

AN OUTLINE OF  
EUROPEAN  
ARCHITECTURE

*By*  
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CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

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(AT THE END OF THE BOOK)

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## Foreword

A HISTORY of European architecture in two hundred pages can achieve its goal only if the reader is prepared to concede three things.

He must not expect to find a mention of every work and every architect of importance. If this had been attempted, the space available would have been filled with nothing but names of architects, names of buildings and dates. One building must be accepted as sufficient to illustrate one particular style or one particular point. This means that in the picture which the reader is going to see gradations are eliminated, and colour is set against colour. He may regard that as a disadvantage, but he will, it can be hoped, admit that the introduction of subtler differences would have doubled or trebled the bulk of the book. Thus the nave of Lincoln will be discussed but not the nave of Wells, and St. Spirito in Florence but not S. Lorenzo. Whether St. Michael's, Coventry, is really a more complete or suitable example of a Perpendicular parish church than Holy Trinity, Hull, the Palazzo Rucellai of the Italian Renaissance than the Palazzo Strozzi, is of course debatable. Unanimity cannot be achieved on matters of that kind. Yet, as architectural values can be appreciated only by describing and analysing buildings at some length, it was imperative to cut down their number and devote as much space as possible to those finally retained.

Besides this limitation, two more have proved necessary. It was out of the question to treat European architecture of all ages from Stonehenge to the 20th century, or the architecture of all the nations which make up Europe to-day. Neither would, however, be expected of a volume called European Architecture. The Greek temple, most readers probably feel, belongs to the civilisation of Antiquity, not to what we usually mean when we talk of European civilisation. It will also be agreed, though for quite different reasons, that the architecture of, say, Bulgaria need not be dealt with in these pages. The main reasons here are that Bulgaria in the past belonged to the Byzantine and then to the Russian orbit, and that her importance now is so marginal as to make her omission pardonable. So everything will be left out of this book that is only of marginal

interest in the development of European architecture, and everything that is not European or—as I thus propose using the term European—Western in character. For Western civilisation is a distinct unit, a biological unit, one is tempted to say. Not for racial reasons certainly—it is shallow materialism to assume that—but for cultural reasons. Which nations make up Western civilisation at any given moment, at what juncture a nation enters it, at what juncture a nation ceases to be of it—such questions are for the individual historian to decide. Nor can he expect his decision to be universally accepted. The cause of this uncertainty regarding historical categories is obvious enough. Though a civilisation may appear entirely clear in its essential characteristics when we think of its highest achievements, it seems blurred and hazy when we try to focus its exact outlines in time and space.

Taking Western civilisation, it is certain that prehistory is not part of it, as the prehistory of every civilisation—the word expresses it—is a stage *præ*, i.e. before that civilisation itself is born. The birth of a civilisation coincides with the moment when a leading idea, a *leitmotiv*, emerges for the first time, the idea which will in the course of the centuries to follow gather strength, spread, mature, mellow, and ultimately—this is fate, and must be faced—abandon the civilisation whose soul it had been. When this happens, the civilisation dies, and another, somewhere else or from the same soil, grows up, starting out of its own prehistory into its own primitive dark age, and then developing its own essentially new ideology. Thus it was, to recall only the most familiar example, when the Roman Empire died, and Western civilisation was born out of prehistoric darkness, passed through its Merovingian infancy, and then took shape first under Charlemagne and finally during the reign of Otto the Great in the 10th century.

Now, besides prehistory and Antiquity, nearly all that belongs to the first thousand years A.D. has had to be left out, because the events of that age, centred in the Eastern Mediterranean—i.e. the orientalisation of the Roman Empire, early Christianity, early Talmudism, early Mohammedanism and the Byzantine Empire, with its successor civilisations in the Balkans and Russia—make up a separate civilisation of its own, of a character fundamentally different from the Greek and Roman as well as the Western.

So these three omissions—all omissions in time—will, it is to be hoped, be considered justifiable. As for limitations in space, a few



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words will suffice. Whoever makes up his mind to write a short history of European architecture, or art, or philosophy, or drama, or agriculture, must decide in which part of Europe at any time those things happened which seem to him to express most intensely the vital will and vital feelings of Europe. It is for this reason that, e.g. Germany is not mentioned for her 16th-century but for her 18th-century buildings, that Spain's rôle in Western Mohammedan architecture is left out, but her rôle in Western Christian architecture considered, that buildings in the Netherlands are only touched upon, and Scandinavian buildings not mentioned at all. The only positive bias towards the work of one nation which has been permitted (and needs no special apology) is towards British examples, where they could be introduced without obscuring the issue, instead of examples from abroad. The issue, to say it once more, is Western architecture as an expression of Western civilisation, described historically in its growth from the 9th to the 19th century.

