although he did leave an extensive paper trail including voluminous correspondence with Peter himself and an unfinished treatise outlining a new, optical approach to architectural perspective. (Peter bought up Le Blond’s papers and books from his widow after he died, hence they remain in Russian repositories. Similarly, of Le Blond’s earlier work in Paris only two townhouses (bôtels particuliers) survive along with some formal garden traces; but here too there proved to be a paper trail, including a sizable number of engravings after his designs. From this mass of documents left by Le Blond and today found scattered in archives, libraries, and museums in both Russia and Paris, Medvedkova has reconstructed what she considers a minor master of nascent French neoclassicism (a term she avoids, perhaps thinking it too restrictive).

My perspective on Medvedkova’s achievement is that of a general historian of Russia who has used architecture as a primary source for studying larger historical developments. In this light one must truly be grateful for the abundant material she has assembled, both verbal and visual, regarding the crucial transfer from France to Russia of architecture in the European Renaissance tradition—of “modern” versus “medieval” styles and techniques of building. She has demonstrated, really for the first time, that Le Blond was a key player in the creation of the modern Russian built world. My main reservations on this point concern the paucity of Medvedkova’s representation of pre-Petrine or Muscovite architecture—simplistically dismissed as “byzantine” (139)—and her resort to a tenuous semiotic solution to the question of Peter’s motivation (140–42 passim), incongruous surely in the discussion of so concrete a phenomenon as architecture and so hardheaded a ruler as Peter. A much fuller picture—literally and figuratively—of the Muscovite architectural scene is needed to appreciate the shock of rage (256) it engendered would reverberate in the Modern Russian built world.

The publishers of this book appear to be new to the scholarly business, the cause perhaps of a number of flaws in their otherwise beautifully produced volume. There is no proper table of contents, no list of illustrations, no clear listing of the manuscript sources consulted, and the lengthy bibliography is unhelpfully segregated into works in Russian (coming last) and those in Western (primarily French) languages. Transliterations from the Russian—said at one point to follow “la translittération anglo-saxonne” (273), whatever that might be—are garbled.

Notes
3. But Le Blond was not the key player, as might be deduced from Medvedkova’s text; at least as important was the Swiss-Italian architect Domenico Trezzini.
4. For his contribution see the sumptuously illustrated exhibition catalog edited by Manuela Kahn-Rossi et al., Domenico Trezzini e la costruzione di San Pietroburgo (Lugano, 1994).

Susan Weber Soros, editor
James “Athenian” Stuart, 1713–1788: The Rediscovery of Antiquity

In the early 1740s, James Stuart (circa 1713–88), a lowly fan painter of undisguised lineage and limited means, set out on foot from his native London for France and Italy. Some fifteen years later, he returned to England as the most famous archaeologist of his day. The experience, connoisseurship, and prestige that “Athenian” Stuart (as he was now called) had gained in Italy, Greece, and Turkey rendered him a successful designer and well-connected celebrity for the remainder of his days. This voyage and the remarkable personal transformation it engendered would reverberate...
on a much larger scale well into the next two centuries. Through the publication of the Antiquities of Athens, one of the most influential architectural texts of all time, Stuart would exercise a profound and lasting influence on late eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and early twentieth-century neoclassical architecture in England, Western Europe, and beyond.

Apart from David Watkin’s fine but short monograph, Athenian Stuart, Pioneer of the Greek Revival (1982), Stuart has not received due scholarly attention. That is now amply corrected with the publication of this hefty catalog, which accompanied an exhibition of the same title, organized by the Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design, and Culture in New York. With the exhibition closed and the 204 objects and photographs it brought together again dispersed, this carefully edited and beautifully produced catalog transcends the limits of the genre and stands tall as a major, autonomous, and comprehensive work of scholarship.

The catalog contains thirteen lengthy and lavishly illustrated essays by eleven specialists. Two treat Stuart’s life and career while two others paint a detailed picture of the social and cultural contexts in which he operated. Eight chapters deal with Stuart’s artistic production, organized by artistic medium: first architecture (with chapters on Stuart’s London houses, country estates, public commissions, and garden architecture) and then the decorative arts (with chapters addressing Stuart’s sculptural designs, furniture, metalwork, and medals). This emphasis on the decorative arts is in line with the mission of the Bard Graduate Center, the organizer of the exhibition, dedicated as it is to the study of the decorative arts. The remaining chapter functions as an epilogue and deals with the impact of Stuart and his work, mostly in architecture. Following the essays and the exhibition checklist (nearly all its entries are illustrated in the book) are an appendix listing the numerous craftsmen with which Stuart collaborated, a detailed chronology, a lengthy bibliography, and an index.

The book as a whole accomplishes three major goals. First, it contextualizes Stuart’s extraordinary work within the broad cultural context of the Enlightenment, more specifically within the fiery debate regarding the respective merits of Greek and Roman civilization that raged in mid-eighteenth-century Rome. Watkin’s contribution provides an excellent discussion of the debate that was won, ultimately, by the side of Winckelmann’s “mythical Greece.” This victory formed the intellectual cornerstone for the expedition to Greece that Stuart, together with his collaborator Nicholas Revett, undertook, and constituted the basis of Stuart’s successful career as a designer upon his return to England.

Given his humble social background, Stuart by necessity cultivated the connections upon which he depended for his commissions. Kenny Bristol explores the role of the various learned (and not-so-learned) societies to which Stuart belonged, the Society of Dilettanti (originally a drinking club of former Grand Tourists) more than any other, as “patronage circles.” During Stuart’s lifetime these social environments were increasingly viewed as outdated and irrelevant by the younger generation of architects, presenting him with a rapidly changing economic landscape in which to operate.

