

Attending to the “architectural everyday”—which aligns closely here with the vernacular—Apotos demonstrates how localized engagements with the built environment entail complex and changing relationships with a long history of cross-regional artistic, intellectual, and cultural exchange. Her second chapter, “The Road to Larabanga: A Short History of Afro-Islamic Architecture,” situates Muslim practices and Larabanga’s built environment within the historical movement of Islamic thought and practice across the African continent. Describing Islam as an adaptive system and elaborating on Labelle Prussin’s seminal research on Afro-Islamic design and space, Apotos presents the advance of Islam as neither the diffusion of knowledge from East to West nor the implantation of foreign structures in African soil, in contrast to many surveys of Islamic art.<sup>1</sup> Rather, she shows how specific environmental and physical realities and socio-political conditions contributed to the adaptation of Islamic systems and the invention of new forms that shaped Afro-Islamic architecture and reverberated across the Muslim world—from the seventh-century Umayyad military campaigns in North Africa to Muslim traders and scholars interacting with the Sahelian empires of Mali, Ghana, and Songhai between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries to communities faced with the violence of colonialism and the slave trade in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Apotos also demonstrates important connections between Islamic and non-Islamic architectural forms and material cultures in Africa. For example, she compares the potent symbolism of the threshold in Afro-Islamic architecture to the piercing of the surfaces of Central African *minkisi* (power figures) to activate their spiritually charged contents, noting that both are instances of transformative opening (12); she also connects pre-Islamic *ksour* (fortified settlements) along trans-Saharan trade routes with the *ribats*, or fortress-like dwellings, of Muslim militias in the Sahel (77). Apotos thus evokes iconic objects in the fields of both African and Islamic art not to determine directions of influence but to paint a picture of the complex interactions of visual and symbolic systems characteristic of the architecture of African Muslim communities such as Larabanga.

The third and fourth chapters investigate these localized strategies in greater detail. As Apotos notes, Larabanga’s built environment is a “palimpsest of histories” revealing a “timeline of transformation and progression, beginning with its formative moment as a site of spiritual revelation in the seventeenth century and leading into its contemporary reality as a heritage destination and tourist attraction” (27). Her study of Islamic architectural form in Larabanga centers on human actors, from *mallams* (Qur’an specialists and spiritual advisers) to individuals engaged in the contemporary tourist industry, whose interventions continuously reanimate the community’s historic structures and resonate with ever-changing physical and social environments and symbolic systems.

Apotos’s skillful interpretation of the multivalent significance of Larabanga’s environment for different actors underscores her extensive ethnographic research, yet the story she presents might have been strengthened by more frequent identification of her interlocutors and incorporation of their own language into her text. At the same time, her careful attention to multiple narratives avoids privileging specific voices and highlights her conviction that “architectural forms, sites, and communities [are] objects and areas capable of multiple identities, functions, and signification” (126).

More broadly, Apotos is concerned with issues relating to critical heritage studies, including debates about who may claim authority over the past and its interpretations. Her nuanced understanding of the complex role that both local and global notions of heritage play in recent transformations of Larabanga’s historical built environment suggests a significant avenue for future research. Alongside Prita Meier’s recent evaluation of how the Swahili coast’s seemingly immobile and unchanging stone architecture “plays a central role in mediating shifting ideas of what it means to be fixed or mobile” in Swahili society, *Architecture, Islam, and Identity in West Africa* encourages us to move beyond notions of temporal and cultural fixity to investigate the role of architecture in negotiating the past and expressing modern identities, in Africa and elsewhere.<sup>2</sup>

ASHLEY MILLER  
*University of Michigan*

## Notes

1. Labelle Prussin, *African Nomadic Architecture: Space, Place, and Gender* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995).
2. Prita Meier, *Swahili Port Cities: The Architecture of Elsewhere* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 3.

Lauren Jacobi

### **The Architecture of Banking in Renaissance Italy: Constructing the Spaces of Money**

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019, 255 pp., 87 color illus. \$100 (cloth), ISBN 9781108483223

In *The Architecture of Banking in Renaissance Italy*, Lauren Jacobi aims to investigate buildings and other urban complexes related to banking activities and coinage in Italy from the thirteenth through the sixteenth centuries, an undoubtedly ambitious undertaking requiring reconciliation of multiple skills and diverse areas of research. The title refers to Italy as a whole, but it quickly emerges in the introduction that the conditions analyzed are mainly those of Florence and Rome (especially the Rome of Florentine businessmen), with occasional reference to Venice, Milan, Genoa, and the European financial centers where Florentine merchant bankers were particularly active (e.g., Bruges).

