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## ***Architecture of Regionalism in the Age of Globalization: Peaks and Valleys in the Flat World* By Liane Lefaivre and Alexander Tzonis Routledge, London and New York, 2011 232 pp., many drawings and illus. ISBN: 978-0-415-57579-9 £29.99 (pb)**

Michael Asselmeyer

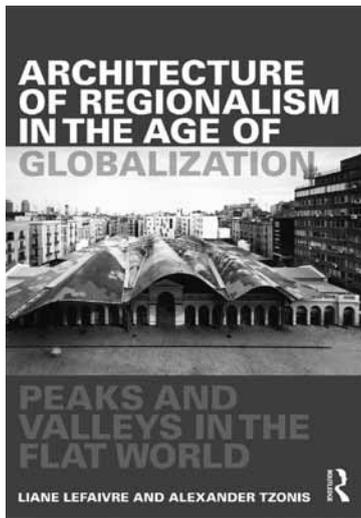
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### Architecture of Regionalism in the Age of Globalization: Peaks and Valleys in the Flat World

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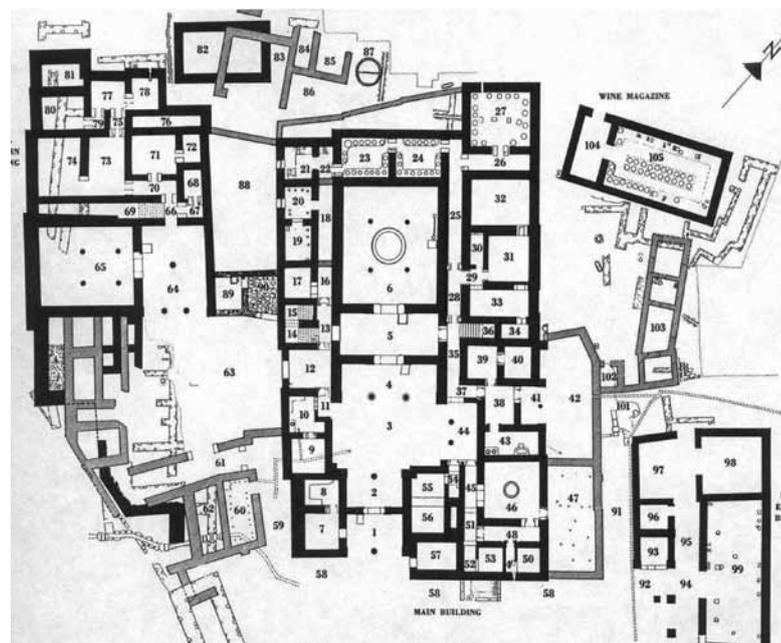
Reviewed by Michael Asselmeyer

We are used to considering ourselves children of globalisation; sometimes protagonists, sometimes victims, but always witnesses to the current movement that appears to transform a plethora of regional economies into an overarching global economy. Readers therefore might be forgiven for assuming that Lefavre's and Tzonis's new title refers to our present day and age in general and to contemporary architecture and recent regionalist debate in particular. But it does not. This book is a macro-historic investigation based on the presumption that regionalism and globalisation are antagonistic movements through time. It sets out to illuminate the 'continuous process' of regionalism and its ever-changing context by means of a chronological review of regionalist architecture and theory during the last four thousand years. The subtitle 'Peaks and Valleys in the Flat World' explains in a metaphoric way, how regionalism establishes boundaries ('peaks', 'valleys') and how globalisation removes obstacles of interaction and communication ('flattens the world').

