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 Oath of the Orazi, the well-known medieval pilgrim to Rome is given as anonimo Einsiedeln, and the famous Roman censor appears as Appio Claudio Cicco. My personal favorites are Federico Guglielmo IV of Prussia and Gerolamo Napoleon. Place names, particularly in Rome, suffer badly: we are treated to Augusto Imperatore Square, Tiberina Island, Cestia Pyramid, Holitorius Forum, Consentes Di Portico, 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 mistranslations. Disegno and 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 Dioecetian, including S. Maria degli Angeli, which had apparently gone missing; and that the Nymphæum Alexandri (the Trophies of 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.

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Ecclesiastical Architecture

Hélène Rousteau-Chambon
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, and extended in Gothic—including the relatively well known example in Orléans (1601–1829), but also those in Blois (1678–1700), Mende (1599–1620), Pamiens (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 loomed 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-
raphy and list of archival sources. Scholars interested in pursuing the topic further will find this a most convenient starting point. Likewise, her study of the formal characteristics of postmedieval Gothic will interest connoisseurs of medieval Gothic, especially those who know that distinguishing later additions from the medieval fabric is not always as easy as one might think.

The heart of the book concerns the question of why these churches were built in Gothic. First, Rousteau-Chambon lays out the facts: during the period in question, in urban locations uniquely, twenty-six existing Gothic buildings were extended in Gothic, twenty-three destroyed buildings were reconstructed in Gothic, and fifteen were constructed in Gothic ex nihilo. These are then classified in three ways: 1) survival, as when an unfinished or damaged medieval building was completed or repaired following the original design; 2) imitation, as when a medieval building was extended or embellished in a manner closely corresponding with the older parts, but not called for by the original design; or 3) creation, as in the case of completely new Gothic buildings, free reconstructions of destroyed medieval buildings, or when a medieval building was extended, repaired, or embellished in a Gothic that did not correspond with the older parts.

After a brief detour to show that the choice of Gothic cannot be attributed entirely to economy (in a few cases Gothic was quite expensive), the author proposes her explanations. In cases where buildings were extended or completed in Gothic, she suggests that there was a desire to protect the “greater beauty of the church” by preserving its visual homogeneity (161ff.). It was, in other words, a religiously motivated version of the nineteenth-century preference for “unity of style” associated with Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc. There is unquestionably truth in this argument, but the exposition here is summary, and omits any substantive discussion of contemporary debates on the question or of the fact that countless Gothic churches were redecorated or extended in the classical style during these years.

More substantial are Rousteau-Chambon’s other arguments, which hinge on the idea that Gothic was seen as the most ancient and therefore appropriate manner for ecclesiastical architecture, particularly in the context of the Counter-Reformation and the aftermath of the Wars of Religion. This is hardly a novel claim (similar patterns have been established concerning Early Christian references in contemporary Italian architecture), but whereas usually it is simply asserted, Rousteau-Chambon attempts to marshal evidence for it. Referring to her survey data, she notes that Gothic was especially favored in situations where the ecclesiastical patron was concerned to appeal to the populace, for instance, in Jesuit churches, of which fully one-third in France had Gothic rib vaults, or in areas where religious divisions ran deep and it was a question of repairing or replacing a building attacked during the Wars of Religion. Thus she hypothesizes that in instances of Gothic creation, whether of an entire building or just a part, a belief in the “majesty of the Church” had dictated Gothic form (132ff.). She comments, fascinatingly, that whereas sixteenth-century Gothic was basically a development of Flamboyant forms, after 1596 the preponderance of new Gothic buildings referred to thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Gothic, in other words, to the age of the great cathedrals. She also points out that several new Gothic buildings during this period received a modern—that is, classical—façade, and suggests that these were to have been read as signs of a Church triumphant turned toward the world, through which the worshipper was then to pass to find the Church’s more timeless face on the interior. Finally, she suggests that in the many instances when only a rib vault was constructed, even in ostensibly non-Gothic churches, this feature was to be understood via a sort of metonymy as a “symbol of the Church,” by virtue of its connection to French religious history (147ff.).

These are interesting and very plausible hypotheses, but the mostly circumstantial evidence Rousteau-Chambon provides does not always suggest causality as clearly as she seems to think. A bigger problem, though, is her insensitivity to the conflicts and divisions within the society she is studying. In supporting her hypotheses about the use of Gothic, she points to the importance of tradition in the Tridentine church, the Church’s desire to stress to Protestants its own antiquity, the contemporary concept of bienséance or appropriateness, and the familiar idea that Gothic was popular among the common people. While these ideas and beliefs might explain the decision of a particular (elite) patron or group, they are discussed as though they were representative beliefs or ideas “of the period.” Sections are given titles like “The Point of View of the Architects” (164) or “Stimulating the Collective Memory” (148), but categories such as “architects,” “theologians,” “clergymen,” the “Catholic faithful,” or the “common people” do not, in fact, enclose homogeneous mentalities susceptible to representation by a few emblematic quotes, which is what happens here.

