Vaticane, modeled after literary academies, where prelates and laymen met and debated classical literature and attendant questions. Soon, in addition to studying the ancient literary legacy, the members began to transpose classical philosophical questions into unmistakably Christian terms.1

Aspects of antiquity posed problems for post-Tridentine institutional and devotional cultures in general, to be sure, but Ligorio’s career illustrates that there was no question, despite Pius V’s choler toward the idea of ancient remains sulllying his space, that the study of antiquity would be abolished or relegated solely to private retreats or distant courts. Yet ancient art could not be read the same way as before, during the blissful syncretistic period of the High Renaissance. I think we might try to see Ligorio as contributing in some important ways to the wider Counter-Reformation project of reform, although one closer to Pius IV’s integrative ideals than Pius V’s fervor. Coffin allows us the freedom to dwell on all of these issues, and more, thanks to his generous last contribution to scholarship.

NICOLA COURTRIGHT
Amherst College

Jean-Marcel Humbert and Clifford Price, editors
Imhotep Today: Egyptianizing Architecture

How have ancient Egyptian forms, motifs, and styles been used around the world? This book of fifteen essays examines what the authors call “Egyptianizing” architecture in Europe, America, and other, mainly English-speaking parts of the world. Here one learns of Egyptian cemeteries, factories, museums, cinemas, schools, shopping centers, bridges, gymnasiums, and private homes, as well as Egyptian-style interior features such as vestibules, elevators, and stairways—and much, much more. It is to the credit of the editors that they engage head-on with the complex corpus of modern architectural Egyptianism in a much more open and freewheeling way than attempted in previous literature.2 At the same time, the publication exemplifies the inherent challenges of such an effort.

This volume is part of an important new series, driven by initiatives centered in the Institute of Archaeology of the University of London, to “move the study of Ancient Egypt into the mainstream” of critical practice throughout the humanities and social sciences. The series is devoted to a range of ancient and modern conceptions of Egypt: its wisdom, culture, and mystery; its significance for Africa; its role within modern Western consumerism; and related topics that go far beyond the conventional bounds of archaeological inquiry. The book is edited by Clifford Price, an expert in archaeological conservation, and Jean-Marcel Humbert, perhaps the past decade’s most involved and prolific student of Egyptian-inspired production, whose work provides a touchstone for the majority of the other authors.

While including such well-known examples of Egyptianizing architecture as William Bullock’s Egyptian Hall, the Napoleonic Fontaine du Fellah, the Egyptian Court at the Sydenham Crystal Palace, the Antwerp Zoo, and the Mount Auburn Cemetery gateway, the book also adds in-depth treatments of some lesser-studied monuments, such as the sphinxes, pylons, and related features of nineteenth-century St. Petersburg, ably discussed by Helen Whitehouse, and neo-Egyptian garden monuments in Florence, considered by Gloria Rosati. These are welcome and what the appetites. Yet one wonders about Egyptianizing architecture elsewhere in eastern Europe, and in garden decoration in other parts of Italy. The latter is especially relevant here, given the contributors’ frequent acknowledgment of the formative role of the pyramid of Caius Cestius in Rome and the Egyptian designs of Giovanni Piranesi. The scope of the essays is wide: Margaret Marchiori Bakos surveys Egyptianizing motifs in art and architecture in Brazil, noting also that the tallest obelisk in South America is in Buenos Aires (231). Despite its considerable reach the volume does not convey the universality of Egyptianizing to the degree that Humbert has previously asserted.3 This is not to say that the editors would be successful only by accounting for all Egyptianizing monuments, but rather that they do not make clear what is included and what is left out.

Nonetheless, and perhaps inevitably, the publication is more successful at demonstrating the scope of the question than fully articulating the cultural dynamics involved. On the topic of what all this Egyptianism means, the essays vary greatly. The acute and admirably complete text by Richard Fazzini and Mary McKercher on Egyptianized architecture in America offers many possible motivations for various American Egyptian-style monuments, having to do with—among other things—the sagacity, agelessness, and sublimity attributed in modern times to ancient Egypt. Their piece shows how American interest in Egypt continued in various ways through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is thus meant as a corrective to the claim they attribute to Richard Carroll that the “Egyptian Revival” was limited to the first six decades of the nineteenth

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century (135). But their wide temporal and geographical scope complicates the conclusion Marie-Stéphanie Delmaire reaches in her essay, that American attention to Egypt was high only in the later nineteenth century and largely confined to the Northeast.

The remainder of the contributors find other meanings and complications in relation to Egypt as it was iterated and imbriated in various contexts, including nineteenth-century imperial motivations. Cathie Bryan interprets French Egyptianizing as a sort of a political spin on a “doubtful military outcome” (202). We also learn that in a portion of Australia, Egyptian references might stand for a “cultural affiliation” with Western culture (161), while in another part of the country their significance is their very lack of significance, as obelisks could be used without sacred meaning by a “less sectarian” society (179).

These complexities stem in part from the real contradictions generated by the permutations of Egyptian references. But they also are due to the predominant method of investigation in this book, which most often involves working backward from extant monuments. Yet surely the objects are all part of a broader picture, which involves not just buildings but the complex of forces and beliefs behind them. In startling contrast, the book’s most satisfying essay provides a view focused not so much on product as process. John Hamill and Pierre Mollier, preeminent historians of Freemasonry, discuss the movement’s intersections with ancient Egypt. They make clear that the Egyptian origin of Masonic identity is a myth fabricated by specific individuals in a particular period. Here, then, a corpus of Egyptianate buildings—the Masonic lodges—can be clearly seen in a framework that is not national but cultural; forming part of a living movement, they are judged not for their authenticity but their functionality. Chris Elliott, Katherine Griffis-Greenberg, and Richard Lunn focus on Egyptianizing building in modern London, particularly the Earls Court Homebase and the recently renovated Harrods. As they show, not just the stamp, but quite literally the face of Harrods’s current owner, Mohammed Al Fayed, can be discerned within the Egyptianizing decorative scheme.

The book’s final essay stands out from, and frames, all the others. Beverley Butler discusses the controversies around the modern “Alexandrina,” the Egyptian government’s initiative to create a library comparable to the ancient library of Alexandria. The text throws into relief the contradictions of contemporary Egyptian cultural identity, which is otherwise barely acknowledged. Egyptianizing is a question for Egypt too, not the token of something distinctly different from an indigenous culture—to be variously embraced, deflected, remade, or otherwise managed—but rather a feature of its own past and present. Even more, the Egyptian image on which other nations thrive is shown here to be a relic, largely maintained in a Western framework, with important implications for power and identity in the contemporary world.

All in all, Imbrotep Today is an important achievement. It presents a fascinating array of material essential to understanding the modern architectural incarnations of ancient Egypt, and demonstrates a way to ask new questions of monuments old and new.  

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