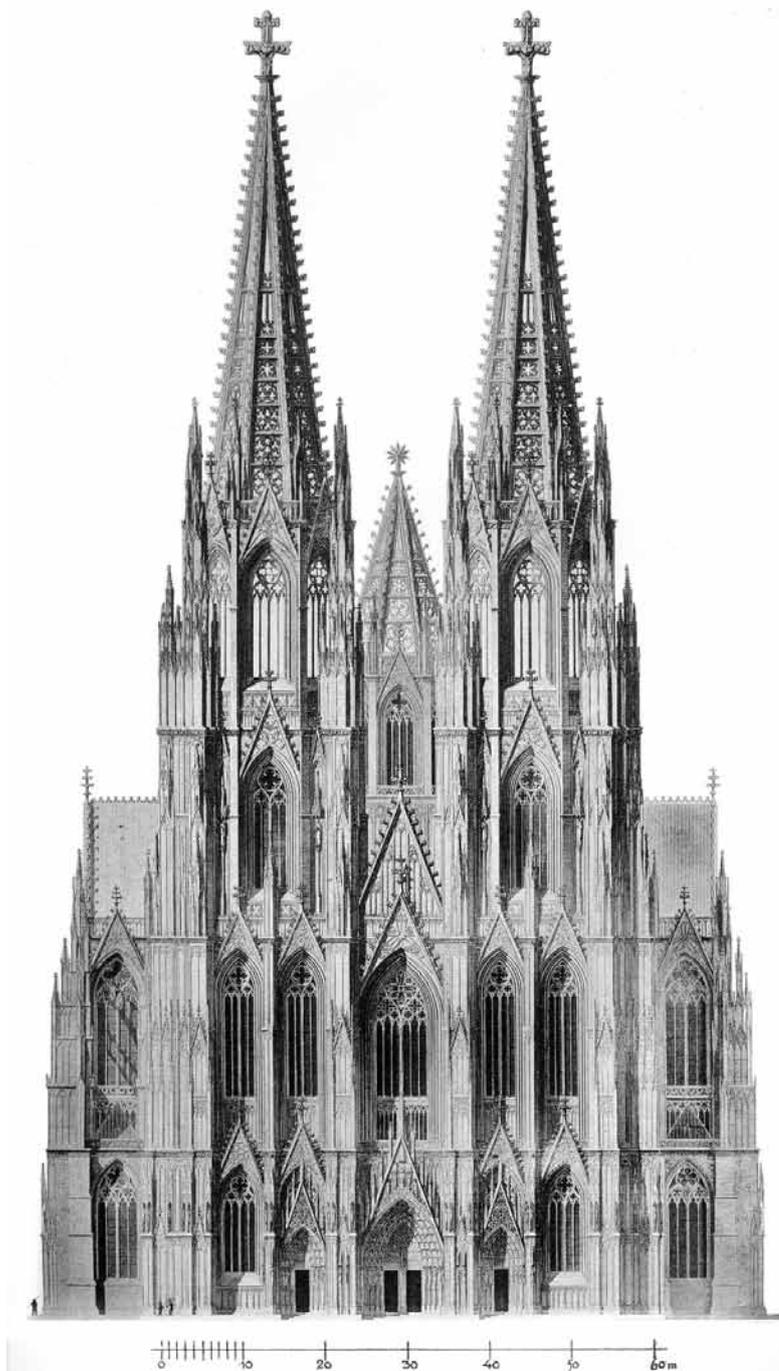
Readers will notice the somewhat inconsistent format,

depth and pace of the historical-critical investigation. The first of 12 chapters ('The Regional and the Classical Imperial') covers a period of 2000 years, considering Minoan and Mycenaean settlements and their increasing and decreasing horizons, the architectural representation of regional versus pan-Hellenic identity and the establishment of a 'centralised global order' under Augustus as it emerges in *De Architectura* by Vitruvius. The following brief chapter ('The First Regionalist Building-Manifesto') is dedicated to the next 1200 years, discussed almost exclusively in terms of a single building (the Casa dei Crescenzi in Rome). The very readable Chapters Three and Four ('A Flat Archipelago of Garden-Villas' and 'Consult the Genius of the Place in All') are more evidently based on theoretical texts and consider Italian and French precedent mainly from the Renaissance to the Age of Enlightenment and British precedent from the eighteenth century respectively. The increasing nationalisation of regionalist thinking after 1750 is well-documented and eruditely discussed in the following four chapters: ('From the Decorated Farm to the Rise of Nationalist Regionalism', 'From Regions to Nation', 'Gothic Communalism and Nationalist Regionalism' and 'Homelands, World Fairs, Living-Spaces, and the Regional Cottage') all of which rely equally on the