Second, the book chronicles in great detail Stuart’s life and career. Catherine Arbuthnott depicts Stuart as an autodidactic polymath, whose resourcefulness and acute sense of opportunity can only be described as extraordinary. Frank Salmon’s thorough essay on Stuart’s work as an antiquary and archaeologist provides a keen sense of how Stuart, trained as a painter in London, became a budding archaeologist in Rome. When fragments of the Egyptian obelisk of Psammetichus II (which had been brought to Rome by the Roman emperor Augustus to serve as the needle of his enormous sundial) were discovered in 1748, Stuart was away, probably in Naples. Yet, he involved himself in the subsequent excavation of the fragments, measured and drew the fragments, put them together in scaled drawings, and in 1750 published what is arguably the first scientific monograph on an ancient monument. Based on his archaeological study and the description of the sundial by the ancient Roman author Pliny the Elder, Stuart wrote an accompanying essay explaining how the sundial functioned. He would follow that same successful approach, in which scaled drawings of a monument as it had originally appeared were combined with a discussion of the physical and literary evidence, in the various installments of the Antiquities of Athens.

Third, the book brings together all of the buildings, designs, objects, and drawings that can be attributed to or associated with Stuart. This is done rather exhaustively, as even the inclusion of an empty instrument case later owned by John Soane indicates (checklist no. 34). Stuart emerges as a versatile designer who relied on his standing as an antiquity and archaeologist for his work in architecture and the decorative arts. As a keen opportunist he also tapped eagerly into the fashions of the day, producing designs in styles contrary to his own hard-won “Grecian” sensibilities. These accomplishments in architecture and design are all the more remarkable given the fact that Stuart continued meanwhile to work on the publication of the Antiquities of Athens. As he aged, however, problems with gout and insobriety sadly and increasingly interfered with his artistic production and delayed the publication of the Antiquities of Athens. Only the first of four volumes was published during his lifetime.

In spite of the comprehensive scope of the book, Stuart’s legacy as an archaeologist remains largely unaddressed. As an archaeologist, this reviewer would have liked more discussion of the impact of Stuart and Revett’s work on nineteenth- and twentieth-century developments in classical archaeology. The great British archaeologist and architect Charles Cockerell (born in 1788, the year Stuart died) referred to Stuart constantly and used the Antiquities of Athens as the model for his own work. He contributed to a supplement to the Antiquities...
Anthony Alofsin  
**When Buildings Speak: Architecture as Language in the Habsburg Empire and Its Aftermath, 1867–1933**  

Using language as an interpretive framework, Anthony Alofsin examines the complex architectural history of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire and its successor nation-states, a region usually little known to the Western reader. This book concretizes the extensive scholarship brought together in Alofsin’s ambitious collaborative research project, “A Tense Alliance: Architecture in the Habsburg Lands 1893–1928,” which he conceived and organized. 

During long years of research, Alofsin benefited from the work of numerous eminent scholars in the region, which is reflected in his rich bibliography.

Considering the architecture of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire in terms of language is not a new approach—Ákos Morávanszky and Friedrich Achleitner used it as well—but Alofsin has transformed the idea into a key to understanding modern architecture in this complex region. As he explains in the preface, his use of the concept was not motivated by fashion; rather he has drawn on late twentieth-century debates about architectural history to suggest a way to include buildings usually left outside the canons of modernism (ix). This idea of architecture as a language also allows Alofsin to construct a unified vision for reading the intricate range of expressions of modern architecture employed in the Habsburg Empire as well as to put forward a significant interpretation of it. His approach metaphorically parallels the multitude of languages spoken inside the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, a cultural characteristic that had significant consequences, especially on a political level.

Alofsin’s introduction frames the complex historical and cultural background of the empire, and emphasizes the role of language in it as a tool in the process of national identity formation. As the use of dominant languages “became a powerful weapon and a necessity in political control,” cultural production (including architecture) took an active part in this process (8). By making buildings speak, Alofsin helps them deliver their message in this intricate context of history and culture. He proposes a method of “contextual formalism,” which seeks to “join divergent paths by assuming that social and political forces of architecture are transmitted through its physical form and that the two inseparably create a dialectical realism” (11). This contextual formalism also determined the choice of illustrations; because of their “narrative” capacities, Alofsin favors exterior and interior views and decorative details rather than more “technical” floor plans or sections.

Alofsin discerns five types of architectural languages in his analysis of modern architecture in Central Europe. Each chapter of the book is dedicated to one language, analyzes several examples judged to be exemplary, and discusses the reception of buildings at the time of completion. The first to be considered, the “language of history” serves to express both authority and identity, either imperial or, in this case, its opposite—national identity. Not only did history provide the most coherent and dense narrative framework, but its discourse was also of paramount importance in shaping the political and cultural strategies inside the empire. Alofsin examines the force of this language through three significant examples: the Vienna Rathaus (Friedrich von Schmidt, 1869–83), the Czech National Theater (Josef Zítek, 1868–83), and the Rumbach Street Synagogue in Budapest (Otto Wagner, 1868–72). Built immediately after the 1867 Compromise that shifted the empire into an Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy, these three edifices embody different discourses on identity and power by using different stylistic vocabularies. The neo-Gothic of the Vienna City Hall, the highly allegorical neo-Renaissance of the Czech National Theater, and the use of Moor-