Most of the drawings in the text of this edition were specially drawn by Miss Margaret Tallet. The index is the work of Pamela Reekie; the author wishes cordially to thank her for having given up so much of her limited spare time to its compilation. He also wishes to place on record his gratitude to Margaret Whinney and Anthony Blunt for reading the text of the whole book in typescript and improving it in many ways.

LONDON, 1948

N. P.

The present edition is virtually a reprint of its predecessor. In spite of this I have been able to include many minor amendments and two larger ones, the one referring to the paragraphs on Gothic construction which were decidedly inadequate, the other to staircases of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

## Introduction

A BICYCLE SHED is a building; Lincoln Cathedral is a piece of architecture. Nearly everything that encloses space on a scale sufficient for a human being to move in, is a building; the term architecture applies only to buildings designed with a view to æsthetic appeal. Now æsthetic sensations may be caused by a building in three different ways. First, they may be produced by the treatment of walls, proportions of windows, the relation of wall-space to window-space, of one story to another, of ornamentation such as the tracery of a 14th-century window, or the leaf and fruit garlands of a Wren porch. Secondly, the treatment of the exterior of a building as a whole is æsthetically significant, its contrasts of block against block, the effect of a pitched or a flat roof or a dome, the rhythm of projections and recessions. Thirdly, there is the effect on our senses of the treatment of the interior, the sequence of rooms, the widening out of a nave at the crossing, the stately movement of a baroque staircase. The first of these three ways is two-dimensional; it is the painter's way. The second is three-dimensional, and as it treats the building as volume, as a plastic unit, it is the sculptor's way. The third is three-dimensional too, but it concerns space; it is the architect's own way more than the others. What distinguishes architecture from painting and sculpture is its spatial quality. In this, and only in this, no other artist can emulate the architect. Thus the history of architecture is primarily a history of man shaping space, and the historian must keep spatial problems always in the foreground. This is why no book on architecture, however popular its presentation may be, can be successful without ground plans.

But architecture, though primarily spatial, is not exclusively spatial. In every building, besides enclosing space, the architect models volume and plans surface, i.e. designs an exterior and sets out individual walls. That means that the good architect requires the sculptor's and the painter's modes of vision in addition to his own spatial imagination. Thus architecture is the most comprehensive of all visual arts and has a right to claim superiority over the others.

This æsthetic superiority is, moreover, supplemented by a social superiority. Neither sculpture nor painting, although both are

rooted in elementary creative and imitative instincts, surround us to the same extent as architecture, act upon us so incessantly and so ubiquitously. We can avoid intercourse with what people call the Fine Arts, but we cannot escape buildings and the subtle but penetrating effects of their character, noble or mean, restrained or ostentatious, genuine or meretricious. An age without painting is conceivable, though no believer in the life-enhancing function of art would want it. An age without easel-pictures can be conceived without any difficulty, and, thinking of the predominance of easel-pictures in the 19th century, might be regarded as a consummation devoutly to be wished. An age without architecture is impossible as long as human beings populate this world.

The very fact that in the 19th century easel-painting flourished at the expense of wall-painting and ultimately of architecture, proves into what a diseased state the arts (and Western civilisation) had fallen. The very fact that the Fine Arts to-day seem to be recovering their architectural character makes one look into the future with some hope. For architecture did rule when Greek art and when mediæval art grew and were at their best; Raphael and Michelangelo still conceived in terms of balance between architecture and painting. Titian did not, Rembrandt did not, nor did Velasquez. Very high æsthetic achievements are possible in easel-painting, but they are achievements torn out of the common ground of life. The 19th century and, even more forcibly, some of the most recent tendencies in the fine arts have shown up the dangers of the take-it-or-leave-it attitude of the independent, self-sufficient painter. Salvation can only come from architecture as the art most closely bound up with the necessities of life, with immediate use and functional and structural fundamentals.

That does not, however, mean that architectural evolution is caused by function and construction. A style in art belongs to the world of mind, not the world of matter. New purposes may result in new types of building, but the architect's job is to make such new types both æsthetically and functionally satisfactory—and not all ages have considered, as ours does, functional soundness indispensable for æsthetic enjoyment. The position is similar with regard to materials. New materials may make new forms possible, and even call for new forms. Hence it is quite justifiable, if so many works on architecture (especially in England) have emphasised their importance. If in this book they have deliberately been kept in the back-

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ground, the reason is that materials can become architecturally effective only when the architect instils into them an æsthetic meaning. Architecture is not the product of materials and purposes—nor by the way of social conditions—but of the changing spirits of changing ages. It is the spirit of an age that pervades its social life, its religion, its scholarship and its arts. The Gothic style was not created because somebody invented rib-vaulting. The Gothic spirit existed and expressed itself in rib-vaults, as has been proved and will be mentioned again later, before the constructional possibilities of the rib had been discovered. The Modern Movement did not come into being because steel-frame and reinforced-concrete construction had been worked out—they were worked out because a new spirit required them.

Thus the following chapters will treat the history of European architecture as a history of expression, and primarily of spatial expression.

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