

## THE LONG REACH OF ROMAN ARCHITECTURE BEFORE THE RENAISSANCE

Five-lecture series

Meeting times: Mondays, September 27 and October 4, 11, 18, and 25, 2021, 1:00-3:00 p.m.

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### Instructor Biography

Laura Hollengreen is Associate Professor and Associate Director of the School of Architecture at the University of Arizona. Since 2019, she has also served as Associate Dean for Academic Affairs in the College of Architecture, Planning and Landscape Architecture. Trained as a medievalist art historian (Ph.D., UC Berkeley), Dr. Hollengreen has published on Gothic architecture, sculpture, and manuscript illumination. She has also edited a book on the medieval culture of translation and co-edited another on world's fairs. Her teaching and advising have ranged even more widely, broaching such topics as museum design and cultures of display, urban public space, environmental behavior and design for dwelling, and modern landscapes of war.

### Course Introduction

“All roads lead to Rome,” goes the famous saying. This course will look at the legacy of the ancient Roman world through the lens of its architecture, one of the Romans’ greatest and most enduring achievements. Treating the Roman world primarily in its later centuries but in its full geographical reach (from northern England and Germany to North Africa, and from Gibraltar to Syria), we will investigate how the Romans did the following:

- adapted forms of Greek and Etruscan religious, civic, and domestic architecture
- created enduring forms of urban design and popular amenities such as stadia and amphitheaters
- devised impressively effective infrastructure at urban and imperial scale, much of it still in use a millennium or more later
- innovated in the fields of building materials (concrete), structures (vaulting), and systems (hydraulic engineering)
- fostered a recognizably Roman civilization across Europe, North Africa, Asia Minor, and the Near East

Many of the achievements of the later Italian Renaissance were founded on a revival of ancient Roman civilization. Less well-known is the variety of ways, moments, and places in which Roman architecture inspired *medieval* building, in both Christian and Islamic cultures. On the one hand, Early Christian and Early Islamic buildings were modelled on and sometimes built of pieces from ancient buildings and *Romanesque* architecture looked old enough to be confused at times with ancient Roman architecture. On the other hand, Byzantine and Gothic buildings appear to realize a very different aesthetic ... while still being indebted to Roman innovations.

The course will address the material, compositional, decorative, and functional precedents provided by Roman architecture for medieval buildings. It will emphasize how to “read” a building’s form for structural assessment, spatial complexity, and aesthetic impact.

### Course Objectives

The course is designed to accomplish the following objectives:

1. To provide a brief examination of Roman building types and the evolution of their programs and forms.
2. To establish in some technical detail the nature of Roman innovations in architectural structure and materials.
3. To consider the role of architectural decoration in communicating the functions and meanings of buildings.
4. To foster interpretation of Roman works as expressions of the values of Roman society.

5. To propound a history of the medieval adoption and adaptation of (as well as departures from) Roman architectural precedents and building culture.
6. To nurture nuanced, comparative scrutiny of the different strains of medieval culture.

### **Course Texts**

Specific readings are assigned below for each lecture and will be provided digitally by the instructor in .pdf. Additional texts may be recommended once the course is underway, depending on the interests and questions of those enrolled.

For overviews of each of the lecture topics in beautifully produced and reasonably comprehensive volumes, which are also often inexpensively priced, please consult the following volumes in the series *Taschen's World Architecture* (accessible from Amazon or other book outlets):

Henri Stierlin, *The Roman Empire: From the Etruscans to the Decline of the Roman Empire* (2004)

Xavier Barral i Altet, *The Early Middle Ages: From Late Antiquity to A.D. 1000* (1998)

Henri Stierlin, *Islam: Early Architecture from Baghdad to Jerusalem and Cordoba* (2001)

Henri Stierlin, *Romanesque: Towns, Cathedrals and Monasteries* (1998)

Gunther Binding, *High Gothic* (1999)

NB: The list of readings for each lecture below may change somewhat before the formal beginning of the course. If that happens, the syllabus will be updated.

