

Thomas Schuetz. *Baumeister und Muhandis: Technologietransfer zwischen Orient und Okzident.* (Studien zur Kunstgeschichte, 189.) 640 pp., illus., bibl. Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2011. €78 (paper).

Thomas Schuetz tackles a difficult theme, and he is aware that he is stepping into a field where enthusiasm for curious analogies and surprising innovations can often blind research proper, based on meticulous analysis of written sources, buildings, and archaeological findings. The relationship between East and West is here studied from the point of view of a specific subject matter, which partly sidesteps the risk described above: the inquiry centers on the tenth to fifteenth centuries (with an introduction on the early period of the Abbasid caliphate) and on the Mediterranean area, describing knowledge relative to construction. The objects of research are buildings and technical literature (especially geometry applied to architecture), as well as the social roles of artisans and scientists. The volume closes with a glossary and a rich bibliography.

The construction site is presented as a privileged field of inquiry: the cooperation of technicians and intellectuals in the evolution of the art of constructing invites study of the economic, political, and religious context from which the mutual influences of East and West emerge. These assumptions, though they may appear obvious, are developed by the author in contrast to traditional histories of art and architecture, which often display a systematic lack of interest (and competence) in the issues considered here. After a detailed diachronic comparison between the technical knowledge developed in the East and in the West, Schuetz notes that it is not possible to identify a linear “single correct path” in the evolution of construction forms and modes. At the time of the expansion of the Latin West an exchange of workers took place, through which knowledge migrated from one side of the Mediterranean to the other. With *Baumeister* and *Muhandis* (both “master builders”), knowledge circulated mainly orally and through experience acquired on the job.

Within the historical and geographical framework described above, Schuetz focuses on two themes regarded as exemplary: the construction of the pointed arch and of the ribbed vault. This choice and the consequent treatment highlight a weakness of *Baumeister und Muhandis*: on the one hand, the author denounces the limits of traditional historiography; on the other, he implicitly accepts its fragile presuppositions—namely, the notion that the pointed arch and the ribbed vault

can be analyzed as pure geometric forms. Surprisingly, there is no precise analysis of the material features of the two construction elements (internal connections, installation, stone cutting, etc.), despite the fact that parts of the book focus on construction materials. After arguing convincingly against too many “disembodied” histories, the author appears to be trapped in the very conceptual scheme he criticized in his introductory pages. That he offers comparisons between abstract construction geometries rather than between construction elements realized in stones, bricks, and mortar makes the author’s impressive effort to provide a large-scale historiographic picture less convincing. The same naïveté surfaces in other parts of the volume as well. For example, there is no adequate comparison with the Vitruvian tradition, and the pictorial apparatus is extremely poor and systematically neglects construction details (the only detailed drawing presented is on p. 534, and it refers to the building of stone bridges).

The author must be credited with having made a useful summary of the relations between East and West in the field of the art of constructing. The book is pleasant to read; the frequent polemical remarks enliven the discussion, and they are always motivated by legitimate historiographical concerns. Schuetz asserts that the “history of technology is still today something exotic in Western historiography” (“Die Technikgeschichte ist aber nach wie vor ein Exot innerhalb der westlichen Historiographie” [p. 17]). This book, with its merits and its flaws, helps us to understand the reasons for this delayed incorporation.

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Zur Shalev; Charles Burnett (Editors). *Ptolemy’s Geography in the Renaissance.* (Warburg Institute Colloquia, 17.) xiii + 240 pp., illus., app., index. London: Warburg Institute; Turin: Nino Aragno Editore, 2011. £50, €59.90 (paper).

Ptolemy’s Geography in the Renaissance contains eleven highly elaborate articles on the reception of the *Geography* that were first presented at a colloquium at the Warburg Institute in June 2003. Each of the participants has focused on his or her scientific subject, so the complete volume covers a wide range of topics. In his introduction, Zur Shalev relates the different subjects to one another. He also recommends that one view the history of the work’s reception in a simplified way, in terms of a succession of tradition, translation, printing, and editing; it was also adapted to changing geo-