
*Italian Mosaics* is a precursor to the five volumes on Italian frescoes (covering the age of Giotto through the Baroque era) published by Abbeville Press. In addition to the scholarly essays on the existing examples of a thousand years of mosaics in Italy and their role in the evolution of Christian art, this monograph boasts over three hundred exquisite color photographs of these mosaics. The photographs, whether showing the mosaics in an architectural setting or details of the imagery, give the reader a chance to study the iconography, the visual program, and the sophistication of the aesthetic placement of the tesserae.

With the introduction, the author presents the evolving pictorial program of the mosaics, their Roman or Byzantine influences, which were informed by the papal hierarchy, and provides the overall context in which these cycles were created.

Each of the nineteen chapters focuses on the most prominent mosaic cycles found in individual churches, baptisteries, and cathedrals, and each is arranged chronologically. The monograph begins with the description of Santa Costanza in Rome, built and decorated in the fourth century, and is followed by a discussion of churches, baptisteries, and ecclesiastical structures in Ravenna, Rome, Cefalù, Palermo, Monreale, Venice, and Florence. It concludes with the description of Santa Maria Trastevere, completed in 1300.

Each section on the individual church, baptistery, or structure discusses the history of the building, its patron (pope, cardinal, bishop), as well as how the patronage guided the pictorial program found in each structure, whether it was a church commissioned in memory of a saint (such as San Vitale in Ravenna) or planned as a Mausoleum (Galla Placidia). Keen observations of styles and what has been researched through documents, or surmised through drawings/etchings done at various times throughout the centuries, provide clues to the history of the mosaics, and to alterations or restorations that may have occurred. The artists, masters of the mosaic decoration, where they came from and how they were influenced, can be deduced, but only a few individual names are known. In addition to the general and detailed color images of the mosaics, some descriptions are also accompanied by a detailed schema of the placement of scenes from the Old and New Testaments, or individual saints and donors, throughout the apse, cupola, nave, and niches.

The appendix includes an extensive bibliography as well as indices of names and places. This sumptuous publication is excellent for any academic library that offers courses in general art history. This is also an excellent addition to museum libraries, especially those whose permanent collections include medieval art.

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