APPENDIX 21

CHOROGRAPHY AND TOPOGRAPHY AS PICTORIAL GENRES
(Ch. VII, n. 35)

Besides the literary forms of chorography and topography we also hear of pictorial variants in the form of cartographic paintings. The exact character of these pictorial genres is disputed. It would seem that chorography refers to larger areas such as whole countries and topography to smaller regions. Beyen assumed that chorography referred to a painted map which included figural details illustrating local characteristics, and that topography referred to a landscape painting which depicted the characteristics of a certain area. He believed that the Nile Mosaic was an example of the second type. The rendering of spatial depth in the Nile Mosaic he attributed, however, to the period when the mosaic was laid assuming that the original Alexandrian topographies would have offered a more schematic perspective. Others have argued that a topographical picture looked like a map with, in or around it, vignettes illustrating topographical characteristics; they too believe that the Nile Mosaic was an example of this genre. In their view an earlier example of this art was the triumphal painting of the conquest of Sardinia by T. Sempronius Gracchus from 174 B.C., described by Livy XLI 28, 8–10. It depicted the island of Sardinia, shown in bird’s eye view, and included representations of battles and sieges. In fact this genre of cartographic painting marked the beginning of a long tradition. Examples may have been the map of the world in the Porticus Vipsania in Rome, and eventually the Peutinger Table. Many reflections of it

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1 For the literary genres see Ch. VII, n. 21. For the pictorial genres see Ptolemaeus I 1, 5; Strabo II 5, 17; Vitruvius VIII 2, 6; Beyen I, 170 ff.; II, 311; Von Blanckenagen 1962, 56; Leach 91 ff., 108 f.; Tybout 340 ff.
2 See Beyen I, 168 ff.; II, 311 ff.; Tybout 341 ff., 344 f.
3 Beyen I, 170; II, 308 ff., 313 f., dating the mosaic to c. 60 B.C.
are to be found in Roman mosaics and illustrated manuscripts. Dawson, Von Blanckenhagen, Leach, and Rouveret all stress the similarity of these pictures to the Nile Mosaic pointing to the neutral background of water in which the scenes appear like vignettes. We have seen, however, that this interpretation is incorrect being due to a false impression created by the restoration, and that originally the Nile Mosaic offered a large coherent landscape composition.

It seems therefore that the ancients distinguished between two classes of painting, chorography and topography; at the same time we have evidence for the existence of two kinds of pictures which represent places and areas. The problem is which name should be given to which kind. The first kind, the cartographic style of painting, appears to fit the description by Strabo II 5, 17, who speaks about continents shaped by the sea, oceans, mountains etc., and calls a painting encompassing such features a chorographical pinax. From this it seems safe to conclude that a chorography depicted a certain large area in the manner of a map, including features of a topographical character. If we accept this definition of chorography we can deduce that topography was the other type, namely an elaborate and detailed landscape picture. This supposition may be supported by an interesting passage in Vitruvius VII 5, 2, which lists various kinds of paintings in relation to their surroundings: ambulationes vero propter spatia longitutidinis varietatibus topiorum ornarent ab certis locorum proprietatibus imagines exprimentes (pinguntur enim portus, promontoria, litora, flumina, fontes, euripi, fana, luci, montes, pecora, pastores), (Because of the length of porticoes they decorated the walls of these with various kinds of landscapes, the features of which derived from the characteristics of real places (they painted harbours, promontories, shores, rivers, springs, straits, sanctuaries, groves, hills, herds and herdsmen). Vitruvius is referring

6 See Dawson and Von Blanckenhagen ill.cc. in n. 4; Leach 92; and Rouveret (o.c. in n. 4) 582 f.
7 See Ch. I, fig. 8. The aspect of the flooded countryside may also have contributed to the impression that the composition was made up of separate scenes, cf. Ch. IV, n. 60, fig. 67.
8 See Tybout 61 f., 88 f.