The danger of this approach is most apparent in the opening chapter, revealingly titled “The Perception of Gothic.” One might well ask: “Whose perception?” The chapter consists mainly of quotes from assorted theorists and architects that put Gothic in a good light, with little hint of how these observations relate to their author’s larger work. We learn, for instance, that François Blondel, the first director of the Académie Royale d’Architecture, “appreciated the beauties of Gothic” (26), a claim that remains unsupported, when in fact he was its most merciless enemy, a man who described Gothic as a nefarious conspiracy of ignorant masons who out of self-interest had hijacked French architecture and drowned it in a mire of barbarous and irrational practices. Those who liked Gothic, he once wrote, were like those alien peoples who “through becoming accustomed to
bizarre sounds have come to find them agreeable, even though there is nothing about them capable of giving pleasure." One could argue that the very mission of the Académie in Blondel’s mind was to exterminate Gothic and replace it with a noble, rational classicism. The académicien Jean-François Felibien is likewise presented as an early champion of Gothic because he wrote the first systematic history of it (36ff.); yet his very purpose in doing so (as his subsequent "Dissertation touchant l'architecture antique et l'architecture gothique" made clear) was to move beyond idealist condemnations of Gothic like Blondel’s in favor of a more convincing historical demonstration of its inferiority.

At times, Roustau-Chambon’s insensitivity to conflict leads her into outright error. She asserts, for example, that the important academic architect Robert de Cotte composed happily in either Gothic or classical, depending on the situation (86ff.). The basis for this claim is a series of Gothic project drawings for Orléans Cathedral and Notre-Dame de Bonne-Nouvelle in Orléans, where de Cotte served as royal advisor and nominal overseer. In fact, as Georges Chenesseau, Robin Middleton, Robert Neuman, and others have indicated, these designs were the work of de Cotte’s local site architect, Guillaume Hénault, who unlike de Cotte was something of a Gothic enthusiast. Indeed, what happened at Orléans Cathedral is that all the local parties wanted the church to be Gothic, while academicians like de Cotte tried repeatedly, though in vain, to impose classical designs.

These sorts of conflicts cannot be erased if one wants to understand what was at stake in the use of Gothic during the period under discussion. This was an architecture whose very name was a synonym for barbarism among the metropolitan and academic elites, yet which people continued to love and to use. Any appraisal of Gothic during these years, or of the statements about it by theoreticians, architects, churchmen, or amateurs, should take account of this basic reality. Roustau-Chambon has done a real service in highlighting the extent and nature of postmedieval Gothic architecture, and in fleshing out several very interesting hypotheses. But for those anticipating a consideration of this architecture in its fuller cultural and ideological contexts, the wait continues.

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Note

Bruno Adorni, editor
La chiesa a pianta centrale. Tempio cívico del Rinascimento

The centrally planned church in the Renaissance has been the subject of far more literature than churches of the Latin-cross type. This interest reflects the fascination of architects of the period with the type and the large number of examples they built, and has been continued in celebrated modern scholarly articles written by Wolfgang Lorz, Staale Sinding-Larsen, and Rudolf Wittkower. The present volume is composed of two sections: a series of general essays, of varying usefulness, followed by studies of single churches. In the first section, Paul Davies offers observations on a number of little-known churches—including Madonna del Sorbo, Formello; Madonna della Quercia, Viterbo; S. Maria delle Lacrime, Trevi; and S. Rocco, Bagnaia—in which the need to maintain the original location of the sacred image governed the shape and orientation of the church around it. Amedeo Belluzzi surveys the references by architects to centralized churches, reminding us that such plans had the blessing of Vitruvius and Christian theologians such as Durandus and Sicardus, and were linked to prestigious precursors like the Anastasis Rotunda in Jerusalem, the Pantheon in Rome, and others of smaller scale.

Most Renaissance architects enthused over the form of the centrally planned church. Michelangelo’s new St. Peter’s Basilica provided a much-copied model for the Greek-cross type on a large scale, although after prolonged and fierce arguments a nave was added. Extending to small-scale churches, the liturgical problems created by the centralized scheme arose from the necessity for a sacristy, as Bruno Adorni discusses in his treatment of S. Maria della Steccata in Parma, as well as from the location of the main altar and its relationship to minor altars. Francesco di Giorgio, who presented the most incisive discussion of the subject, cited Augustine (probably De civitate dei, 10: 4–5) in declaring that placing the altar in the center of the church was a pagan practice. Others objected that it was typical of antique mausolea and preferred the Latin cross because of its liturgical convenience, its consonance with an ever-increasing Catholic literature on the cross as a symbol, and its correspondence with the basilicas of Constantine at the beginning of institutionalized Christianity.

In the studies devoted to individual churches, the emphasis is on the events and byzantine machinations leading from an initial miracle to the construction of the church, rather than on formal analysis of the architecture or the church’s status as a civic temple. Fabrizio Tonelli presents a load of new material on S. Maria della Ghiaia at Reggio Emilia, designed by Alessandro Balbo to commemorate the miracle of a deaf mute who was cured in 1596, following more than a century of squabbles between laymen, clergy, and the diocese for control over the building. Similarly, Elizabetta Susini brings new information to the consideration of the background and patronage of S. Maria Incoronata at Lodi, designed initially by Giovanni Battagio in 1488 on the site of a brothel.

Discussion of some of the most spectacular central-plan churches of the age reappears within the context of these case studies. Riccardo Pacciani analyzes S. Maria della Pietà at Bibbona, exploring the probable role of Francesco di