In the first chapter, “Networked Agglomerations,” the central theme is less architecture than urban planning as linked to the development of banking and credit activities in Florence and Rome. In fact, as Jacobi acknowledges, there was no specific type of building for a bank. The same kinds of spaces—generally rented from ecclesiastical bodies, guilds, or private individuals—could be used by silk merchants, manufacturers of wool cloth, or bankers. Moreover, pure credit institutions did not exist; both large mercantile banking companies and more modest money changers were involved in varied transactions, ranging from loans and currency exchanges to trade in raw materials, manufactured goods, spices, and precious metals. The author’s contribution here is therefore limited to explaining three points: that companies carrying out banking activities tended to concentrate in certain streets and squares according to principles and regulations of a corporate nature

(a characteristic of almost all trades organized by guilds, whether in Florence, Italy writ large, or elsewhere in western Europe); that some firms suspected of usury did not work in open spaces; and that access to the *sanctum sanctorum* of a large merchant bank was not a simple matter, given the need for secrecy that drove such companies.

The second chapter, “The Technology of Money, Architecture, and the Public Good,” shifts to the design of buildings housing mints and to the functioning of mints and the execution of monetary policies. Money and banking are clearly two related realities, yet it is also obvious that if the first pertains to the exercise of public and sovereign authority, the second is often the realm of private companies. The aims and the *modus operandi* of each are different, even if there are points of contact. Jacobi’s observations on the fascination that money and precious metals hold for many are interesting, but the main activity of bankers in this period did not involve cash; rather, it consisted in granting credit through written instruments. Moreover, her insistence on the concept of *bonum commune*—a term now used for any subject related to the development of public institutions in the late medieval period—limits her to but a part of a wider phenomenon: studies of urban wages and small artisans highlight a state of permanent conflict related to continual devaluations of currency induced by economic needs (lowering real wages) and fiscal needs (increasing revenue through more costly minting rights) as expressed by the dominant social classes.

With her third chapter, “Across Economic Geographies: Trade Sites beyond the Peninsula,” Jacobi turns to the world of private enterprise, analyzing the *sui generis* building activities of the Medici banks in Bruges and Milan. International companies like these operated with methods and criteria that differed from those of more regional or localized firms. The author focuses on the commercial diplomacy of the Italian states during the Renaissance, a subject that has recently received considerable scholarly attention.<sup>1</sup> This is followed by a detailed description of the buildings used abroad by the directors of the Medici branches, with emphasis on artistic aspects and visual representation. Europe’s largest mercantile banking company could hardly

have avoided magnifying its presence abroad before a small, demanding clientele with refined tastes, as was the case with the court of the Dukes of Burgundy; further, the Milanese branch functioned as a sort of diplomatic agent to maintain political alliances between Francesco Sforza (the Duke of Milan) and the Medici (de facto lords of Florence).

The fourth chapter, “The Transcendental Economy,” focuses on the phenomenon of the *monti di pietà*: public pawnshops and banks of deposit. Jacobi thus moves away from the economic and political geography of previous chapters, for it was in small and medium towns of the Papal State (especially in Umbria and Romagna) and on the Venetian mainland where these credit institutions were first established. Her discussion of the Franciscan Observants and the late fifteenth-century anti-Semitism conveyed by preachers such as Bernardino da Feltre has little to do with republican Florence or with the Florentine banks operating at the papal curia: the *monte di pietà* in Florence scarcely began to function before the fourth decade of the sixteenth century, when the payment of interest to depositors became the norm and the institution began to provide Florentines with a relatively safe, if not especially profitable, place to invest.

