2009

Roman Monuments

Rachel Meyers
Iowa State University, rlmeyers@iastate.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/language_pubs

Part of the Ancient History, Greek and Roman through Late Antiquity Commons

The complete bibliographic information for this item can be found at http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/language_pubs/35. For information on how to cite this item, please visit http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/howtocite.html.
Roman Monuments

Abstract
This truly monumental book stems from the author's doctoral thesis completed in 1993 at Oxford, and the intervening years have certainly allowed for the development and refinement of his thoughts. The significance of architecture for people living in the second century is the central focus of the book. By using a combination of written and visual evidence, T. tries to understand how the ancient viewer perceived the architectural forms around him. His first task, undertaken in the Introduction and picked up throughout the book, is to explain the term 'monumentality' and to trace its usage from antiquity up to modern times. The term 'monumental' should not be assigned only to a building of great size or one that serves as a commemoration, for 'monumental buildings transcended natural grandeur because of their practical value' (p. 239). Those structures that were used daily by many people were considered to have the greatest monumentality by contemporaries.

Disciplines
Ancient History, Greek and Roman through Late Antiquity

Comments

Rachel Meyers

The Classical Review / Volume 59 / Issue 01 / April 2009, pp 260 - 262
DOI: 10.1017/S0009840X08002801, Published online: 11 March 2009

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0009840X08002801

How to cite this article:

Request Permissions : Click here
Despite theoretical shortcomings, this book opens important questions about the ways in which visual humour encodes Roman cultural values and social hierarchies, and with its emphasis on contextual interpretation it makes a significant contribution to the study of humour in the ancient world.

Eckerd College

HEATHER VINCENT
vincenhl@eckerd.edu

ROMAN MONUMENTS

doi:10.1017/S0009840X08002801

This truly monumental book stems from the author's doctoral thesis completed in 1993 at Oxford, and the intervening years have certainly allowed for the development and refinement of his thoughts. The significance of architecture for people living in the second century is the central focus of the book. By using a combination of written and visual evidence, T. tries to understand how the ancient viewer perceived the architectural forms around him. His first task, undertaken in the Introduction and picked up throughout the book, is to explain the term 'monumentality' and to trace its usage from antiquity up to modern times. The term 'monumental' should not be assigned only to a building of great size or one that serves as a commemoration, for 'monumental buildings transcended natural grandeur because of their practical value' (p. 239). Those structures that were used daily by many people were considered to have the greatest monumentality by contemporaries.

The book comprises four parts, each centring on a principal component of the concept of monumentality, as defined by T. In the first part (Chapters 1–5) T. explains how certain elements of architecture, by means of acquired symbolic significance, could bring about the transformation of a building into a monument. In Chapter 4, 'Patrons and the Monumentality of Architecture', T. argues that architectural forms employed in both public and private contexts helped shape and broadcast the owner's social identity because of the notions they embodied (p. 70). He demonstrates how local families around the empire were involved in a contest of one-upmanship by sponsoring ever more impressive and expensive buildings and donations. In imitation of Augustus' model of turning the city of Rome 'from brick to marble', governors, other Roman officials and private patrons transformed public and private buildings with the aid of the widespread availability of marble in the second century. Transforming a building through the addition of a marble facing was, as T. points out, an act of ostentatious and deliberate monumentality. However, T. later concludes that in the second century the deployment of coloured marble suggests more than simple extravagance and may in fact impart deeper meaning to an architectural form.

In Part 2 (Chapters 6–8) T. considers the civic and/or political meanings of public buildings by focussing on the competition among chief cities in the empire, specifically Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamum. Here in Chapter 8 characteristics of imperial architecture are explored as they are manifested within various cities, carrying meaning locally but also presenting a relationship between the city and Rome. Contrary to the laissez-faire framework asserted by Fergus Millar (1992),
T. supports the notion that the emperor himself was involved in provincial building projects because of the need for the imperial house to reassert the ‘continuing validity of Roma aeterna’ in the face of inter-city rivalries, military threats and economic shifts occurring in the second century (p. 151). Along these lines, monumental architecture promoted the ideas of stability and unity in a time of crisis in the empire.

