

Bryn Mawr College

Scholarship, Research, and Creative Work at Bryn Mawr College

History of Art Faculty Research and Scholarship

History of Art

2021

Review of St. Paul's outside the Walls: A Roman Basilica, from Antiquity to the Modern Era

Dale Kinney

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.brynmawr.edu/hart_pubs



Part of the [History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology Commons](#)

[Let us know how access to this document benefits you.](#)

This paper is posted at Scholarship, Research, and Creative Work at Bryn Mawr College.
https://repository.brynmawr.edu/hart_pubs/121

For more information, please contact repository@brynmawr.edu.

within the complex. These include Shiva dancing and Shiva catching the river Ganga in his hair. As Kaimal points out, these subjects carried particular resonance for the early Pallava rulers, given that they are associated with the powerful dynastic metaphors of war, triumph, and bringing the divine to earth.

In chapter 3, Kaimal discusses another subject that appears with great frequency at the temple: a four-armed Shiva seated with Uma and their son Skanda, who sits between his parents. Known as Shiva Somaskanda images, these are carved on Rajasimha's *vimāna* and *prākāra*. As the complex developed and more structures were added, such images proliferated, particularly along the east-west axis. Significantly, Shiva Somaskanda images alternate with depictions of a crowned couple, a two-armed male and two-armed female, without a child. The repeated alternation between a divine family group and a childless royal couple prompts Kaimal to explore another pattern at play in the temple: a concern for the continuity of lineage. This concern is echoed not only in the imagery and inscriptions at the site but also in the evolving layout of the complex itself. With the subsequent addition of the queens' shrines at the eastern façade and Mahendra's temple preceding Rajasimha's *vimāna*, the siting of buildings and their patrons within the complex came to mirror the figural sequence of Shiva Somaskanda images. In other words, the son's temple was built between his father's monument and the façade commissioned by select Pallava queens.

In chapters 4 and 5, Kaimal explores what propels visitors to move throughout the complex. Movement is encouraged by many things, such as the positioning of the temple within the larger landscape, the multiple points of entrance, directional cues from the internal dynamics and/or sequencing of sculpted panels, the play of light and shadow (dependent on the time of day and season), and the orientation of inscriptions that read from left to right. A consideration of all these factors leads Kaimal to propose both clockwise and counterclockwise circumambulation—*pradakṣiṇā* and *apradakṣiṇā*—as supported and possible. These observations upend scholarly tendencies to privilege clockwise movement around Hindu temples. In these chapters,

Kaimal convincingly argues that those who experience the Kailasanatha through clockwise movement engage in exoteric practices that highlight desires or prayers for prosperity, knowledge, and continuities of lineage. Counterclockwise movement around Rajasimha's *vimāna* addresses the desire for power, victory, and control, which Kaimal identifies as being necessarily esoteric. Importantly, counterclockwise movement also provides access to Rajasimha's panegyric inscribed on the *vimāna*. This Sanskrit poem narrates his descent from gods to sages to the Pallava line. In this way, text and image transcend time and space—both historic and mythic.

Along with numerous plates, plans, and diagrams illustrating the temple's patterns, pathways, and principles of complementarity, Kaimal includes as appendixes some recent translations of the Kailasanatha's inscriptions. While these are important contributions, it is her treatment of the materiality of the inscriptions that is especially compelling. She notes their locations within the complex relative to the viewer and that they require the viewer to move in order to read them. Cut into granite courses layered between sandstone basement moldings, the inscriptions are both highly visible and extremely durable. They do not function as labels for the sculpted panels above, nor do the images illustrate the texts. Kaimal reads the inscriptions and the images as independent types of visual evidence that, when examined together, open up metaphoric possibilities.

Because her access to the main sanctum (*garbhagrha*) of Rajasimha's *vimāna* was limited, Kaimal is able to address the shrine images only briefly. She describes a large Shiva Somaskanda panel behind the sanctum's Shiva *linga* and the important visual dialogue these manifestations of Shiva once shared with a sculpted panel of a childless royal couple on the western wall of Mahendra's *vimāna* (20–21). How did such prominent visual statements—literally connecting fathers and sons—contribute to the shaping of worship practices at the complex? Our desire to know more about worship within the *garbhagrha* is also acutely felt in chapter 5 when we perform *apradakṣiṇā* along with the king but then unfortunately have to stop at the shrine doors. To remedy this interruption, perhaps Kaimal could have introduced aspects

of *linga* worship in Shaiva Siddhanta devotional contexts in this chapter rather than reserving such discussion for her conclusion. Alternatively, in keeping with the complexities of movement deciphered by Kaimal, perhaps the open-ended journey simply underscores that our experience of this temple—both in the eighth century and today—need not culminate in its interior.

