Books

Roman Architecture

Roberto Cassanelli, Massimiliano David, Emidio de Alberti, and Annie Jacques
Translated by Thomas M. Hartmann


Roberto Cassanelli, Pier Luigi Capparelli, Enrico Colle, and Massimiliano David
Translated by Thomas M. Hartmann

Houses and Monuments of Pompeii: The Works of Fausto and Felice Niccolini

Published concurrently by the J. Paul Getty Museum, the two books under review are translations of Italian publications of the 1990s. One presents a sumptuous sampling of the architectural examination drawings of ancient buildings (the *envois*) submitted by winners of the Prix de Rome (the *pensionnaires*) to their sponsoring institution, the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, from 1786 through 1924. The second reproduces illustrations from the famous multivolume set on Pompeii, *Le case ed i monumenti di Pompei disegnati e descritti*, published by Fausto and Felice Niccolini between 1854 and 1896. Virtually identical in physical format, both are organized as catalogues of sorts—though they evidently herald no museum exhibitions. Each begins with short historical essays, and then moves to the heart of the matter, numbered illustrations accompanied by didactic captions. Both have basic bibliographies focusing almost exclusively on the study of the antiquities themselves, rather than on the modern reception of antiquity—which is what the books are about.

Both are primarily about the pictures, and as visual documents they do not disappoint. Lavishly produced in the same large format as their Italian predecessors, they are well bound, slipcovered, and printed on thick, high-quality coated paper. Scholars will find the texts (especially that in the Rome volume) valuable for research, and the illustrations are superb. *Ruins of Ancient Rome* intersperses such familiar images as Édmond Paulin’s famous section of the Baths of Diocletian and Louis-Joseph Duc’s studies of the Colosseum with unknown examples, such as Jean-Louis Pascal’s 1870 watercolors of excavations in Domitian’s Stadium Garden on the Palatine Hill; and nearly every illustration has something significant to say. Looking at the renditions of the Basilica of Maxentius ranging from 1814 to 1921, the attentive viewer can trace phases of restoration that are not at all obvious today (the building “gained back” even more of its fabric under Benito Mussolini and has never shed those extra pounds).

There are many other felicities here. Achille Leclère’s plans, elevations, and sections of the Pantheon from 1813 remain the best ever made, but until now they were only available in undersize catalogues or rare and unwieldy volumes of black-and-white reproductions. Published in color, they can be admired and studied as their author intended, albeit on a smaller scale. The famed athlete mosaics of the Vatican, heavily restored and removed from their architectural context in the Baths of Caracalla, are shown in situ and in their original condition in Abel Blouet’s color plan of the baths from 1825. I could cite dozens of other cases in which the published images serve as visual aids for the serious scholar or the dedicated enthusiast.

The Pompeii volume is a somewhat different matter, for, with the exception of the illustrations accompanying the essays, all of the reproductions are drawn from the Niccolini set. Unlike many of the *envois*, these images were designed for widespread consumption; thus, not only were they meant to temper accurate information with broad appeal, but they are chromolithographs, which do not offer the same coloristic range of precision as the watercolors of the *pensionnaires*. Yet the results, for the most part, are excellent, and like the Roman *envois*, they can be studied both as documentation of antiquities that have since been lost or degraded and as fascinating cultural constructs of their own. Similar to its counterparts, such as William Gell’s *Pompeiana* (various editions were published in London from 1817 to 1852) and Charles-François Mazois’s *Les Ruines de Pompeï* (Paris, 1824–38), the Niccolini set awaits serious historiographic analysis of the reception of Pompeii and Herculaneum in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

During the past quarter century, the École des Beaux-Arts has cosponsored exhibitions that have introduced its massive library of *envois* to an interested public. Yet as useful as they are, the catalogues...
are hard to find and their small square paperback format is not equal to the grand and meticulous illustrations they contain. We have every reason then to welcome Ruins of Ancient Rome, a generous new volume that makes no compromises in production values but remains reasonably affordable.

The introductory essays offer a selective historical framework for the drawings and paintings featured. The first two, by Annie Jacques and Roberto Cassanelli, outline the origins and heyday of the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris and its sister institution in Rome, the Académie Française. The third, a brief treatment of the history of archaeology in Rome by Massimiliano David, is by far the most provocative of the three. Concise and opinionated, it presents the usual jeremiad against philistine developers mowing down cowed preservationists in a fusillade of jackhammers. The lament is heartfelt and understandable, but its premise is too simple. However imperfectly, huge amounts of information were recorded during the great campaigns of urban renewal in the late nineteenth century, and they were often published with astonishing speed and dedication. David underplays the founding in the 1870s of the Bullettino comunale and the Notizie degli scavi di antichità—serials that to this day remain examples of careful and thorough archaeological method. There is no mention of the feverish activity of the foreign archaeologists who operated from their national schools and academies in Rome or of the heroic output of such luminaries as Giacomo Boni, Christian Hülsen, and Rodolfo Lanciani. The sad truth is that we would not know half of what we do about ancient Rome if not for the rapacious development of the late nineteenth century—or if Mussolini had not decided to use the city as his personal sandbox. Amid the turmoil, archaeologists, artists, scholars, and architects did their best to record the antiquities as they emerged, and the sheer volume of the results, if all too selective, is nevertheless astonishing.