## Lecture 1: The Roman Architectural Achievement

This lecture will summarize the stages of ancient Roman architectural evolution, the nature of its structural, material, and decorative innovations, and the key building types. It will also touch on matters of patronage, urbanism, and the survival vs. revival of monuments. Certain Roman buildings simply persisted due to their size and stability; some were adapted to new uses immediately, others only later in time. Many sparked the imagination and the ambition of later builders who associated Roman architecture with the power of the emperors and the glory of Rome, the “eternal city”.

### Readings

- Req Henri Stierlin, “Introduction: The Genius of Rome,” in *The Roman Empire: From the Etruscans to the Decline of the Roman Empire* (Cologne: Taschen, 2002), 7-37.
- Caroline K. Quenemoen, “Columns and Concrete: Architecture from Nero to Hadrian,” in *A Companion to Roman Architecture*, ed. Roger B. Ulrich and Caroline K. Quenemoen (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 63-81.
- William MacDonald, “The Pantheon” and “The New Architecture,” in *The Architecture of the Roman Empire*, vol. 1: *An Introductory Study*, rev. ed. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), 94-121, 167-83.
- Rec Hazel Dodge, “Building for an Audience: The Architecture of Roman Spectacle,” in *A Companion to Roman Architecture* (as above), 281-98.

## Lecture 2: Architecture for Christian Religion and Society

Once Christians emerged from persecution into the light of tolerance and then predominance, they unexpectedly adapted *civic* prototypes from Roman architecture to house their evolving worship practices and to communicate their theology. As long as Early Christian and Byzantine peoples occupied what had been Greek and Roman lands, a taste for monumentality, conjoined political and architectural hierarchies, and triumphal decoration remained, even if transmuted to serve a new god and new rulers.

### Readings

- Req Peter Brown, "The Holy and the Grave" and "Praesentia," in *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 1-22, and 86-105.
- Roger Stalley, "The Christian Basilica," in *Early Medieval Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 17-36.
- Thomas F. Mathews, "A Temple of Transformation," in *Byzantium: From Antiquity to the Renaissance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 97-135.
- Robert Ousterhout, "The Holy Space: Architecture and the Liturgy [excerpt]," in *Heaven on Earth: Art and the Church in Byzantium*, ed. Linda Safran (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998): 81-91.
- Bissera Pentcheva, "Hagia Sophia and Multisensory Aesthetics," *Gesta* 50/2 (2011): 93-111.
- Rec Elizabeth Marlowe, "Framing the Sun: The Arch of Constantine and the Roman Cityscape," *Art Bulletin* 88/2 (2006): 223-42.
- Daniel G. Van Slyke, "The Devil and His Poms in Fifth-Century Carthage: Renouncing Spectacula with Spectacular Imagery," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 59 (2005): 53-72.
- Annabel Jane Wharton, "Ritual and Reconstructed Meaning: The Neonian Baptistry in Ravenna," *Art Bulletin* 69/3 (1987): 358-75.
- Fabio Barry, "Cosmic Floors in Antiquity and the Middle Ages," *Art Bulletin* 89/4 (2007): 627-56.
- Robert Ousterhout, *Master Builders of Byzantium* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2008):
- Chapter 1: "Defining the Byzantine Church," 7-38.  
Chapter 7: "Structural Design, Structural Expression, and the Construction of Arches and Vaults," 201-33.

### **Lecture 3: Christian and Islamic Architecture: Sibling Traditions**

Early Christian and early Islamic architecture are rooted in the shared soil of late imperial Roman traditions. In fact, the provenance and meaning of motifs that we think we know, like the horseshoe arch or pointed arch, is in some dispute—is it Islamic? Christian? late Roman? This lecture will address similarities in the early development of new religious building types—the church and the mosque—while also showing how and why the two medieval traditions began to diverge. Islamic architecture, which initially bloomed in lands that were distinct geographically and climatically from those of much of Europe, drew on residential Roman prototypes, themselves based on Greek and Ancient Near Eastern models, as the point of departure for mosque design. Nevertheless, as in Byzantine architecture, the structural devices of arches and vaults were ubiquitous, continuing the Roman “conquest” of large spans and “molding” of dynamic space.

