Compared to the highly focused, but not always easily transparent, positions of Mitrovic and Kanerva, the exhibition catalog La Roma di Leon Battista, with its subtitle Umanisti, architetti e artisti all sopporta dell’antico nella città del Quattrocento, at first glance seems to be a grab bag of odds and ends. However, with a few exceptions, the essays are quite excellent, even if Alberti serves as little more than a convenient prop for the underlying issue of the exhibition: the cultural struggle in Rome in the quattrocento as artists, patrons, and intellectuals began to accommodate themselves not only to new representational possibilities in the arts, but also to the new ideological claims of the papacy and the continued and unsettled novelty of the antique. The potential to critically frame these issues—and thus to bring life into the subject matter of quattrocento Rome—is lost somewhat with so many authors pointing in different directions, but the tone is set by Arnold Nesselrath who shows that, despite the famous discovery of perspective and the quattrocento architect’s familiarity with its potential, perspective was only slowly integrated into an architectural practice that favored orthogonal projection. In fact, Nesselrath seems to argue that the perfecting of the medieval conventions of orthogonal projection and its synthesis with perspective was just as important to the history of Renaissance representation as the discovery of perspective itself.

The theme of the fluidity of quattrocento humanism in Rome is carried forward by Arnaldo Bruschi, who explores the design history of Palazzo Venezia and its associated church of San Marco, buildings important to the history of architecture as the first major humanist-inspired designs and the first major architectural commission in Rome in several centuries. Scholars long ago suggested that Alberti had a hand in the design, but Bruschi goes as far as one can with the limited documents to probe Alberti’s role as a type of consultant to the project, noting certain correspondences between statements in De re aedificatoria and the layout of the building and the articulation of its detailing. In select cases, Alberti might have provided drawings, but in other cases, he might have corrected someone else’s plans. The question of authorship that Bruschi pursues is significant not because Bruschi wants to prove an attribution to Alberti, but because he aims to give insight into humanism’s transition—and translation—from an intellectual and ideological pursuit into the realm of architectural form.

Arturo Calzona looks with fresh eyes at the situation in Mantua, where Alberti arrived in 1459 to design the Basilica of San Andrea; and Christoph Frommel analyzes again the early design history and problems of attribution of the new St. Peter’s. On a more conceptual note, Massimo Miglio discusses the political situation—and the political imaginary—in quattrocento Rome, whereas Paolo Fancelli discusses the crisis of meaning that the Roman ruins posed, tracing the tension in attitudes toward the spolia between admiring their antiquity and seeing them as models for contemporary design.

While the quattrocento certainly had its great artists and patrons, it is clear from this book that there was a vibrant layer of secondary and tertiary artists whose life and work, still relatively underappreciated, are enmeshed in the life and work of the more famous. The result is not a convenient story line, but it goes to the credit of the exhibition organizers that they held their ground. The title of the exhibition could easily have been “The Rome of Jacopo di Cristoforo da Pietrasanta, Bernardo Rossellino, Giuliano da Sangallo, Benozzo Gozzoli, Jacopo Bellini, Giannozzo Manetti, and others, including Leon Battista Alberti.” Such a title would not have attracted much of an audience, and probably not much in the way of funding either, but it would have provided a clearer image of what to expect.

The three books discussed are not incompatible. With Mitrovic’s book, we imagine Alberti pacing back and forth in his studio writing and rewriting certain key sentences. With the exhibition on Rome, we can immerse ourselves in the complex social and cultural world of quattrocento Rome with its cadres of masons, architects, painters, and carpenters intermingling with humanists and bishops. With Kanerva, we get a sense of the intellectual issues that these very same architects, carpenters, and patrons—the writers among them at least—were debating. Taken together these books make an important contribution to quattrocento studies and to a better understanding of the foundations of the modern world.

MARK JARZOMBEK
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Notes
1. There were other lineages, but a particularly dominant one ended with Joan Kelly, Leon Battista Alberti: Universal Man of the Early Renaissance (Chicago, 1969).

Gülrü Necipoğlu
The Age of Sinan: Architectural Culture in the Ottoman Empire

Sinan is without doubt the most famous architect of the Islamic world and probably the only one mentioned by name in any survey class on Islamic art. He is responsible for establishing the classical Ottoman architectural style and for the magnificent skylines of Istanbul and other cities. Even Istanbul’s splendid mosques, such as its popular tourist attraction the Blue Mosque of Sultan Ahmed I, built by a later architect, adheres closely to the standards established by Sinan. While a good deal has been written on Sinan, much of it treating him as a misunderstood genius, in general only the formal qualities of his architectural evolution are addressed. By contrast, Gülrü Necipoğlu deals with Sinan’s work in a far more contextualized manner. This weighty volume will long serve as the definitive work on this remarkable architect and the cultural milieu of sixteenth-century Ottoman society.

