

organizer Thaisa Way invited historians, urban planners, landscape architects, and others focused on the interactions of cities and their riverine environments to consider rivers more subtly and comprehensively than simply, as she puts it in the introduction to this volume, “as landscapes in themselves or as agents of urban formation” (1). The papers presented at the symposium—the first of several city-focused conferences supported by Dumbarton Oaks’ Mellon Initiative in Urban Landscape Studies—are now available to readers who were unable to attend the 2015 meeting. With this edited collection, *River Cities, City Rivers*, Way has, in large part, succeeded in realizing her initial ambition and in bringing the symposium to a wider audience of urban and environmental historians and planning practitioners.

Following Way’s introduction, the volume’s fourteen essays represent as wide a geographic and topical range as one might seek in a book with goals as broad as those set for this one. With a temporal scope that takes readers from the ancient Yangtze river valley and imperial Rome to contemporary Los Angeles and São Paulo, to a selection of cities located across the Americas, Europe, and South and East Asia, and through the writing of authors trained variously as planners, designers, and historians, the book demonstrates in dramatic and varied fashion the alternating embrace and collision of rivers with the cities that depend on them. Particularly commendable are the contributing authors’ efforts to illustrate their studies with the kind of precise mapping (often showing change over time) that enables readers to comprehend the complex overlap of environmental and architectural form playing out in cities that they may not know, or that they have not before considered with such geographic specificity. Lei Zhang’s compilation of maps showing the shifting flow of water through the cities of China’s lower Yellow River and Rabun Taylor’s exceptionally detailed overlays of the fragmentary stone Severan map of Rome with the map published by Giambattista Nolli in 1748, as well as later maps, are just two of the book’s many notable examples of visual evidence that conveys, for the student of the built landscape, what text alone cannot.

Like all edited volumes, Way’s collection will draw a range of readers, some of

whom will have greater or lesser interest in individual contributions. Essays by practicing planners working in U.S. cities such as Los Angeles, Pittsburgh, and San Antonio, in Chinese cities such as Zigong and Yuzhu, and in the Rhine delta of the Netherlands recount the authors’ own contributions to contemporary planning processes in a manner that is useful but inevitably self-promoting. On the other hand, historians and other scholars do well to understand, even if from a critical distance, the opportunities and constraints as well as the practical and rhetorical strategies available to the people charged with the difficult work of reshaping the urban environment. Historians, even those sensitized to the symposium’s environmental perspective, occasionally fall into the pattern of leaving aside the evidence of the landscape altogether, turning instead to the mining of texts to demonstrate the purported cultural values that rivers hold for their cities. However, such historical studies also remind practitioners of their place in a long line of people who have sought to leave their mark, only to find their best efforts pushed aside by changing capital flows, tastes, or the laws of fluid dynamics.

Common to all of Way’s contributors, however—and perhaps most pertinent to architectural historians consulting this review—is a sobering perspective on geological time and built form. As these collected essays suggest, the traditional focus of the architectural and landscape historian on a site’s conception, construction, and—following completion—seemingly timeless endurance begins to appear a questionable effort, even a fool’s errand, in light of the powerful long-term forces that are capable of flooding a river’s banks, evaporating its waters, or changing its course altogether. Exquisite localized accommodations of built and natural form—whether in Allahabad, as discussed by Anthony Acciavatti, or Vienna, the subject of Kimberly Thornton’s essay—prove themselves temporary at best, as land-use choices made there or elsewhere alter or accelerate the very conditions from which they were designed to benefit.

*River Cities, City Rivers*, then, leaves us with troubling but necessary questions. Of what use are our efforts to shape “firm, commodious, and delightful” urban landscapes when we are working within a global

environment that changes more quickly and more suddenly than ever before? Would Vitruvius himself have embraced the task, had he been aware of the shifting sands on which the capital of his own empire rested? Has the goal of marrying buildings, public spaces, and environmental forms such as rivers become an extravagance at a time of environmental crisis? Or do such temporary alignments of human need and natural resources, even if they function only for a generation or two, still constitute a noble goal for an urban world as much in need of comfort as ever?

