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 Necipoğlu 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. Necipoğlu 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, Necipoğlu is able to treat Ottoman architecture in a manner not possible for that of the other two contemporary 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

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Note
1. See Ebba Koch, Mughal Art and Imperial ideology (New Delhi, 2001); Susan Bahari, Kathryn Babayan, Ina B. McCabe, and Massumeh Farhad, Slaves of the Shah: New Elites of Safavid Iran (London and New York, 2004); Catherine Asher and Cynthia Talbot, India Before Europe (Cambridge, England, 2006).

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 tourism3), 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-
nating reading for anyone interested in Italy, but it ought to be required for specialists of the Renaissance and the modern era. Lasansky’s thorough and nuanced study illustrates how political and cultural forces and figures converged to produce newly medieval or Renaissance urban topographies. Even before MacDonald, the parallels Mussolini constructed between Fascism and Roman antiquity were well known, but the regime’s equally powerful fascination with late medieval and early modern-era cities and architecture largely escaped attention. While scholars recognize the ways our perception of the Renaissance was conditioned by nineteenth-century historicism, the same is not true for how this understanding was mediated in the built environment under Fascism. This is where Lasansky makes her greatest contribution. She helps shift attention from modern architecture to a broader perspective encompassing buildings and culture in general. Studying a diverse body of materials (including documentary films, tourist literature, old postcards, and government documents), Lasansky illuminates the consolidation of Tuscan cities such as Florence, Arezzo, Siena, and San Gimignano into paradigms—or should we say parodies?—of early modern architecture. In the heat of historical revival movements (often led by British expatriates such as Vernon Lee), entire neighborhoods were refashioned as “authentically” medieval or Renaissance. Her most compelling example is Arezzo, a city deprived of its most important medieval structures by new Medici overlords in the late sixteenth century. By the third decade of the twentieth century, civic leaders had decided to revamp and remodel everything from the old Palazzo dei Priori to a house putatively occupied by Petrarch, and in the absence of documentary or pictorial evidence, the revamping adopted a generic vision of what late medieval architecture might have looked like. Along with the spruced-up buildings came reconfigured medieval or Renaissance festivals, such as Florence’s calcio, Arezzo’s giusta del Saraceno, and even the much-touted palio in Siena. While Lasansky’s study illustrates the transformation of Tuscan towns and spectacles, strikingly similar enterprises occurred in Treviso, Trento, Ferrara, and Asti. 9

As Lasansky remarks, many such reconstructions long preceded the advent of Fascism (Palazzo della Ragione, Ferrara, 1834), and as in the case of the chess game at Marostica, others concluded well after its fall. The impulse for these ambitious local enterprises sprang as much from a desire to preserve and maintain an imagined historic landscape as it did from a plan to capture a larger share of the growing tourist trade. The resulting urban settings and buildings are not authentic reconstructions, but as the author argues, they are in some sense authentic recreations of a vaguely medieval ambiance.

The extensive program during the Fascist era for the restoration of historic city centers to idealized images invites some interesting reflections. While manifestly fake (though rarely presented as such by the relevant cities), ownership rights on historical deceptions cannot be pinned exclusively on Fascism; historic preservation is to some degree always a fictional reconstruction laden with biases, some more noxious than others. The interesting questions concern choices—what is erased and why. 10

Likewise, as Lasansky notes, the political enterprises of the Fascist state entailed engaging people of all classes and educational backgrounds, enlightening them about the country’s traditions and history, and triggering pride not only in their hometowns but also in the new Italian nation—something the prewar governments had disdained. As Lasansky remarks, the regime transformed the celebration of medieval and Renaissance artifacts from a private, foreign, and elite preoccupation to one that was domestic, public, and democratic. This hardly fits with the image of Fascism we have inherited, yet it is quite nonlinear. Nonetheless, Lasansky indictes Fascist cultural figures for speaking with the rhetoric of Fascism and for exploiting and encouraging local initiatives for its own totalitarian and nationalistic purposes. The involvement of local and national Fascist figures, she argues, infused the enterprises with a politicizing agenda that by implication was less present in the earlier and later periods. From a somewhat broader perspective, that much of this is quite consistent with the processes of shaping a new nation-state renders these actions no more sinister than those of any other nation, including the United States. Any governmental support for culture inevitably politicizes it.

