Anonimo halfway, unusually incomprehensible, the medieval pilgrim to Rome is given as Anonimo Einsiedeln, and the famous Roman censor appears as 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 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 mis-translations. Disegno and edito are translated innovently 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 Diocletian, including S. Maria degli Angeli, which had apparently gone missing; and that the Nymphaeum 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.

**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 Hédiot 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 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: as 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 its own antiquity, the contemporary concept of biamance 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 ideals “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,” “clergy,” 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 who 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 academi-
cian Jean-François Félibien 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
demnations 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 draw-
ings 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 indi-
cated, these designs were the work of de Cotte’s local site architect, Guillaume
Hénault, who unlike de Cotte was some-
thing 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 syn-
onym for barbarism among the metro-
politan 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 theo-
reticians, architects, churchmen, or ama-
teurs, 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 ide-
ological contexts, the wait continues.

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Note
1. François Blondel, Cours d’architecture, vol. 1 (Paris,
1675–83), 170.

Bruno Adorni, editor
La chiesa a pianta centrale. Tempio
cívico del Rinascimento
Milan: Electa, 2002, 258 pp., b/w illus. €45
(paper), ISBN 88-436-9678-0

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 exam-
pies they built, and has been continued in
celebrated modern scholarly articles writ-
ten by Wolfgang Lorz, Staale Sinding-
Larsen, and Rudolf Wittkower. The
present volume is composed of two sec-
tions: a series of general essays, of vary-
ing 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
Lacrini, 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 Christ-
ian theologians such as Durandus and
Sicardus, and were linked to prestigious
precedents 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 cen-
tralized scheme arose from the necessity
for a sacrament, as Bruno Adorni
discusses in his treatment of S. Maria della
Stuccata in Parma, as well as from the loca-
tion of the main altar and its relationship
to minor altars. Francesco di Giorgio,
who presented the most incisive dis-
sussion 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 prac-
tice. Others objected that it was typical of
antique mausolea and preferred the
Latin cross because of its liturgical con-
venience, its consonance with an ever-
increasing Catholic literature on the
cross as a symbol, and its correspon-
dence 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 construc-
tion of the church, rather than on formal
analysis of the architecture or the church’s status as a civic temple. Fabrizio
Tonelli presents a lode 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 Susani brings new informa-
tion to the consideration of the back-
ground 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, explor-
ing the probable role of Francesco di