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### **Piranesi’s Lost Words**

University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015, 264 pp., 130 b/w illus. \$79.95 (cloth), ISBN 9780271065496

Views of Rome more or less derived from the works of Giovanni Battista Piranesi are so omnipresent in the city itself—in shop-windows, on wrapping paper, in hotels and homes—that they have become virtually impossible to see for what they once were. Although Piranesi’s monumental achievements, his many books and hundreds of prints, were founded on those of earlier generations of antiquarians, his work was strikingly original in its own time. At once faithful to the actual appearance of monuments and dramatic in their visual rhetoric, Piranesi’s etchings provided views of the city shaped by the mind of an architect and antiquarian. Despite all this, for many viewers the singularity of these images is all but invisible because of the superficial familiarity of Piranesi’s prints—itsself a sign of their broad legacy.

Into the breach has come Heather Hyde Minor, who with *Piranesi’s Lost Words* restores the artist’s errant images to the books where they belong. She demonstrates that Piranesi’s greatest ambition was as an author, and that only accidents of history have obscured this fact. In so doing, she restores not only the full physical and material presence of Piranesi’s books, bringing into focus the relation of text and image, but also the social and intellectual worlds his work addressed.

Minor begins with the question, “Why did Piranesi want to be an author?” (5).

He was already an architect and a print-maker, and it is not obvious why he sought to excel in yet another arena. Minor argues that writing brought prestige and authority, and put Piranesi into dialogue with the premier scholars and antiquarians of Europe. It put him at the center of eighteenth-century debates about the classical legacy of Greece and Rome, allowing him to wield both the pen and the etcher's needle as his weapons of choice. The marriage of text and image was not a perfect one, however, ~~not least~~ because Piranesi's way with words could not always match his visual acuity and flair. The tension between these realms forms one of the core subjects of Minor's book.

The book is organized into seven chapters. The first two focus on Piranesi's monumental publication the *Antichità romane*, a four-volume work published in 1756, comprising 72 pages of text and 214 plates. The book included city views, plans reconstructing ancient buildings, inscriptions, and images of assorted sculpture and ornamental features. Intriguingly, Minor frames her discussion by reading back from the twenty-first century, allowing us to grasp the unique physicality of the volumes and the experience of turning their pages. In chapter 2 she considers how eighteenth-century readers would have read and understood the text and images differently than we do. She discusses such rarely addressed issues as who Piranesi's collaborators were, how much the books would have cost, and how one would have bought one. She also suggests that readers were not universally enthralled. She quotes Tobias Smollett, a Scottish author, who indicated that Piranesi was "apt to run riot in his conjectures; and with regard to the arts of antient [*sic*] Rome, has broached some doctrines, which he will find it very difficult to maintain" (61).

A complex topic that Minor broaches in chapter 2, one woven throughout the book, is that of Piranesi's borrowings from other sources, both visual and textual. For example, for the *Antichità* Piranesi used some plates from earlier books by other authors. Minor writes, "Whether we view this as sampling or as piracy, these practices were common and were part of how large illustrated books were produced in eighteenth-century Rome" (55). Of course, modern readers may find such attitudes challenging to grasp, given the current fixation on

copyright and plagiarism, as well as the legal framework surrounding them. Minor's task in contextualizing these practices is even more difficult when it comes to Piranesi's textual borrowings. Minor quotes one of his eighteenth-century biographers, Giovanni Ludovico Bianconi, who went so far as to assert that Piranesi's work was written by others: "He cleverly enrolled some eminent men of letters who, in admiration of his genius and his etchings, were not above working for him, composing text to fit his beautiful prints, and generously permitting him to publish them under his own name. . . . Eventually, Piranesi persuaded himself that these books, composed by so many distinguished hands, were entirely his own work and woe betide anyone who did not agree—even the authors themselves" (61). While rescuing Piranesi from this character assassination, Minor offers a nuanced assessment of his collaborative working methods, which were the norm rather than the exception in his day. She also points out where the writing is most obviously his own, in particular in his on-site observations of monuments.