Necipoğlu’s arguments are rein-
forced by the splendid photographs of Rehu Gunay and high-quality architectural plans drawn by Arben N. Arapi.

Necipoğlu opens her book with an introduction entitled “Contextualizing Sinan” that provides the reader with an overview of previous scholarly work on Sinan and the approach of the subsequent chapters of the book will take. Going beyond the notion of Sinan as a creative genius, Necipoğlu promises a study that contextualizes Sinan in light of the legacy he consciously created for himself, the obligations of holding the office of chief architect for the Ottoman state, the needs of his patrons, and the overall understanding of architecture in sixteenth-century Turkey. Throughout this volume, Necipoğlu argues convincingly that unwritten but well-understood codes of decorum regulated Sinan’s architectural production of Friday mosques, which are the focus of her study.

The book is divided into three main sections, with multiple chapters in each section. Part one concerns architectural patronage in the Ottoman classical period, covering Sinan’s career during the reign of three sultans: Suleyman I, also commonly known as Suleyman the Great (reigned 1520–66), Salim II (reigned 1566–74), and Murad III (reigned 1547–95). Chapter one of the three in this first section introduces Ottoman rule and the Sultans’ adherence to the principles of orthodox Sunni Islam as a major factor in shaping the state. The construction of a large number of mosques reflected this ideology and enhanced the status of the sultan, who was supported by an enormous standing army and a carefully regulated series of administrators. Those holding the highest ranks were often captured slaves or former Christians who, as children, were given to the Ottoman court as part of a levy and then converted to Islam. Raised and trained in the court, the best among them went on to hold high offices, some even serving as prime ministers and becoming the Sultans’ sons-in-law. It is commonly believed that these former Christians completely severed all ties with their birth families and homeland, but Necipoğlu gives strong evidence that this is not necessarily true. The Ottomans were renowned for their thorough record-keeping, making it possible for families to be traced. Sinan’s will, for example, provided for members of his birth family, including the construction of water fountains (a charitable act) for their welfare, as we learn later in the text.

Chapter two regards the legalities in religious practice that had an impact on the overall plans of mosques and/or their locations. While not law, it was long standing practice in Ottoman Turkey and elsewhere in the Islamic world that booty from victorious military campaigns funded new mosques built by the ruling monarch, a tradition that was maintained for all mosques of this category built by Sinan. These mosques stood as concrete symbols of triumph and, as they often contained the Sultan’s tomb, dotted the skyline of Istanbul as “dynastic victory memorials” (66).

In chapter three, Necipoğlu provides a convincing and salient discussion of links between the architectural development of contemporary Rome and Istanbul. The Ottomans were aware of Italian architectural treatises, had contact with major architects such as Leonardo da Vinci, and both cities had a common heritage with the Hagia Sophia. But Necipoğlu posits that the common development in Rome and Istanbul of domed central-plan sanctuaries may have been more than coincidence, for the patrons of each city were interested in revitalizing their own city as a new Rome. Europeans in Istanbul—scholars and architects invited by the court—returned home with drawings and written accounts of the city’s architecture. This chapter ends with a discussion of unwritten codes of decorum which tacitly governed the visual, from clothing to houses to mosques, in Ottoman society. Not surprisingly, these codes reflected the hierarchical nature of a culture where class and rank were of extreme significance. Thus only a sultan’s mosque could have multiple minarets and a courtyard. Each building commissioned by a person of lower rank and class had to be appropriately less showy and smaller in scale.

Part two, divided into two chapters, focuses on Sinan as chief architect in his roles as an individual and as part of an institution. While chapter five deals with rich documentary evidence regarding architectural practice and the construction industry, chapter four analyzes the five versions of Sinan’s autobiography that the master architect dictated to Mustafa Sai, a poet-painter loyal to Sinan. Here Necipoğlu convincingly argues that Sinan was aware of his buildings’ importance and wrote in the same vein as his Italian contemporaries to shape his legacy. Sinan was a pious man with a very keen sense of his own abilities. His autobiography shows that he studied past architectural traditions, especially Roman ones, to create his own buildings. The success of his autobiographical portrayal is evident, as the author argues, since until now his narrative has been accepted literally, not read critically.

The bulk of the text belongs to part three, which is divided into ten chapters each concerning the patronage of various elite and social groups who commissioned Sinan to design Friday mosques. Discussing the patronage of the highest ranking sultans down to tax-paying merchants and tradesmen, Necipoğlu examines their motives and the appearance of the final project in terms of each individual’s position and in relation to the specific time frame of building. Although Sinan served three Sultans for nearly a century, the political and social circumstances changed considerably; this affected architectural meaning and the mosques’ overall symbolism to the patrons and the larger public, an issue Necipoğlu probes as well. Of particular interest are her sections on Friday mosques built by queens, meaning wives and mothers of sultans, and on princesses who often co-commissioned mosques with their very high-ranking husbands. A close reading of these women, who were sometimes considered invisible while in fact they often yielded considerable power, and of their mosques reveals the female patrons’ aspirations and power struggles with other women and men of the court. Hurram Sultan, the wife of
Suleyman and the first woman to be legally married to an Ottoman sultan, established new precedence by building her mosque not in some provincial city but in the heart of Istanbul. Subsequent wives, queen mothers, and princesses followed suit by building often increasingly large structures in important locales. The text of the chapters in part three is rich and nuanced, arguing that patrons, no matter their status, constantly pushed the boundaries of the codes of decorum, both with and without success.