Opening Kailasanatha is the result of years of rigorous fieldwork. By focusing on principles of complementarity, Kaimal convincingly demonstrates how historic kings conceptualized and articulated their deeds and actions with those performed by gods in mythic time. By opening the Kailasanatha to us through time and space, she enables us to better understand Pallava worldviews. In fact, Kaimal's examinations help us to make sense of the complexities of such views as well as the meaningful ways in which they intersect with our own.

LISA N. OWEN
University of North Texas

Nicola Camerlenghi

St. Paul's outside the Walls: A Roman Basilica, from Antiquity to the Modern Era

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, 400 pp., 137 color and 72 b/w illus. \$125 (cloth), ISBN 9781108429511

The Basilica of St. Paul's outside the Walls is probably best known today for its spectacular incineration in 1823. Its picturesque and melancholy ruins were powerfully described by Stendhal (246) and other writers, and they were memorialized in evocative views by leading engravers and painters. To many readers of this journal, those views may be more familiar than the basilica's extant replacement, widely regarded as a cold and lifeless counterfeit.

In his commendable book *St. Paul's outside the Walls*, Nicola Camerlenghi brings the lost basilica back to life through a combination of traditional print-based research and digital visualization. Conceived as a contribution to the burgeoning genre of lives or "biographies" of buildings, the book traces the basilica's evolution through six stages: its imperial founding (386–410), early transformations (410–700), liturgical changes and fortification (700–1050), monastic reform and a golden age (1050–1423), rebirth and

modernization (1423–1655), and new appreciation and restoration (1655–1823). An initial chapter describes the site and the small basilica over the tomb of Saint Paul that preceded the book's subject, and an epilogue covers its demise.

The introduction lays out the importance of the basilica and the author's biographical approach. As built by order of the three emperors reigning in 386, St. Paul's was the last and largest imperial basilica in Rome. It was a magnificent building, but, in Camerlenghi's view, a book devoted only to its original state would be insufficient. His subject is "the enduring Basilica," which he describes at any given point after its construction as an "assemblage of stages" (20). The introduction also addresses the salient methodological problem: all of the stages disappeared in 1823. The architectural history of the Middle Ages is full of such absent protagonists. Scholars and teachers routinely discuss them on the basis of two-dimensional plans and elevations derived from archaeological research and verbal and graphic historical sources. In a significant innovation, Camerlenghi supplements these traditional representations with ten digital models, which in aggregate produce a "virtual basilica" that includes the dimension of time. The construction of the models is thoughtfully described in an appendix.

In addition to their heuristic value, the models expand the audience for the book considerably. Still frames created by Evan Gallitelli make the stages of the basilica visually accessible in a way that two-dimensional plans and elevations cannot. The book includes such traditional graphics as well, and it offers many rewards for specialists, but it is above all the models that convey the author's vision of "a survey course packed into a single building" (7). The text is concomitantly teacherly: clear, sometimes informal, self-explanatory. Chapters end with helpful reiterations of their main points.

The basilica inaugurated in 386 was the grandest and finest Christian building ever constructed in medieval Rome. It replaced a relatively tiny church credited to Constantine (d. 337), with the evident purpose of elevating the stature of Saint Paul's martyrdom to that of his fellow apostle Peter on the Vatican Hill. St. Paul's had the same components as St. Peter's basilica (atrium, nave and four aisles, transept, and

apse), but it was bigger and better designed. The apostle's tomb, virtually hidden on the chord of the apse in St. Peter's, stood on display in St. Paul's at the crux (or "core") of the building, the intersection of transept and nave. Instead of the assorted *spolia* decried by Giorgio Vasari at St. Peter's, the colonnades of St. Paul's comprised purpose-made white marble shafts (fluted in the nave) with Corinthian and Composite capitals. In another departure, the columns all carried arches rather than architraves, creating a buoyant, spacious, and decidedly postclassical elevation. Medieval architects recognized St. Paul's superiority, and Camerlenghi rightly observes that the paradigmatic churches of the eleventh- and twelfth-century Roman Reform adopted St. Paul's design rather than St. Peter's, even though the latter had greater prestige.