Minor's aim is to make the case for Piranesi as "not just a fiercely talented artist but an extraordinary author" (209). To do so, she must not only describe the content of books unknown to her audience (and largely unavailable except to readers of Italian) but also demonstrate that texts containing large chunks of copied material can still be original. Specifically, she argues that Piranesi "practiced incredible originality through copying" (208). Whether readers find this persuasive may depend on how much they are willing to free themselves from the modern-day cult of the single author and embrace the eighteenth-century ~~culture~~ of collaboration. Minor attempts to help readers along the way, but without firsthand knowledge of the texts, some may strain to grasp this point.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 take on three of Piranesi's other major publications, the *Campus Martius antiquae urbis* (1762), *Della magnificenza ed architettura de' Romani* (1761), and *Diverse maniere d'adornare i cammini* . . . (1769). For each, Minor provides a sense not just of the book's contents but also of how it was read and used. She conveys the physicality of each book as well, even including an image of herself holding open the pages of one (85, fig. 55).

In this she contributes to a new emphasis on the materiality of the book, already established in other fields but relatively new to early modern studies.<sup>1</sup>

The final two chapters trace the loss of Piranesi's legacy, due mainly to the gross incompetence of his surviving heirs, and its recovery at the hands of modern and postmodern architects. According to Minor's vivid picture, to call Piranesi's family dysfunctional would be an understatement and an anachronism. Toward the end of his life, Piranesi thought his family was trying to kill him. Beyond its soap operatic interest, Minor's family portrait explains how Piranesi's careful curation of his legacy was undone. The final chapter, which tracks how Rudolf Wittkower brought Piranesi to the attention of modernists, may be of special interest to architects. Indeed, the resurrection of Piranesi as a forefather of modern and postmodern architecture is a rich enough story for a book of its own.

Throughout the book, Minor brings historical figures vividly to life, opening each chapter with a vignette: "Robert Adam had given up hope" (83), or "Laura Piranesi was preparing for her wedding" (183). More typical of a novel than a scholarly book, these scenes draw the reader in and keep him or her engaged as Minor builds the story out to include an account of the myriad forces at work in the creation and reception of Piranesi's oeuvre.

Minor's light touch—her absorbing anecdotes and engaging prose—belies the depth of her scholarship. Piranesi was nothing if not prodigious, and sorting out his relations to his contemporaries cannot have been easy. But the effort does not show, and, despite its serious scholarship, the text, like Piranesi's prints, is not without whimsy. Minor points out a street urchin urinating on the Pantheon in one print, and she describes a book's binding, with "its brown faux leather spine and bright turquoise and olive marbled paper cover," as "the equivalent of the era's polyester leisure suit, ready for a night out at a disco" (15).

When reviewing a book called *Piranesi's Lost Words*, it may be unfair to lament that it is not enough about images. Rather than see this as a deficit, I will simply say that the richness of Minor's discussion of texts made me wish for a broader, more integrated view. Focusing primarily on text,

Minor has avoided Piranesi's own flaw: she has sidestepped the hazards of redundancy by discussing texts largely ignored by scholarship. But as a writer, she holds considerably more promise than Piranesi ever did, and this reader at least could not help but wish she had been willing to tread again on well-trodden ground so as to paint the whole picture of the whole Piranesi. The good news is that unlike Piranesi, whose sheer volume of prose is likely to leave a reader exhausted, Minor leaves us wanting more.

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#### Note

1. See, for example, the discussion of John James Audubon's books in Jennifer L. Roberts, *Transporting Visions: The Movement of Images in Early America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014). See also Leah Price, *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012).