#### *Readings*

Req D. Fairchild Ruggles, *Islamic Gardens and Landscapes* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008):

Chap. 1: “The Islamic Landscape: Place and Memory,” 3-11.

Chap. 4: “Organizing the Earth: Cross-Axial Gardens and the Chahar Bagh,” 39-49.

#### Lecture 4: Roman Masonry Revived in the High Middle Ages

The pressures of non-Mediterranean peoples at and then over the boundaries of the Roman Empire resulted in a hybrid architecture of remarkable inventiveness in northern Europe, often in new materials such as wood. At the same time, a small coterie of masons preserved sophisticated knowledge of vault construction and made possible the revival of large-scale Roman-style vaulting in the Romanesque period. At this time feudalism organized society, economic growth drove urban revitalization and the founding of new cities, and the Crusades and pilgrimage took people far from home, exposing them to new developments in art and architecture elsewhere.

How and by whom was large-scale vaulting revived in the Romanesque period of the eleventh and twelfth centuries? Who preserved knowledge of the requisite masonry techniques and why were Spain, Normandy, and Burgundy sites of particular architectural accomplishment in the period? In addressing those questions, we will inventory the features that provide a glorious, enduring new chapter in architectural history and a stepping stone to a new structural system (the first in the West since antiquity) and a new aesthetic in the Gothic period.

#### Readings

- Req Lewis Mumford, "The Heavenly City," in *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1961), 243-48.
- Stalley, "Architecture and Monasticism," and "Architecture and Pilgrimage," in *Early Medieval Architecture* (as above), 166-89 and 146-65.
- Paul Meyvaert, "The Medieval Monastic Clastrum," *Gesta* 12 (1973): 53-58.
- Giles Constable, "Renewal and Reform in Religious Life: Concepts and Realities," in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, ed. Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable, with Carol D. Lanham (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, in association with the Medieval Academy of America, 1991), 37-67.
- Conrad Rudolph, "Pilgrimage in the Middle Ages," in *Pilgrimage to the End of the World: The Road to Santiago* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 1-16.
- Rec Rudolph, "The Pilgrimage to Santiago and to the End of the World," in *Pilgrimage to the End of the World* (as above), 17-49.

## Lecture 5: The Gothic Departure

While all but one of the elements of the Gothic structural system pre-dated the Gothic period, they had not before been combined as a system. This final lecture will traverse the exciting, competitive development of that system in northern France and the specific, ongoing elements of Roman inspiration that were part of the “Twelfth-Century Renaissance”. In the conceptual bases of congregational interior space, soaring structure, geometric complexity, careful design of illumination, and urban presence, the distinctive forms of Gothic architecture can be seen, against the grain, as an apotheosis of Roman ideas, albeit in service to a very different society.

Finally, the course will end with a coda on early Renaissance and early Ottoman architecture, two parallel outgrowths of Roman and medieval architecture. These will be seen primarily through the work of the master builders Brunelleschi and Sinan, each of whom built his own distinctive legacy inspired by and in some ways surpassing Roman precedent.

### Readings

- Req Michael Camille, “Introduction: New Ways of Seeing Gothic Art,” in *Gothic Art: Glorious Visions* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996), 9-25.
- Nicola Coldstream, “What We Now Vulgarly Call Gothic,” and “Architectural Space,” in *Medieval Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002): 22-53.
- Otto von Simson, “Gothic Form,” in *The Gothic Cathedral: Origins of Gothic Architecture and the Medieval Concept of Order*, Bollingen Series 48 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956), 3-20.
- Rec Marvin Trachtenberg, “Suger’s Miracles, Branner’s Bourges: Reflections on ‘Gothic Architecture’ as Medieval Modernism,” *Gesta* 39/2 (2000): 183-205.
- Erwin Panofsky, *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism: An Inquiry into the Analogy of the Arts, Philosophy, and Religion in the Middle Ages* (New York: Penguin, 1951), 43-60.