The early stages of Camerlenghi's biography contain some surprising revisions, such as the attribution of the paintings covering the flat walls of the nave to Emperor Honorius around 403–4, rather than to Pope Leo I (440–61). This makes St. Paul's the prototype, not the follower, of the similar decoration of St. Peter's and "countless" later churches (73). The replacement of twenty-four (of forty) original columns in the nave with pavonazetto *spolia* is redated to the seventh century, and the contributions of Leo I are redefined as primarily liturgical.¹ Camerlenghi explains the north–south wall on columns that bisected the transept, which he convincingly attributes to the antipope Anacletus II (1130–38), as not just a pragmatic repair but a "stroke of theatrics" that "ordered the spiritual experience" of the transept (157, 159).

But for the dividing wall, St. Paul's endured into the nineteenth century with remarkably few structural changes. This is not to say that its biography was uneventful; on the contrary, St. Paul's witnessed multiple physical disasters, restorative interventions, and bursts of beautification offset by neglect and even abandonment. Nevertheless, excepting the continual need to replace collapsed or rotted roof beams, the most dynamic part of the building was the "sacred core": a multilevel installation comprising the apostle's tomb, crypts, an altar over the tomb, and a repeatedly reconfigured liturgical precinct around the altar. Much of Camerlenghi's digital

modeling is devoted to analysis and reconstruction of the many phases of this setup, and the stills that illustrate chapters 3–6 are a boon to students of relic worship and liturgy. Some (like the wonderful fig. 5.13) are literally worth a thousand words.

Over time, the basilica suffered from its location, more than 2 kilometers south of the city wall on the Tiber riverbank, and from its size. The site was prone to floods and disease. The size all but precluded routine maintenance. While the dividing wall halved the span of the transept roof and enabled its repair, the nave still required beams more than 24 meters long. The end of its "golden age" in 1423 found the basilica partially unroofed, "full of wind, rain, snow and hail," occupied by pilgrims cooking their meals and "reveling in drunkenness" and by shepherds with their herds "as if it was a barn" (181). Readers who know the Roman paintings of Hubert Robert (1754–65) can picture the tents and laundry lines strung from the colossal column shafts, the campfires, and the animals. Such temporary installations left no quantifiable traces, and the book makes no attempt to model or reconstruct them. The focus on the sacred core tends to play down the recurring episodes of ruination in the nave, but like the other giant basilicas of Rome, St. Peter's and the Lateran Cathedral, St. Paul's lived much of its later life like impoverished nobility, sometimes in shocking decrepitude.

Chapter 6 lays out the repairs and liturgical remodelings of the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries, including the repainting of the murals in the nave and the near miss of a radical remodeling by Francesco Borromini aborted on the death of Pope Innocent X (1655). In 1680 the basilica was again "deserted and abandoned" (215). In the eighteenth century it attracted the new historical sensibility of the Enlightenment (chapter 7), served as a stop on the grand tour, and became a candidate for modernization. A competition to design its reconstruction was held in 1758, and only lack of funds kept the basilica intact. In his epilogue, Camerlenghi recounts the debates over how to replace it post-1823, as it was or in a modern design by Giuseppe Valadier; the pope's decision in 1825 to reconstruct it with "no innovation" (252); and the practical and neoclassical alterations that Pasquale Belli and Luigi Poletti

nevertheless introduced. These later chapters provide opportunities for reflection on changing theories of architectural renovation *all'antica* or *alla moderna* and David Hume's position (articulated in 1739–40) that “an entity transcends its material state” (267). Camerlenghi's term “self-spoliation” to designate the reuse of material elements from one phase of the building in a later one merits more discussion; to me the practice seems more like salvage, the taking of tokens, or the keeping of souvenirs (204, 260).

Camerlenghi's book is deeply researched and exceptionally well illustrated, with a generous selection from the 1,400 historical images that he discovered in museums, libraries, and photo archives. The digital stills set a new bar for the publication of multiphase churches, even if they isolate new features from the entropy (also a dynamic process) that surrounded them. The models are available online, and the author generously encourages others to download and make use of them (273).² This is the proverbial icing on the cake. Remarkably, Camerlenghi's biography is the first book in English on this seminal building of Western Christendom. We can be thankful that it is such a good one.

