Review: Baroque Architecture in Classical Antiquity by Margaret Lyttelton

Birkner's documentation, not only opens a window onto a field that has been up to now inaccessible to outsiders; it also offers valuable clues to an understanding of the interactions between architecture and politics in the thirties—and should be cited together with Barbara Miller Lane's and Robert R. Taylor's studies on Germany, Anthony Jackson's on England, and the cavalcade of Italian studies on the situation in Italy. But there are still problems, resulting, in my view, from the reluctance of most authors to address the subject in the most simple and straightforward terms. There are essentially two ways of considering the relations between politics and architecture. One can study architecture as *ideal* embodiment or built metaphor of political thought on the designer's side, or one can work the other way around and examine the *real* role of architecture in a given political context. The first approach will have to deal mostly with buildings and the ideas that inform them; the second, with clients, their political ambitions, and the techniques of realization. The problem of most books on the subject, including Gubler's—and including this reviewer's own efforts in similar directions—is that they do not make it clear enough that the two problems are, despite their intricate interdependence, of a quite different order: the first concerns architectural theory, the other political practice. From the point of view of architectural theory a building may be "national romantic," whether or not it was actually understood as such by the client and/or the public; the intention of the designer is evidence enough. From the point of view of political history, a building's style may be in line with the "national interest" regardless of the architect's ideas that had informed its design. Thus the apparent paradoxes in the political history of Swiss architecture: e.g., the fact that Switzerland as a nation has frequently cultivated "internationalist" images—from the nineteenth-century railway bridges to Max Bill's exhibition designs—while the national and romantic imagery has been more prolific in areas that were (and are) relatively insignificant for the promotion of national politics, such as the iconography of vacation houses and mass tourism. From the point of view of political nationalism, styles are relatively neutral ideologically; their choice is to a large degree determined by pragmatic criteria having to do with the program involved, with political opportunism, and circumstance. This is why the presence of cultural values or architectural styles at a given moment in time cannot be used as a litmus paper for the identification of political ideas. Gubler is aware of the fact that "International Style" in architecture does not always indicate rationalist enlightenment. But when it comes to the Swiss châlet, we are left with enough quotes and sources to believe that it is and remains a paradigm of reactionary and chauvinist political stands. And yet, it is first and foremost part of the picturesque tradition—and who knows when it will emerge from the shadow of modernist disdain.

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Margaret Lyttelton, *Baroque Architecture in Classical Antiquity*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1974, 336 pp., 267 pls., 51 figs. £12.50.

What is best about this book is that it describes in detail several sites and a number of buildings, many of which are famous but little known, celebrities in Boorstin's sense of being "known for their well-knownness." Much telling architectural detail is sharply observed, and the drawings and plates are very good except for the familiar, tired photograph of the so-called Temple of Venus at Baalbek that falsely gives the building the form of an inverted, truncated cone. And the book is stimulating, provoking again thought about those elusive words "Baroque architecture" and about the dates of certain key buildings—the Khasne at Petra and the Palace of the Columns at Ptolemais, for example. Almost all the facts are taken directly from the buildings and the book is on the whole clearly written, though there is that kind of repetition of points and attitudes that makes the reader suspect that the author may be somewhat uncertain about them. In short, for facts, descriptions, and illustrations it should serve well, particularly as reliable information about such sites as Petra, Palmyra, Gerasa, and Baalbek is not always easily found.

But the argument of the book is another matter. The title promises all of classical antiquity, which to most of us would include Roman work in spite of the stylistic and chronological distances between its high points and those of Greek architecture. Not so; this is a Greek book, in predisposition, the selection of monuments, and presentation of the evidence. Because the west is excluded, some awkward situations result in discussions of buildings of the imperial period. More importantly, the artificial schism of east and west that was largely created by nineteenth-century scholars is protracted and the complex story of imperial architecture, with its crosscurrents and its centrifugal and centripetal patterns, is left in limbo. The difficulties raised by this position can be seen, for example, in the discussions of Baalbek, where some space is used to question the possible Roman origin and content of the sanctuary buildings. The value of this discussion, which could be considerable, is much undermined by the fact that the dominating Roman forms of the two larger temples, such as their majestic podia and emphatic one-endedness, are not mentioned.

The author's pro-Greek stance is based in part on her detailed knowledge of eastern Mediterranean buildings. In every chapter her command of moldings and of other elements of the orders is apparent and instructive. She puts this knowledge to good use in the cause of comparative analyses among buildings and periods and regions, and by implication shows once again how necessary it is to return repeatedly to the study of the orders and of architectural décor, to their variations and to the characteristics of regional hands and shops. Quite minute differences can count, and there is much of value here in that respect. The difficulty comes, it seems to me, because she repeatedly interprets décor as the essence of architecture, which is thus swamped by detail. The claim is often made, for example, that because two moldings from different buildings are unarguably related in form, then the buildings from which they come are necessarily related stylistically. That is too thin. What of the overriding, informing concepts that gave the buildings their shapes overall? Could not an architect at times ask for a particular molding treatment? The presence or lack of a regionally alien molding does not necessarily determine style, though it can help as it can with dating.

In other words the book is based largely on arguments developed from analyses of architectural carving. Plans are discussed, but there is little mention of plan types, which if included would now and again have inevitably led to Rome. Spatial considerations and the role of technology are all but excluded. Style, at first given a Wölfflinian frame, shifts as the book progresses. For example, great size is more than once spoken