This volume is a collection of papers derived from a 2009 colloquium on Etruscan and early Roman monumentality organized to mark the retirement of Ingrid Edlund-Berry from the University of Texas at Austin. Monumentality was a central theme in both Etruscan and early Roman architecture, and the origins of this commitment to colossal scale, as well as its related decoration, symbolic meanings, and necessary technologies, is a topic that lies at the foundation of the development of later Roman architecture. The subject of monumentality is not purely tectonic in nature; as Bruce Trigger has argued, the universality of monumentalism in the architecture of complex societies can be understood through its enduring reflection of power over materials, specialized skills, and mass labor by patron elites. The most successful contributions to Monumentality in Etruscan and Early Roman Architecture address this relationship between architecture and its social and political structures.

Gretchen E. Meyers sets out the parameters of the volume in an introduction titled “The Experience of Monumentality in Etruscan and Early Roman Architecture.” Since the topics of the essays are quite varied, this introduction outlines a necessary structure and sets forth a coherent theme for the volume. Meyers argues that despite the disparate topics, similarities across chapters can be found in the “means” through which architecture conveyed messages in the Etruscan and early Roman period. Although the essays are arranged chronologically, it is this structure of means—durability, visibility, and commemoration—that the editors use to unify the volume. While clear in its intent, the structure is, on more than one occasion, strained by essays that only secondarily address either monumentality or even architecture.

One of the most valuable contributions of Meyers’s introduction is a clear definition of monumentality. This provides an important foundation for the volume, since the terms monumentality and monumental first appear only in the early modern era. According to ancient texts, the Latin noun monumentum emphasizes not necessarily size or grandiosity, as the modern term implies, but the combination of commemoration, durability, and visibility. Meyers argues that by the late Republic there was a sophisticated and widespread understanding of monumentality and that the specific associations of the term monumentum continued to evolve as a central tenet of architecture into the Imperial period. Despite the usefulness of Meyers’s carefully presented discussion of the meaning(s) of ancient monumentality, a shortfall of the volume overall is that this—or any other—definition is not consistently followed by all of the contributors, some of whom utilize the term monumentality without addressing what it may, or may not, have meant to the ancient viewer.

Thomas and Meyers stress the importance of durability as one of the “consistent experiential qualities” of monumentality (14). In her essay “Straw to Stone, Huts to Houses,” Elizabeth Colantoni touches on this theme in her discussion of the development of domestic architecture from small-scale huts of perishable materials to larger houses built with stone foundations in the seventh and sixth centuries. Employing Naroll’s constant, an often-problematic tool used to estimate population from dwelling floor area, in combination with ethnographic comparisons, Colantoni proposes that groups of early huts should be viewed collectively and not as the individual dwellings of nuclear families, as has been previously argued. In this way, multiple small huts could be understood as parts of a larger unit where familial interaction would take place outside and social arrangements would be reflected in the spatial configuration of the individual huts. This conclusion is bolstered by archaeological evidence that indicates early huts were functionally differentiated. It follows that with the transition to stone architecture these distinct spaces were replaced by rooms around a more “monumental” central courtyard, eventually becoming the spatial forerunner of the atrium in a Roman domus.

Penelope J. E. Davies’s contribution, “On the Introduction of Stone Entablatures in Republican Temples in Rome,” engages ideas of durability and monumentality in a more direct fashion. Davies argues that the replacement of wooden entablatures with stone began earlier than previously suspected (Temple of Victoria on the Palatine, ca. 294 BCE). This transition had a profound effect on temple design, including not only enhanced durability but also narrower intercolumniations and, possibly, the earliest examples of monumental sculpture in Rome. Davies grounds these significant architectural changes in increased competition among members of Rome’s governing elite at the end of the fourth century, which frequently manifested itself in architectural innovations and the intense monumentalization of the built environment. A considerable contribution of Davies’s essay to the volume as a whole is its lucid illustration of varied forms of monumentality; although the Temple of Victoria was itself diminutive, its monumentality stemmed from its materiality.