DALE KINNEY

Bryn Mawr College, emerita

Notes

1. The seventh-century date was demonstrated by Paolo Liverani, “S. Paolo f.l.m. e i restauri di Eusebio (*ICUR* II, 4794),” in *Marmoribus vestita: Miscellanea in onore di Federico Guidobaldi* (Vatican City: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 2012), 2:867–81.
2. See “St. Paul's outside the Walls: A Virtual Basilica,” <https://n2t.net/ark:/81428/v81593> (accessed 28 July 2021).

Jaap Evert Abrahamse

Metropolis in the Making: A Planning History of Amsterdam in the Dutch Golden Age

Turnhout: Brepols, 2019, 535 pp., 100 color and 105 b/w illus. \$163/€125 (cloth), ISBN 9782503580302

Historical atlases and studies of urban development in the engineered geography of the Netherlands have multiplied over the past decades. Yet, until recently, the literature lacked a scholarly monograph on

Amsterdam's seventeenth-century extensions, which occurred from 1588 forward as the young Dutch Republic flourished and expanded in all domains: from overseas trade, capital, and culture to military power and colonial outposts. This gap in planning history has now been filled by Jaap Evert Abrahamse, whose holistic approach in *Metropolis in the Making* reveals the reality behind mythical master plans for Amsterdam in the Dutch Golden Age.

The “Versailles of the north,” the Protestant counterpart to “baroque urbanism,” and the “cult of geometry” are metaphors forged by late modern historians and planners who interpreted images of an ideal city that existed only on wall maps (25–32).¹ Rarely, if ever, did these authors and designers study Amsterdam's archival sources. Looking to verify the beauty of architectural theory in planning practice, they even less often accounted for the microhistory of conflicting social and economic interests. Nor did preexisting ground conditions and an ever more subsided substratum of peat polders fall under their purview. Such are some of the real city's components with which, by contrast, Abrahamse fully engages by drawing on archival material. He has mined, for the most part, the archives of the city (Stadsarchief Amsterdam) to show how “Amsterdam would become an icon of capitalism, but also the most meticulously planned city in Europe” (470).

The result is a thick volume, abundantly illustrated with historic views (sketches, engravings, paintings), maps, and architectural and allotment drawings, as well as images of legal documents and construction records. It is structured in two parts, organized, respectively, by chronological order and by theme. Part I is dedicated to the “urban structure” of the city's third and fourth historic phases of extension, from 1600 to 1650 (chapter 2) and 1650 to 1700 (chapter 3). The second part is concerned with the city's “functioning,” which includes “land-use planning” (chapter 4), “traffic, infrastructure, and public space” (chapter 5), and “problems of a water city” (chapter 6).

From the outset, Abrahamse acknowledges his debt to a few methodological precedents: Willem Barent Peteri's city planning dissertation, archivist L. Jansen's innumerable articles published from 1953 to 1975 in *Werk in uitvoering* and *Ons Amsterdam*, and Ed Taverne's historiographic

overview in *Stedebouw* (1993).² In their wake, he fully examines the history of Amsterdam's urban development “from the perspective of the city's administrators and their civil servants or ‘stadsmeesters’ ” (38), and thus delivers a detailed account of the city's contingent growth from the ground up.

The author walks us through “resolutions, regulations, reports, and requests” (36) to highlight the interactions between the public and private, political and religious, and collective and individual interests of the city's stakeholders. He contrasts statute books with the legal framework of construction and the dynamics of land economy. Likewise, he examines landownership and tenancy, surveying and layout procedures, value and taxation. He compares failed projects with final designs at all scales: from infrastructure (polders, groundworks, fortifications, dams, canals, ports) to street grids, blocks, plots, and buildings. Most important, Abrahamse provides a comprehensive chronicle of events and decisions, complete with the water board and city council deliberations, decrees, and litigations that shaped successive phases of extension.

From the same administrative records, we are presented with a variety of numerical data that include not only physical measurements and land revenues but also construction costs and demographics of residents and migrants. The wealth of information helps us to characterize the flow of materials (peat, clay, sand, stone, bricks, timber, water, urban refuse) as well as their transformation through practices ranging from hydraulic engineering to real estate auctions, tree planting, and waste management.

Along the way, Abrahamse brings to the fore the actual makers of the city, whose roles often overlapped: burgomasters, treasurers, merchants, speculators, surveyors, architects, carpenters, contractors, masons, diggers, and other laborers. We realize how contradictory their motivations, vested interests, and decisions were. We follow the transactions and disputes, resolved through negotiations or connivance, that were meant to increase revenues but also caused damage and unrest. We thus understand the social correlations among soil composition, ground elevation, income levels, and the efficiency of water management (395–447).