While Jacobi claims originality for her research, she does not appear to be in full command of the recent Italian bibliography on her subject. In fact, she gives little attention to most of the Italian (and other non-English) academic production of the last three to four decades. For example, she fails to cite the 2011 collection *Nati sotto Mercurio*, edited by Donata Battilotti, Gianluca Belli, and Amedeo Belluzzi.<sup>2</sup> Jacobi engages with humanistic disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, and numismatics, but her bibliography is less than fully adequate when it comes to economic and social history. She refers to Richard Goldthwaite’s work on the link between economics and construction, but this remains largely abstract, given that she mentions Goldthwaite’s contributions—in particular *The Building of Renaissance Florence* (1980) and *The Economy of Renaissance Florence* (2009)—only occasionally and does not address them in depth.<sup>3</sup> The problem is further aggravated by Jacobi’s interest in the entrepreneurial dimension of banking, which too often

overshadows her attention to architecture and urbanism. Overall, she seems largely unaware of having entered into densely populated scholarly territory. Such is the case, for instance, when she claims to have demonstrated that Max Weber’s thesis on the combination of Protestantism and capitalism is substantially wrong and that the origins of the modern economic development of Europe can be found in Italy during the late Middle Ages (the continuing adherence of many scholars to Weber’s views notwithstanding): a century of research, publications, historiographical debates, and international conferences is passed over in silence. Despite Jacobi’s good intentions and the potential of her topic, it is unclear—particularly in terms of economic and social history—just where the originality of her work lies.

Finally, the book includes several mistakes that could have been avoided had the author engaged in more dialogue with experts in various relevant fields. There are, for instance, several errors pertaining to double-entry accounting, as in the discussion of matching ledgers to income-expenditure journals (39). It is erroneously asserted here that *scrittura mercantile* (a form of writing peculiar to Tuscan and Northern Italian mercantile society) was also used by notaries, amanuenses, chancellors, and humanists (4). Florentine names are sometimes inaccurately transcribed or distorted, as when the patronymic is transformed into a second name (26, 30, 31, 49–51, and elsewhere). The *mercanzie* are presented as corporate agencies that dealt with commercial information, whereas in reality they were mainly business courts (60). And, in a discussion of the well-known interventions carried out at the loggia of Orsanmichele, the architect and stage designer Bernardo Buontalenti is said to have worked on the Florentine loggia of the Mercato Nuovo (a privileged meeting place for businessmen), creating an archive of notarial deeds, or “*strumenti pubblici rogati da’ Notai*” (improperly translated as “notarized public ordinances”) (86–87). In fact, the Mercato Nuovo contained only copies of the deeds, and then only from the seventeenth century; no such deeds were kept there during the age of Cosimo I.

SERGIO TOGNETTI  
*Università di Cagliari*

## Notes

1. See, for example, Elisabetta Scarton, *Giovanni Lanfredini: Uomo d'affari e diplomatico nell'Italia del Quattrocento* (Florence: Olschki, 2007); Maria Paola Zanoboni, " 'Et che . . . el dicto Pigello sia più prompto ad servire': Pigello Portinari nella vita economica (e politica) milanese quattrocentesca," *Storia economica* 12, nos. 1/2 (2009), 27–107; Federica Veratelli, *À la mode italienne: Commerce du luxe et diplomatie dans les Pays Bas méridionaux, 1477–1530* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Press Universitaires de Septentrion, 2013); Isabella Lazzarini, "I circuiti mercantili della diplomazia italiana nel Quattrocento," in *Il governo dell'economia: Italia e Penisola Iberica nel basso Medioevo*, ed. Lorenzo Tanzini and Sergio Tognetti (Rome: Viella, 2014), 155–77.
2. Donata Battilotti, Gianluca Belli, and Amedeo Belluzzi, eds., *Nati sotto Mercurio: Le architetture del mercante nel Rinascimento fiorentino* (Florence: Polistampa, 2011).
3. Richard A. Goldthwaite, *The Building of Renaissance Florence: An Economic and Social History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); Richard A. Goldthwaite, *The Economy of Renaissance Florence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

Alexandre Cojannot and Alexandre Gady  
**Dessiner pour bâtir: Le métier  
d'architecte au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle**

Paris: Le Passage–Archives Nationales, 2017,  
352 pp., 286 illus., €39 (paper), ISBN  
9782847423747

From 24 January 2017 through 12 March 2018, the Archives Nationales at the Hôtel de Soubise in Paris staged the exhibition *Dessiner pour bâtir: Le métier d'architecte au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle (Drawing to Build: The Profession of the Architect in the Seventeenth Century)*. The catalogue published to accompany the exhibition explores the social, cultural, and artistic contexts that shaped the evolution of the architectural profession in France during the Grand Siècle and includes reproductions of the two hundred objects—drawings, documents, models, and drawing instruments—displayed in the exhibition, some for the first time. The book features an ingenious system of cross-references that highlights the many relationships among different drawings, indicating where earlier works served as sources of inspiration for later studies. At the same time, the cross-referencing system reveals the numerous familial, professional, and institutional networks that linked architects with their collaborators. An index is also

provided, as well as a valuable bibliography that includes dissertations and forthcoming books.