Mari Hvattum and Anne Hultzsich, eds.  
**The Printed and the Built: Architecture, Print Culture and Public Debate in the Nineteenth Century**  
London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2018, 306 pp., 115 color illus. £75.00 (cloth), ISBN 9781350038417; £24.99 (paper), ISBN 9781350038400

Mari Lending  
**Plaster Monuments: Architecture and the Power of Reproduction**  
Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2018, 284 pp., 48 color and 73 b/w illus. \$49.95/£40 (cloth), ISBN 9780691177144

"For better or worse, all my figures are men and all my texts are canonical, but the men do not look so triumphant in retrospect, and today the canon appears less a barricade to storm than a ruin to pick through." These lines, written by Hal Foster, appear in his 2002 article "Archives of Modern Art," which traces major shifts in the memory structure of European art between 1850 and 1950. Rereading this history through a series of oppositions (Baudelaire/Manet, Valéry/Proust, Panofsky/Benjamin), Foster examines the "institutional relay" between the artist's studio and the space of the museum. Art in the

nineteenth century was a "mnemonic elaboration" of earlier work. Yet this relation between the atelier and the museum was hardly a one-way street: Baudelaire's idea of artistic practice, for instance, "already presumes the space of the museum as the structure of its mnemonic effects." Each theorist's position is reread through a "dialectic of reification and reanimation"—that is, the shifting relation between art museum and art studio could reanimate European art, reify it into a spectacle, or both. Foster ends by asking how our own archival moment, the age of digital reproducibility, is transforming art's memory structure. His answer is compelling: "If the old museum, as imagined from Baudelaire through Proust and beyond, was the site for the mnemonic reanimation of visual art, the new museum tends to split the mnemonic experience from the visual one."<sup>1</sup> Decoupled from its archival/mnemonic function, the new museum highlights the exhibition and exchange value of art in unprecedented ways.

The two volumes under review here offer insight into the now-lost memory structure of the nineteenth century by rethinking architecture's relation with technical reproductions—printed images and plaster casts. Meticulously researched and produced, these two books reveal a curatorial approach to architectural history, one that foregrounds the exhibition value of its documents. Prints and plaster casts are not understood as copies after originals, but rather as collectible objects with their own specific and material histories.

*The Printed and the Built: Architecture, Print Culture and Public Debate in the Nineteenth Century* begins with an introduction by editors Mari Hvattum and Anne Hultzsich that retraces a well-traveled history: how the manifold increase in the circulation of printed images, beginning in the 1830s, expanded architecture's publics. Technically, this was in large part due to the mechanization of xylography (woodcuts or wood engraving), which was far more consequential than high-end imaging techniques such as copperplate engraving or lithography. As Iver Tangen Stensrud shows in a brief chapter, although xylography, too, was a labor-intensive process—skilled engravers cut images and text into the end grain of hardwood blocks—copies of the woodblocks were cast in metal

stereotypes, which allowed multiple printing presses to run simultaneously (295–99). The first illustrated weekly, the *Penny Magazine*, appearing in 1832, reached a circulation of two hundred thousand in its first year (32). Printed images thus became available to an expanding middle class.

This story has been narrated in the past as a tale of two cities—London and Paris—with the common themes being the diffusion of technology, the rise of a public sphere, and the dissemination of a professional discourse from the center to the periphery. One outcome of the circulation of cheaply printed images was the rise of professional publications, including illustrated architecture journals, pattern books, and architectural history handbooks. Yet, after duly summarizing the dominant historical narrative, the editors move away from it. Technology does not always drive history. Nor is a canonical modernism the telos of nineteenth-century architecture. In fact, at times a teleological history is altogether omitted. What follows is a surprising collection, revolving around the reciprocity of the printed and the built.

Hvattum and Hultzsich's introduction is a case in point. It opens with a picture of "Mr. Applegath's Printing Machine" originally published on 31 May 1851 in the *Illustrated London News*. Here the relation between building and printed page is mind-bogglingly circular. The *Illustrated London News* featured, in a supplement dedicated to the Crystal Palace, an illustration of the printing press that produced the magazine inside the walls of the Crystal Palace. As Hvattum and Hultzsich explain: "The astounded public could see the magazine materialize from the midst of its own content" (2). According to the editors, neither architecture nor print culture was in a supporting role. "The printing press and the building produce each other's image" (2).

The reciprocity of architecture and printing press returns in Maarten Delbeke's fascinating contribution, "Architecture's Print Complex: Palloy's Bastille and the Death of Architecture." The chapter begins with another historical tableau: a printing press installed on 17 July 1792 on the ruins of the Bastille in Paris. After printing a copy of the Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme where the Bastille once stood, the printing press was carried