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Review of 'Painting in Stone: Architecture and the Poetics of Marble from Antiquity to the Enlightenment'

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Book Reviews

Fabio Barry, *Painting in Stone: Architecture and the Poetics of Marble from Antiquity to the Enlightenment* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2020), 432 pp. incl. 214 colour and 116 b&w ills, ISBN 9780300248166 (hardcover), £50; ISBN 9780300248173 (paperback), £30 doi:10.1017/arh.2022.XX

Reviewed by DALE KINNEY

A work of rare conceptual rigour and enormous range and depth of research, *Painting in Stone* is a 'biography' of a material common to many of the most celebrated buildings in the western canon. The book is the product of long thought, much travel and years of reading. Based on the author's already ambitious doctoral thesis of 2013, and familiar in parts from numerous articles published since 1995, it has a unifying vision. Its argument is described in the introduction and reprised in the epilogue, which is helpful to the reader who might lose sight of it in the divagations of the intervening chapters. The author aims to reconstruct the premodern 'lithic imagination' in which marble was understood to be a product of the earth's exhalations that trapped celestial light, and its veins were nature's painting. Its properties made marble a bridge between earthly 'chthonic generation' and heavenly transcendence, and therefore an ideal material for buildings made to house divinity, temples and palaces. Its qualities conferred agency: 'in the dialogue between artist and material [...] the animate marble always spoke first'.

The thesis — which is also a history — is demonstrated over twelve multi-faceted chapters. It begins with (1) radiant architectures in the ancient near east and Egypt, followed by (2) white marble temples and statues in Greece and Rome (whiteness equating to brightness and light); (3) Greek and Roman theories of the formation of stones and of Mother Earth as a living body, the reflection of such ideas in masonry, and the Roman preference for coloured marbles; (4) the Minoan invention of *buon fresco* ('painting in stone'), the painted simulation of stone, and the Hellenistic first style as a precursor to revetments (veneers) of real marble. The expansion of marble revetments from temples to palaces (5) reflected fictional visions of palaces shining with brilliant colours and gems. The subsequent 'depressing' story of marbling in the western Middle Ages (6) moves from shining revetted churches and translucent windows to the perception of marbling as *vanitas*, the 'loophole' of simulating marbling in paint, white faux-masonry (a metaphor for the 'living stones' of scripture) and the discovery of 'substitute stones' such as Purbeck.

Much happier is the story of marble in Byzantium (7), centred as it is on Hagia Sophia, the linchpin of the author's argument. Covered with dramatic book-matched veneers

and gold mosaic, Hagia Sophia is the summit of the painted marble architectural aesthetic. Numerous eyewitness accounts attest to its unearthly effects. The generation of these effects by marble nearly sidelines the building's renowned architects, Anthemios of Tralles and Isidore of Miletus; they figure as part of a 'collaborative culture' that created the building's design. The demonstration of marble's mimetic and iconographic capacities continues in an essay on 'cosmic floors' (8), reprinted from a much-admired article of 2007.

The following three chapters (9–11) are devoted to the Italian Renaissance. Western interest in coloured marbles was reignited in the fifteenth century. Some stones became relics, as colours and patterns were metaphorically and even physically associated with sacred persons and events, while a historicising impulse led architects such as Alberti to emulate ancient revetments still visible in Rome. Marble-fronted palaces appeared in Venice and were emulated elsewhere in paint. Jewelled façades, made with real or painted gem-like pieces of marble, celebrated the virtues of princely inhabitants; diamond-point façades even more so. In the sixteenth century, the tradition of architectural marble was 'decisively revitalised' by the archaeological precision of Raphael and his humanist associates — witness the fiery stone in the Chigi chapel and Peruzzi's painted marbling of the Villa Farnesina. This Roman renaissance was succeeded (12) by the 'reinvention' of marbled church interiors in the context of an ardent Christian antiquarianism; ekphrasis of the Cappella Gregoriana in St Peter's echoes that of Hagia Sophia, with revetments conjuring images of meadows, mountains, waters and radiating light. Artists vied with nature by painting on stone as well as in stone, in opus sectile and marquetry. The pictorial marquetry of the Spada family chapel illustrated the possibility of architecture as painting, an idea fully realised in the works of Bernini. In the Cornaro chapel, Bernini constructed a 'brilliant mirage of color' representing the light, heat and cloud of St Theresa's divine visitation. Unlike Anthemios and Isidore, Bernini shared authorship of his work only with nature, in a 'dialogue between matter and vision'. The 'cloud architecture' he created at Sant'Andrea al Quirinale was influential into the eighteenth century, after which marble abruptly lost its 'dialectical role'. The epilogue briefly recounts why this happened.