Finally, Lasansky shares with other historians (such as Victoria De Grazia and Libero Andreotti) considerable skepticism about the effectiveness of the Fascist program of using festivals, exhibitions, restored town halls, landscape, and tourist experiences to shape a collective Italian identity. All of the enterprises drew upon deep traditions, in part maintaining them and in part transforming them. Of even greater interest to me is the powerful appeal that the specifically Italian adventures in collective identity have on cultures as diverse as the Anglo-American, Japanese, and Scandinavian, to name but a few. What is the source of the enormous appeal of this culture, its artifacts, its fabricated antique cityscapes, its newly revived festivals? We would be looking at none of these things today if hordes of foreigners were not descending on Italy every year to bask in the aura of these spaces, places, buildings, and events. Maybe the Fascists got one thing right after all.

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Notes
The Storia dell’architettura italiana, the ambitious series published by Electa, covers the history of the past six centuries of Italian architecture in volumes that are chronologically defined, one or two per century. Four volumes have already been reviewed in JSAH. For each volume, an editor has devised a structure and assembled a team of scholars to write individual essays. Il Seicento, edited by Aurora Scotti Tosini, shares the handsome format of its companion volumes—lavishly illustrated with both black-and-white and color photographs—as well as shortcomings that other reviewers have mentioned—no figure numbers and therefore no references from text to illustrations, and footnote reference numbers smaller than any that my ophthalmologist has ever asked me to read. It also presents the problem, addressed by each of the previous reviewers, of how to write a history of a particular segment of Italian architecture at this point in the life of our discipline.

Scotti Tosini’s introduction anticipates many issues a reviewer might address. The chronological definition, chosen by the editor of the series, presupposes a certain “concrete materiality and formal specificity” (9). As with other volumes in the series, Il Seicento inevitably must be seen against the magisterial volumes in the Pelican History of Art, and for Scotti Tosini, this means a direct comparison with Rudolf Wittkower’s Art and Architecture in Italy 1600–1750 (1958). She lays out the early (largely German) historiography, from the pioneering constructs of GURLITZ, Wolflin, and others through interwar documentary collections to a “vertiginous increase” of studies between 1940 and 1960 that includes monographs on artists and corpora of drawings by an international array of scholars (10). Throughout, investigators dealt with the definition, development, and evaluation of “baroque” as a style but also as a synonym for the seventeenth century. Wittkower’s synthesis, which included painting and sculpture as well as architecture, attempted to provide a coherent stylistic narrative that could be discerned in the works of the great protagonists (Bermini, Borromini, Pietro da Cortona, and Guarini) and lesser artists throughout the Italian peninsula, though with variations owed in part to an organic growth through early, high, and late phases, and in part to modifying currents. His systematization became the basis for many in-depth regional and monographic studies and then for an amplification of methodologies and themes, all noted by Scotti Tosini. In 1998, in L’architettura del Seicento, Daniela del Pesco presented a work of synthesis intended not to replace but to stand alongside Wittkower. Less interested in a debate about the baroque, she divided her book along political-geographical lines (with almost a third devoted to Rome and the papal territories) and emphasized the variety of tendencies at the opening of the seicento, the many kinds of persons involved in the production of architecture, and the richness of architectural solutions throughout the century.

Scotti Tosini sees her own task as both simpler, because she can take del Pesco’s analysis as a model, and more complex, because the division of the project among many authors means that it is difficult to maintain a coherent general argument. She has recruited twenty-eight authors—many of them acknowledged authorities in their fields and others at earlier stages of their careers—for the thirty-one independent essays, ranging from six to forty-six pages in length. Her description of the structure and content of the essays seems to be a combination of a grand design and a rationalization of the result.

A quick glance at “Printed Sources” and the bibliography reveals the difficulty of writing a history of seventeenth-century Italian architecture following the past half century of vigorous and far-reaching scholarship. What form might that history take, and what readers might come to Storia dell’architettura italiana to discover it? Surely Il Seicento is not a reference book or a textbook, nor is it the place to find the most recent research in the field or comprehensive treatments of individual architects or buildings. Still, the abundant footnotes and documentation point to a scholarly audience, and the heft of the two volumes militates against casual bedtime reading.

If the charge of the editor is to consider the history of Italian architecture in the seicento, one might look for themes that weave through the peninsula and the century, embracing the particular results of earlier (or ongoing) investigations, posing questions and proposing structures for understanding historically the abundance and variety of architectural production. Scotti Tosini does this in