The third part (Chapters 9–10) deals with the act of commemoration and the fact that a building not only looks to the past for precedents but will hold meaning in the future and continue to impress viewers. After addressing the meaning of monumentum in ancient Egyptian, Greek and earlier Roman thought, Chapter 9 explores attitudes from literary works toward monuments in the Antonine Age. Here T. draws attention to some of Pausanias’ pertinent descriptions, for his view represents a shift from earlier Greek writers with a more limited view of monuments and monumentality. Pausanias instead viewed monuments of the past as lasting through time and expressing historical changes. In Chapter 10 tomb monuments and mausolea, including simple steles, the elaborate Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, the tomb of the Flavii at Cilium, and a range of others, are discussed.

The final part of the book (Chapters 11–12) takes up the topic of viewer responses to monumental architecture. Audience reception has been a widely-discussed topic in scholarship on Roman art, with the most recent contribution by Peter Stewart (The Social History of Roman Art [Cambridge, 2008]), and T., by utilising written descriptions of architecture and literary works, aims to grasp how the ancient viewer ‘experienced and responded to Roman buildings’ (p. 207). He refers to the four qualities identified by Aristotle (shape, size, number and movement) as the basis of the ancient experience of architecture. In Chapter 11 T. provides a close reading of two works by Lucian of Samosata, Hippias, or the Bath-building and On the Hall, of which the first reports on great architecture as a way of bringing the aesthetic experience to those who do not have the opportunity to view it for themselves, and the second details how people might have responded to a building.

The text throughout has numerous endnotes, and readers may be distracted when flipping between the chapter and the endnotes section, though clearly T. is comprehensive in his knowledge and application of a vast body of scholarship, as is clear also from the extensive bibliography. The four tables at the end of the text demonstrate again T.’s thoroughness. He has compiled lists of provincial coins portraying arcuated lintels (which are one of the architectural features emphasised in Part 1) and similar architectural forms; architects active during the second century, including where they worked and bibliographic citations; mausolea from the Roman world; and building construction in Rome and around the empire during the Antonine age. This last table includes the name of the building, the date, the patron, certain architectural features and the pages of the book on which it is discussed.

This book brings together an immense amount of material, though more periodic summations (at the end of each chapter, for instance) would certainly benefit the reader in trying to digest and reflect upon it all. The quality of all the black-and-white images is not outstanding, but the decision to include 200 illustrations is laudable. General readers may find the book appealing, but the intended audience must be specialists in Roman architecture, architectural history and the Roman provinces, especially those dealing with civic ties to the centre. One of the greatest accomplishments of this book is the painstaking assemblage of a body of material

T. supports the notion that the emperor himself was involved in provincial building projects because of the need for the imperial house to reassert the ‘continuing validity of Roma aeterna’ in the face of inter-city rivalries, military threats and economic shifts occurring in the second century (p. 151). Along these lines, monumental architecture promoted the ideas of stability and unity in a time of crisis in the empire.

The third part (Chapters 9–10) deals with the act of commemoration and the fact that a building not only looks to the past for precedents but will hold meaning in the future and continue to impress viewers. After addressing the meaning of monumentum in ancient Egyptian, Greek and earlier Roman thought, Chapter 9 explores attitudes from literary works toward monuments in the Antonine Age. Here T. draws attention to some of Pausanias’ pertinent descriptions, for his view represents a shift from earlier Greek writers with a more limited view of monuments and monumentality. Pausanias instead viewed monuments of the past as lasting through time and expressing historical changes. In Chapter 10 tomb monuments and mausolea, including simple steles, the elaborate Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, the tomb of the Flavii at Cilium, and a range of others, are discussed.