About half of the objects presented at the exhibition came from the rich holdings of the Archives Nationales, while public and private collections furnished approximately one hundred additional items. Among these were the first “mathematical kits” (sets of architectural drafting instruments), which became common in the middle of the seventeenth century. Often made of precious metals such as silver or gold, these prestigious objects attested to the scientific pretensions of their owners, mirroring the ascendant social status of the architect during the reign of Louis XIV (cat. 28a–d). The exhibition also featured an exceptional series of drawings lent by the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm and restored especially for the exhibition. These works are held in the Nationalmuseum's Tessin Hårleman Collection and Cronstedt Collection, which together contain some fourteen thousand drawings, a third of which are by French artists. These documents are invaluable for clarifying attributions of architectural projects, delineating their evolution, and mapping their construction (cat. 68). The recent digitization of these two collections has made a significant contribution to our knowledge of early modern European architecture by enhancing access to the drawings.

One of the most stimulating aspects of the *Dessiner pour bâtir* catalogue is the holistic approach adopted by the coauthors, who also served as cocurators of the exhibition: Alexandre Cojannot, chief curator at the Archives Nationales, and Alexandre Gady, professor of early modern architectural history at Sorbonne University. Breaking with the tradition of monographic shows such as the 1997 exhibition at the Archives Nationales dedicated to François Mansart (1598–1660), Gady and Cojannot instead emphasize the collaborative nature of the art of building in seventeenth-century France. As they stress in their introduction, this novel interpretive strategy was made possible by the publication since the late 1980s of many monographs on seventeenth-century French architects, including those on Pierre Le Muet (1991), Claude Perrault (1988 and 2000), François Mansart (1998 and 2016), Louis Le Vau (1999 and 2012), Augustin-Charles d'Aviler

(2003), Jacques Lemerrier (2005), Jules Hardouin-Mansart (2008 and 2010), and François Blondel (2010), as well as many recent articles and dissertations (including studies of Pierre Bullet and Étienne Martellange).<sup>1</sup> Gady and Cojannot draw upon this research to determine how architects worked and what they knew. Rather than attempting to elucidate the particulars of specific architects' careers, they explore how the architects and other individuals collaborated and intervened in the construction process. Without discounting the importance to contemporary practice of the king's First Architects—as attested by the spectacular 1644 portrait of Jacques Lemerrier (1595–1654) by Philippe de Champaigne, featured prominently in the exhibition (cat. 1)—the authors bring to light the little-known draftsmen, master masons, and building contractors who also played crucial roles in the building enterprise.

Cojannot and Gady's attention to architectural collaboration also highlights the absence of legal statutes regulating the architectural profession in early modern France. Until the end of the ancien régime, any building professional could claim to be an architect, with no requirements of age, experience, or social affiliation. Indeed, *architect* was an umbrella term that encompassed several types of workers, from those possessing mere graphic or technical skills to the documented experts of the construction industry. Because of the vagueness of who was considered an architect (with the exception of the royal First Architects and the *architectes-experts*, whose status was codified in 1690), the authors examine the contributions of figures with widely disparate skills. Their approach to their study of archival documents and drawings is to emphasize collaborations between individuals of different profiles and expertise. One may regret, however, that Cojannot and Gady did not choose to include in their study the contemporary architectural networks operating at Versailles. Although they claim that Versailles represented “a world in itself, too rich and specific” to be considered in their investigation (13), a true “Versaillaise atmosphere” pervades the entire catalogue, as demonstrated in particular by the drawings of Louis Le Vau and Augustin-Charles d'Aviler. It is difficult to justify the exclusion of Versailles, since any comprehensive examination of