Even if in awe of the whole, specialists inevitably will find faults in their areas of expertise. The medievalist is dismayed that the author takes the Renaissance view of the Middle Ages and repeats the canard that medieval spoliation left ancient buildings 'stripped [...] to the bare bones'. The author dislikes spoliata-column basilicas ('optical havoc') and omits them from his history. The omission is necessitated by the terms of his argument, but it draws attention to the argument's singular specificity: this is not a history of architecture, nor of marble, but of marble's use as revetment.

For this reader, the greatest contribution of *Painting in Stone* is its masterful demonstration of the interpretive power of 'materiality'. Too often a buzzword invoked to restate the obvious, that art is realised in matter (or not), materiality here is a critical tool for recovering meaning through the analysis of innate properties of materials. In most cases, the architectural programmes of the buildings examined — especially the leading paradigms, Hagia Sophia and the Cornaro chapel — were already familiar, revealed long since by the traditional means of matching primary sources to visual

effects. New here are the repeated proofs that programmes (that is, the manifestation of intentions by visual means) are not only embodied in but spawned by the unique properties of the materials in which they are seen.

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Konrad Adriaan Ottenheim, ed., *Romanesque Renaissance: Carolingian, Byzantine and Romanesque Buildings (800–1200) as a Source for New All' Antica Architecture in Early Modern Europe (1400–1700)*, NIKI Studies in Netherlandish-Italian Art History 14 (Leiden: Brill, 2021), xxiv and 432 pp. incl. 228 colour ill., ISBN 9789004446625, €165
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Reviewed by MORGAN NG

In recent decades, two trends have remapped how scholars relate Renaissance architecture to its historical precedents. The first is a growing appreciation of what we might call the 'multiple antiquities' that pervaded the early modern historical consciousness. Across and beyond Europe, builders drew heavily on the histories, lore and monuments of their own localities, deriving diverse architectural *exempla* not limited to those of ancient Rome. The second trend is a desire to problematise conventional models of stylistic periodisation that separate the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Christine Smith, Ethan Matt Kavalier and Robert Bork, among others, have recovered previously under-appreciated continuities between late medieval and early modern design practices and sensibilities. Stephan Hoppe, Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood have explored how Renaissance builders consciously emulated medieval works, either because they admired them on their own terms, or because they unwittingly or wilfully mistook them as classical artefacts.

The collection of essays under review represents a confluence and outgrowth of these two streams of scholarship. Indeed, many of the authors have participated in major international research projects that expand the regional and chronological scope of Renaissance architectural scholarship. What distinguishes this book is its focus on 'Romanesque Renaissance' architecture: early modern architecture inspired by *earlier* medieval precedents, that is, by so-called Romanesque monuments from roughly the years 800–1200. Romanesque Renaissance structures have received less attention among early modernists than the virtuosic late or 'Renaissance gothic' buildings recently reassessed by Kavalier and Bork: exuberantly traceried Flamboyant, *Sondergotik*, Perpendicular, Maneline and Isabelline concoctions that proliferated across northern Europe well into the sixteenth century. Whereas the Renaissance gothic was daringly avant-garde, the Romanesque Renaissance explored in this book belonged squarely to the realm of historical revivalism. The models it pursued were largely deemed extensions of, rather than ruptures from, those of antiquity.