

Special Issue on Architecture Histories: An Introduction

By Anna Hooper*

It is my pleasure to write the introduction for this special issue of the Athens Journal of Architecture 2021 which has arisen from the Architectural History Stream at the 9th Annual International Conference on Architecture held in Athens between 8-11 July, 2019. Papers delivered in this stream, for which I was Chair at the conference, offered insights into architectural design praxis from the ancient Roman period, Medieval and Renaissance times, and more recently, the 20th century. Of these, 3 papers were selected, and 1 from the 8th Annual International Conference on Architecture, for this issue. The researchers of these papers analysed architectural exemplars with differing typologies and contexts yet each shares a common theme of culture, people, and place.

History as a discipline holds an important place in academic research and it is through such research into historic precedents that we, as architects, historians, and educators, can better understand the influences and legacies of architectural sites and buildings and, indeed, what inspired their own development, style and form, and the impact of these on society and culture at a particular point in time.

This is not a new idea. Indeed, in the earliest extant Western treatise we have about architecture (written in the 1st century BC) by the Roman engineer-cum-architect, Vitruvius, he states that the architect "...should know a great deal of history...".¹ In 1959, the American architect, Philip Johnson told his architecture students "[y]ou cannot today not know history."² There have been myriad writers and practitioners of architecture (and related disciplines) spanning the 2 millennia between these two men including Alberti, Quatremere de Quincy, and Ruskin, to name but a few, who have not only drawn upon histories but argued for the importance of them in understanding the built environment.

As an educator in architecture (and landscape architecture) history and design, I am often confronted by students who say "why do I have to know about the past? Why do I have to read about architecture from hundreds, and sometimes thousands, of year ago? I just want to design buildings for the present and for the future" and my answer is this: we learn from history; we learn about how we have come to be where we are now and what lessons we can take with us from history into the future. I say to them: "you need to understand not just *what* a building from the past looked like and functioned as but also *how* and *why* it came into being". History provides context and context is essential; not just physical, tangible, context (as some of my students would argue) but also the intangible, the fragments of ideas and practices long forgotten or buried under the asphalt of contemporary

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1. Vitruvius, *De Architectura libra decem*, (trans.) Ingrid D Rowland (Cambridge, Cambridge University, 1999), Book 1: Chapter 1.

2. Philip Johnson, *Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 108.

design thinking. Histories serve not only to define and inform, but also to maintain, culture, people and place.

This is necessary so we can know how to proceed in the future whether this is designing greenfield sites, redeveloping brownfield sites, applying for a heritage listing, conserving a heritage site or building, or even theorising about architectural form and function. This requires reading and critically analysing the material available to us and arriving at an informed position about the value of a site, a building (or ruin) or even an idealised, but never realised, architectural plan. At the end of semester, my students (most of them anyway) say to me: “Ah, now I get it! I can see why this building has influenced so many others or how this architect has inspired a new Movement”. This is why I believe architecture histories are relevant in research; they enrich rather than diminish our understanding, that is, they allow us to examine and critique design thinking and design practice and learn from these insights.

The four papers presented here follow a loose chronology and each explores a discreet aspect of architectural design (and one could argue, architectural engineering in some instances): the heritage significance of a Roman road (*via Egnatia*) that traversed Europe; the travelling *Seljuk caravanserai* of Anatolia and the infrastructure (*khans*) that provided accommodation and sites of exchange; a Renaissance courtyard palace typology (*All’Antica*) in Ferrara, Italy; and the cinemas and their socio-architectural importance in Nicosia, Cyprus.

Co-authors of the first paper, Aylin Akçabozan Taşkıran & Can Şakir Binan “aim to provide a framework for...a single hybrid heritage...”³ in their paper on serial heritage listing in which they examine the extensive ancient Roman road/trade route which traversed a Europe from Illyricum (a Roman province) to what is today the European side of modern-day Turkey. The implications for inclusion under the new World Heritage System Transnational Serial Nominations, is argued as a cultural as well as an architectural imperative.

In the second paper, the authors Tuğçe Darendeli & Can Şakir Binan analyse the “...change of the commercial activities and accommodations during the history and the spatial organisation, plan typologies and functions of the Anatolian Seljuk Caravanserai constructions...”,⁴ The discussion around the cultural and architectural ‘crossroads’ in this historical ‘roadmap’ reveals a new spatial ‘Seljuk’ form and continues the theme of roads and trade/cultural routes.

Benedetta Caglioti, author of the third paper, takes a different narrative road, one to Ferrara, and examines the “...linguistic, lexical intention... of the Renaissance court palazzo...”⁵ in Ferrara and speculates on the culturally-laden

3. Aylin Akçabozan Taşkıran and Can Şakir Binan, *Transnational Serial Architectural Heritage in Turkey: Traces of the Roman Empire via Egnatia* (Abstract) paper presented at ATINER’s 11th Annual International Conference on Architecture July 5-8, 2019.

4. Tuğçe Darendeli and Can Şakir Binan, *Seljuks Inherit to Aatolia: Caravanserai* (Abstract) paper presented at ATINER’s 11th Annual International Conference on Architecture July 5-8, 2019.

5. Benedetta Caglioti, *Costabili Palace and the Architecture “All’Antica” in Ferrara at the End of the XV Century* (Abstract) paper presented at ATINER’s 11th Annual International Conference on Architecture July 5-8, 2019.

language of this exemplar but frames the critique through the broader lens of the Renaissance architects' interest in antiquity.

Concluding this special issue, the final paper by Aliye Menteş & Valentina Donà states "...the purpose [of the research] is to raise awareness on [the] significance of cinema buildings thus to foster their protection and enhancement. ... also to stress the role of Cypriot architecture and architecture in the international panorama within the Mediterranean area in a peculiar multicultural context."⁶ Through a qualitative research enquiry the authors present the case for such places (and spaces) of socio-cultural importance to be recognised as having real heritage value and that protection should be afforded to reduce further loss of this typology in the region.

As architecture paradigms continue to shift and evolve, the role of histories must always be present as part of the practice of analysis. Without contextual histories, architecture remains in a virtual space without boundaries. The trajectory of architecture from ancient times to the present and into the future is an exciting one and it is the task of the architect not only to design but to reveal these histories. My hope is this will be the first of many special issues on architectural histories in the Athens Journal of Architecture and that it will stimulate further discussion and debate.

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6. Aliye Menteş and Valentina Donà, *Transformation of Cinema Buildings and Spaces in Nicosia: Early-Mid 20th Century Heritage* (Abstract) paper presented at ATINER's 11th Annual International Conference on Architecture July 5-8, 2019.