Sinan’s legacy comprises the epilogue. The new patron types, royal women and the powerful court eunuchs, were especially close to the Sultan and transcended kings and ministers in the patronage of mosques well into the eighteenth century. Since Istanbul by the time of Sinan’s death was glutted with Friday mosques, legal considerations made the construction of many more a challenge. Thus huge Friday mosque complexes were replaced by the construction of smaller institutions serving educational and charitable needs. Those few Friday mosques that were built faced considerable opposition, as Ncicpo˘glu relates. Even in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when Europeanizing elements became popular, Sinan’s legacy was still apparent as it is in every newly constructed mosque one sees when driving across Turkey, whether it be the modest mosque of a small village or the gargantuan Sabanci mosque of Adana.

Given the length of the text and the number of monuments discussed, the four appendices are most helpful in reminding the reader of the chronology of Sinan’s output as well as facts such as patrons’ names, buildings’ locations, dates, and costs in relation to other buildings. The volume is a magnum opus concerning sixteenth-century Ottoman Turkey. Necipo˘glu has produced a work encyclopedic in scope, providing tremendous new and illuminating insight on Sinan and his milieu. Due to vast surviving documentation in the Turkish archives, Ncicpo˘glu is able to treat Ottoman architecture in a manner not possible for that of the other two contemporaneous Muslim houses, the Mughals of India and the Safavids of Iran. Nonetheless, recent excellent work being done on the Mughals and Safavids makes future comparative work a reality.1

Catherine Asher
University of Minnesota

Note

D. Medina Lasansky
The Renaissance Perfected: Architecture, Spectacle, and Tourism in Fascist Italy

One fine spring day in 1990, I received a postcard from my parents in Orlando, Florida. On the obverse of an image of the Italian Pavilion at Epcot Center, they enthusiastically reported that it was like being back in Venice at St. Mark’s Square! This gave me considerable pause. Having lived, worked, and traveled in Italy for many years, surely they could not confuse these mini-scaled, fiberglass tourist traps with the real McCoy. Yet, as D. Medina Lasansky illustrates in remarkable detail, the real McCoy is not always that easy to discover, for Walt Disney was not the first to configure faked versions of past Italian cityscapes. Centering her study on the reconstructions of Tuscan cities during the Fascist era, Lasansky shows both how limited most studies of building in that era have been and how recently fabricated are many of today’s premier tourist sites in the region.

The paradigms within which scholars studied Italian architecture during the Fascist period remained fundamentally unchanged through the early 1990s: a “good” modernist architecture struggled to hold its own against a “bad” Fascist one but, by the mid-1930s, had yielded to heavily Nazi-inspired designs. With attention focused exclusively on new buildings or town plans, heroes and devils, most studies slogged through this turf offering evermore refined nuances on the same tired themes. I found these approaches tedious almost before I started researching Fascism, and time has not rendered them any more attractive, not least because they offer little on the most interesting questions about architecture and politics. Fresh approaches to an era’s building enterprises demand perspectives often most available to the outsider, and in this case, it has fallen mostly to U.S.-trained scholars to open new ways of approaching the phenomenon of modernism, architecture, and Fascism. Prompted by groundbreaking work from other disciplines, by studies from architectural historians such as Henry Millon, and by Gwendolyn Wright and Sibel Bozdogan writing about other cultures and their complicated engagements with modernism, historians of the Fascist period since the early 1990s have begun to address a wide range of infinitely more interesting and challenging issues.1

Today led by Brian McLaren in the United States and setting out from earlier work by Marida Talamona and Giuliano Gresleri in Italy, one group has focused on building outside of Italy, such as in the North African colonies and the Dodecanese, while another has shifted attention to engagement with historic preservation within Italy and, springing in part from William MacDonald’s pioneering study, the relationship of Fascism with the peninsula’s architectural traditions.2 Lasansky’s The Renaissance Perfected falls within the second category, and like McLaren (with whom she edited a book on architecture and tourism), she convincingly demonstrates that the changes in Italian cities enacted during the twenty years of Fascist dominance can be explained in large part through the intersecting axes of tourism, tradition, spectacle, politics, and the tensions of modernism played out most compellingly at the local level.

How this took shape will make fasci-