The final part of the book (Chapters 11–12) takes up the topic of viewer responses to monumental architecture. Audience reception has been a widely-discussed topic in scholarship on Roman art, with the most recent contribution by Peter Stewart (The Social History of Roman Art [Cambridge, 2008]), and T., by utilising written descriptions of architecture and literary works, aims to grasp how the ancient viewer ‘experienced and responded to Roman buildings’ (p. 207). He refers to the four qualities identified by Aristotle (shape, size, number and movement) as the basis of the ancient experience of architecture. In Chapter 11 T. provides a close reading of two works by Lucian of Samosata, Hippias, or the Bath-building and On the Hall, of which the first reports on great architecture as a way of bringing the aesthetic experience to those who do not have the opportunity to view it for themselves, and the second details how people might have responded to a building.

The text throughout has numerous endnotes, and readers may be distracted when flipping between the chapter and the endnotes section, though clearly T. is comprehensive in his knowledge and application of a vast body of scholarship, as is clear also from the extensive bibliography. The four tables at the end of the text demonstrate again T.’s thoroughness. He has compiled lists of provincial coins portraying arcuated lintels (which are one of the architectural features emphasised in Part 1) and similar architectural forms; architects active during the second century, including where they worked and bibliographic citations; mausolea from the Roman world; and building construction in Rome and around the empire during the Antonine age. This last table includes the name of the building, the date, the patron, certain architectural features and the pages of the book on which it is discussed.

This book brings together an immense amount of material, though more periodic summations (at the end of each chapter, for instance) would certainly benefit the reader in trying to digest and reflect upon it all. The quality of all the black-and-white images is not outstanding, but the decision to include 200 illustrations is laudable. General readers may find the book appealing, but the intended audience must be specialists in Roman architecture, architectural history and the Roman provinces, especially those dealing with civic ties to the centre. One of the greatest accomplishments of this book is the painstaking assemblage of a body of material
that makes contributions to a variety of sub-fields within Roman archaeology and architecture.

Iowa State University RACHEL MEYERS rlmeyers@iastate.edu

THE BASILICA OF MAXENTIUS


For the ancient historian the analysis of the Basilica of Maxentius provides a valuable context for appreciating the capabilities of Roman builders and engineers in the Imperial period, and for realising the uniqueness and enormity of the venture that was necessary to create one of the largest covered spaces of the ancient world. The book is a product of an interdisciplinary study that draws on the technical knowledge of conservators, archaeologists, seismologists, architects and engineers. Its main goal is to provide an architectural history of the structure and to deliver an evaluation of its current state, the factors which have led to its deterioration, and proposals for conservation. As stated in the Introduction (pp. 16–17), it does not provide any in-depth analysis of the architectural decoration; it is also not concerned with the historical context or the use of the structure, but purely with architectural history and, even more specifically, with the materials and building techniques. It focusses on the walls, foundations and vaults, the processes and materials necessary to create them, and also their properties in terms of elasticity and resistance. A reader without any architectural background will find some of the chapters challenging. Especially towards the end, there is an increase in the technical detail and arguments evaluating different analytical models which are used to reconstruct the structure's history, and to understand the capabilities of ancient engineers. Some help is provided by a brief glossary and numerous, intricate images, which act as an alternative narrative, and will no doubt prove an important research tool in themselves (although they are unfortunately not indexed).

The introductory chapter by G. gives the basic historical circumstances for the creation of the Basilica, and explains the goals of the project, highlighting its collaborative nature. It makes clear that this is a technical and material study of the structure, focussing on the ancient and present state of the building, while reviewing the capabilities and shortcomings of Roman engineering. The physical context is outlined in Amici’s Chapter 2, which also focusses on the impact of its construction on surrounding routes and structures. This provides a brief overview of the mix of buildings and their history in this small corner of Rome. It also draws attention to the initial preparations needed to stabilise the earth banks and create a level foundation for the site. Through detailed analysis Amici highlights the stress points and examples of ancient adaptations made to ensure the strength of the structure, while also outlining the destruction process. The main text of this section links together the images and captions which form a more intricate parallel narrative. Zeroing in further on the geology and foundations, Calabresi and Fattorini’s Chapter 3 demonstrates the high capability and sophistication of those who designed and built the Basilica. By