Oddly, the pensionnaires hardly figure in this essay. Granted, most of them turned their gaze away from urban salvage archaeology, preferring to document and reinvent monuments already visible. But some were granted excavation permits and were expected to report their finds in the meticulous illustrative manner favored by the École. In a few cases, the engaged enthusiasm of a pensionnaire actually stirred responsible archaeologists into action. It is particularly unfortunate that nothing is said of Georges Chédanne's sensational reassessment of the Pantheon in the 1890s. This led immediately to excavations that confirmed the French architect's redating of the building to Hadrian's reign and proved that the building had existed in two earlier phases. Chédanne's celebrated analytical cutaway view of the Pantheon is reproduced, but we learn nothing of its importance to the archaeological history of the city.

As with the earlier catalogues, I find myself longing for more synthesis and analysis. Why did the Prix de Rome matter, and how did it matter? How are the values and ideologies of the academy visually encoded in these sumptuous, seductive illustrations? How deeply embedded in European culture were the environs and their conservative aesthetic? Eight decades after Le Corbusier's revolt against academicism, we still wait for answers.

In Houses and Monuments of Pompeii, the first essay, by Pier Luigi Ciapparelli, outlines the careers of the Niccolini brothers, one an architect, the other an antiquarian and curator. It elucidates the extent to which the careers of the brothers were intertwined with that of Giuseppe Fiorelli, the director of excavations at Pompeii, in a symbiotic relationship of publicity and access. An essay by Enrico Colle considers the impact of the Pompeian antiquities on neoclassical design around Europe. The narration is strong on the Italian material but sketchy with regard to other countries. Robert Adam receives a nod, but we learn little of the Society of Dilettanti that did so much to advance his career and Pompeianism in general. I also wished for more than the scant paragraph devoted to the famously Pompeii-influenced work of Karl Friedrich Schinkel and Leo von Klenze. Ludwig's Pompejanica villa in Aschaffenburg, completely renovated in the 1990s, goes unmentioned, perhaps because it follows Pompeian architectural forms while the essay favors ornamental design. The next two texts, by Roberto Cassanelli, again are too brief to do justice to their respective subjects: Pompeii in nineteenth-century painting and the history of photography at Pompeii. Exploration of the influence of early Pompeian photographs on painting (and on the sepia-toned monochrome lithographs interspersed among the full-color work in the Niccolini set) would be an especially worthy topic of study, though it is hardly given its due here. A clear but unacknowledged link is evident in two images reproduced in the articles an 1852 photograph by Alfred-Nicolas Normand taken through the atrium of the House of the Faun, and Paul-Alfred de Curzon's A Dream among the Ruins of Pompeii of 1866, which plainly used the photograph as its template. David concludes the essay section with a curious but informative piece on scale models of Pompeii.

The “catalogue” section of the book offers a generous sampling of the maps and illustrations produced by the numerous artists who contributed to the Niccolini's project. These range from meticulous engraved plans and elevations to sweeping romantic vedute. As is to be expected, a great deal of space is devoted to reproductions of wall frescoes. Some of the highest-quality lithography is reserved for the household objects that often approach the meticulous watercolors of the pensionnaires in naturalism and detail. Among them, in the final volume of the set, are vivid, almost photographic reproductions of Fiorelli's evocative plaster casts of victims.

