considered a failure or a bad copy. Perry compares Kopienkritik to textual criticism where differences to originals can be methodically for verified, the texts with the archäologische Gegenbeweis und Forschungen eröffnet.

Heikki Solin


Non essendo un addetto ai lavori, non mi sento di poter dare un giudizio sulle identificazioni proposte dal Bernabò Brea. Ma so che alcuni specialisti hanno espresso dubbi su alcune di esse. Quale che sia la verità, si tratta di un libro di grande importanza. Le scoperte fatte dall’altra e le rilevanti, e la presentazione dei materiali è eccellente. Se qualche identificazione rimane meno sicura, ciò non toglie niente al grande fascino dell’opera.

Heikki Solin

De novis libris judicia