Visibility and its role in emphasizing the monumentality of architecture, another theme the editors suggest, is first addressed in Nancy A. Winter’s “Monumentalization of the Etruscan Round Moulding in Sixth-Century BCE Central Italy.” Winter documents the appearance and use of the Etruscan round moulding in Tuscan Order temple architecture and terracottas. She posits that following the construction of the Capitoline Temple in Rome, architectural terracottas became more “monumental” and that Etruscan round moldings on raking simas became one of the characteristic features of this monumentalization. Although Winter’s study is very useful and detailed (replete with precise drawings and measurements), one of its shortcomings is that it lacks a clear discussion of what exactly constitutes “monumentality.” Winter uses terms like sizable throughout without addressing the...
The city of Venice is defined by a tenuous pact with the sea. Nature and architecture coexist in a balance unprecedented in urban history. No political, cultural, ecological, or architectural examination of Venice can approach the topic without some consideration of the city’s maritime setting. In recent publications, scholars have explored the rich architectural heritage of Venice through a variety of critical stances, yet none has analyzed the urban morphology and aesthetics of this miraculous “floating” city from the perspective of the aquatic milieu as the physical and metaphorical generator of architectural form. In *Venice from the Water: Architecture and Myth in an Early Modern City*, Daniel Savoy combines scrupulous archival research with extensive voyages through the waterways of Venice to formulate a theory based on a calculated process of water-oriented Venetian urbanism during the medieval and early modern periods.

Despite reference to early modernity in the book’s title, Savoy’s investigation starts in the early thirteenth century, at which time, he proposes, “the Venetians shrewdly recognized potential in their aqueous site for spectacular architectural exhibitionism and then realized that prospect through inventive urban design” (111). He argues that architects and patrons throughout the period under examination sought to perpetuate the “myth of Venice” as a divinely established civic entity through dreamlike architectonic compositions for the express purpose of enchanting and astounding visitors to the island city. Savoy further contends that the Venetian waterways were “integral components of a unified land and aquatic-based spatial network” (4), as important to Venetian civic life as land-based streets and squares. Building on Elisabeth Crouzet-Pavon’s history of the concerted efforts of the Venetians to shape a landmass out of their watery surroundings, Savoy proposes a parallel collaboration among architects, planners, and patrons in developing a water-inspired architectural aesthetic.1 Citing *Dominion of the Eye*, the groundbreaking study on fourteenth-century urbanism in Florence by Marvin Trachtenberg (Savoy’s doctoral adviser), he suggests that a similar process of rational medieval planning occurred on the waterways of Venice.2

Notes


Daniel Savoy

*Venice from the Water: Architecture and Myth in an Early Modern City*

New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2012, 143 pp., 50 color and 140 b/w illus. $65.00, ISBN 9780300167979

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“Monumental Embodiment,” which offers a theoretical approach to the Etruscan temple. Starting from a discussion of the metaphorical “burial” of a temple at the Etruscan site of Poggio Colla, Warden considers various ancient and modern ways in which the body is used as a metaphor for the temple and how the rituals of death are entwined with religious architecture. Directly addressing the topic of monumentality, Warden argues that it relates not only to size but also to symbolism, functionality, and even the historicity of architectural traditions.

Overall, this thought-provoking volume is a valuable contribution to a topic that should continue to receive attention. In some ways, the lack of cohesion in the contributors’ discussions of monumentality serves to emphasize nuances inherent in this concept as well as the challenges of applying a modern term to ancient architecture. As is often necessary in studies of Etruscan and early Roman architecture, many of the authors employ innovative theoretical and methodological strategies (particularly Colantoni and Warden) to address critical absences in the material and literary records. In this way as well, the volume represents an important contribution to Etruscan and Roman architectural history. This is a carefully edited and well-illustrated book. The decision to include an individual bibliography at the end of each chapter is warranted considering the diversity of topics and the freestanding nature of many of the contributions.

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