In a review of two books that are so overwhelmingly visual, it may seem churlish to criticize the text. But so irritating is the English translation in each volume that it constantly draws attention to itself. Uncomfortable with Italian and English alike, the translator is even more flummoxed by the subject matter. At times the language is so clumsy as to be
incomprehensible, at others it is merely amusing, as in such passages as “remained in discrete condition,” “resulted badly for the guest fans,” or “is cheered by flowerbeds.” The translator has a particularly bad habit of anglicizing names only halfway, or not at all, without checking the sense of the original language. Thus the title of David’s painting is translated as 
\textit{Oath of the Orazi}, the well-known medieval pilgrim to Rome is given as 
\textit{Anonimo Einsiedeln}, and the famous Roman censor appears as 
\textit{Appio Claudio Cieco}. My personal favorites are Federico Guglielmo IV of Prussia and Gerolamo Napoleon. Place names, particularly in Rome, suffer badly: we are treated to 
\textit{Augusto Imperatore Square}, 
\textit{Tiberina Island}, 
\textit{Cestia Pyramid}, 
\textit{Holitorius Forum}, 
\textit{Consentes Di Portico}, 
\textit{Iuturnae Lake}, and dozens more. This errant policy is followed so obstinately that it inspires a kind of perverse counting game. More troubling are the numerous mis-translations. 
\textit{Disegno} and 
\textit{edito} are translated innocently as “design” and “edited,” when they clearly mean “drawing” and “published.” Sometimes entire sentences are botched with a lamentable loss of sense. We are offered the astonishing revelations that “B. Peruzzi uncovered a prestigious palace in the highest part of the theater [of Marcellus];” that “two churches were uncovered in the bath structures” of 
\textit{Dioecletian}, including 
\textit{S. Maria degli Angeli}, which had apparently gone missing; and that the 
\textit{Nymphæum Alexandri} (the Trophies of 
\textit{Marius}) “remained in operation until 1590.”

All of these errors could have been eliminated under the blue pencil of a competent scholar in the field. Still, nobody will shun the books on the basis of their linguistic flaws. I will look elsewhere for substantive treatment of the Nachleben of Roman art and architecture, but I will return to these publications often for their sheer charm and their value as visual documents of two bygone ages.

\textbf{RABUN TAYLOR}  
Harvard University

\textbf{Ecclesiastical Architecture}

\textbf{Hélène Rousteau-Chambon}  
\textit{Le Gothique des temps modernes. Architecture religieuse en milieu urbain}  

Most of us were taught as undergraduates (and possibly as graduate students as well) that Gothic architecture in France ended in the fifteenth century with the introduction of classical forms from Italy. Specialists, however, have long known that this is simply untrue. Already by the late 1930s, Pierre Héliot had begun publishing his series of seminal articles on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French Gothic architecture, and from these and a host of other, chiefly local, studies we know that postmedieval Gothic was an extensive phenomenon. Cathedrals were built, rebuilt, or extended in Gothic—including the relatively well-known example in Orléans (1601–1829), but also those in Blois (1678–1700), Mende (1599–1620), Pamiers (1602/1660–86), and Lectoure (1638–1742), as well as scores of collegiate and abbey churches, like the beautiful Abbey of Saint-Maixent (1676–ca. 1687). And while the classic art-historical texts on this period have tended to erase these “anachronistic” or “retardataire” buildings, concentrating instead on what Nikolaus Pevsner once called “the historically leading works,” in fact Gothic architecture remained large in the imagination of contemporaries. Even the neoclassical architects of the eighteenth century worried over how to achieve a more Gothic sense of lightness and space, as Robin Middleton and Wolfgang Herrmann showed in the early 1960s. Yet, postmedieval Gothic has remained largely off the academic radar screen. It is therefore with great excitement that one learns of Hélène Rousteau-Chambon’s new study, a revised version of her 1997 doctoral dissertation and the first book-length consideration of this rich topic.

The ambitious volume focuses on ecclesiastical buildings between the end of the Wars of Religion (1596) and the beginning of the French Revolution (1789). It looks only at urban milieux, where Gothic is harder to dismiss as mere provincialism. It has three main goals: to document the scope as well as the “physiognomies” of the Gothic architecture from these years; to survey contemporary attitudes toward Gothic; and to investigate why Gothic was chosen by certain ecclesiastical patrons. It is a superb program, one whose moment has surely come. Rousteau-Chambon’s main thesis, which is almost certainly correct, is that Gothic was employed during this period not out of ignorance or inertia or for reasons of economy, as is commonly supposed, but because its religious associations and suggestion of continuity with the past responded to the needs of the Church following the Wars of Religion. The second component of her book concerns the implications of her research for the stylistic category “Gothic”—a rather quaint concern unlikely to spark much interest beyond those outposts where “history of style” paradigms still hold sway. The strength of Rousteau-Chambon’s investigation lies in her ability in examining construction histories, unearthing patronage circumstances, and studying the fabrics of the large number of buildings she surveys. Through this work she amasses a plausible circumstantial case for her argument. But in seeking, quite appropriately, to dig a little deeper, she is led into areas of cultural history, social history, and the history of ideas, where she seems out of her depth.

The most rewarding and least problematic parts of the book are her case studies of individual churches, usefully reprised in a sixty-seven-page gazetteer at the end of the text, which contains notices on some sixty-three churches. These provide historical analysis and description (longer for previously unstudied buildings, briefer for better-known ones), as well as a short bibliog-