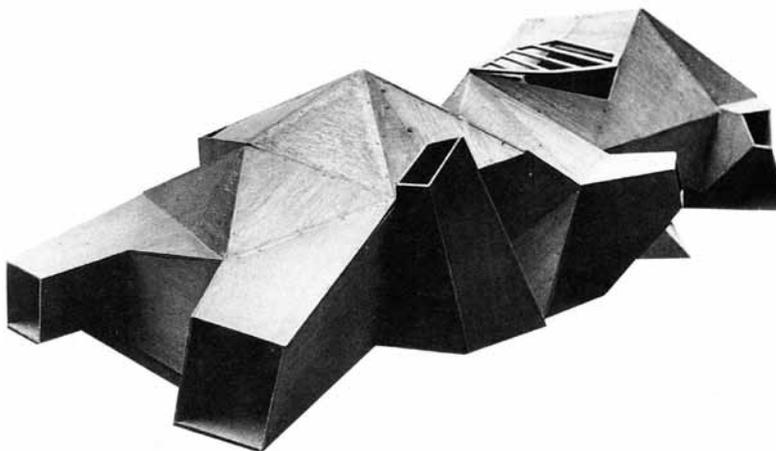
natural and built environment and their perception as well as the contribution of political and economic theory, philosophy and poetry. They describe the gradual adoption, if not usurpation, of regional phenomena for chauvinist purposes including the unholy alliances of the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century between regional architecture and racist theories. Chapter Nine ('International Style versus Regionalism'), Chapter Ten ('Regionalism Rising') and Chapter Eleven ('Regionalism Redefined') tell the fascinating story of the rather passionate debate about Modernism from the 1920s to the 1950s. A rich spectrum of illustrations such as Goeritz's diagrammatic sketches of his El Eco Experimental Museum in Mexico City, the first publication of Jean Prouvé's prototype for a *Maison Tropicale*, a study model of Correa's Hindustan Lever Pavilion in New Delhi and a perspective section of the Woh Hup Complex in Singapore make Chapter Ten not only the most diverse, but also by far the best-illustrated part of the book. Half of the final chapter (entitled 'Regionalism Now') has been dedicated to China, leaving the other half to cover the rest of the world. Here, the number of chosen precedents has reached a scale that leaves hardly enough space for the discussion of individual cases. In-depth study and analysis have been replaced by little more than an inventory of buildings, most of



2 Regional – but regionalist? The Acropolis at Pylos



3 'Building like the French do': Cologne Cathedral



4 Charles Correa, Hindustan Lever Pavilion, Delhi, 1961. Study model

which are neither described nor illustrated. Rather than being confronted with a catalogue of cases in the two post-war chapters, one would have liked to learn a few relevant details about one or two samples of regionalist architecture and urban design in the Western world as well as in the almost forgotten Eastern hemisphere during the decades of the Cold War. This might perhaps have included the East Berlin Stalinallee, often seen as Soviet-style architecture, but in fact a sample of manifest anti-Western, Neo-Classical and, more specifically, Prussian-inspired architecture with references to the buildings by Karl Friedrich Schinkel mirrored by 'Hanseatic' references in cities of the German Democratic Republic along the Baltic coast – a 'regionalist' approach par excellence.

Even more puzzling is the relative silence about the long period between Vitruvius and the writers of the Renaissance. Apart from considering the Casa dei Crescenzi and literally mentioning Charlemagne's Palace in Aachen and the Lateran Palace in Rome, there is no discussion about regionalism and globalism in Byzantine, Romanesque or Gothic architecture. This sits uncomfortably with the authors' universalist approach and can hardly be explained by a lack of sources. As a matter of fact, one can find evidence for 'globalist' and 'regionalist' perception and articulation from late Roman to late Medieval periods: for example, the well-known mausoleum for the Ostrogothic King Theoderic in Ravenna (AD 526) is reminiscent of imperial structures in Constantinople but it combines the 'globalist' architectural language appropriate for the quasi-equal representative of the East-Roman Emperor with Barbarian decoration that marks the regional Ostrogothic-Arianist presence; Speyer Cathedral was erected from 1030 as a Romanesque monument with a westwork to advertise imperial presence and 'globalist' ambition of the Salian dynasty; Rosslyn Chapel in Lothian (founded in 1446) imitates the quire of Glasgow Cathedral as a prototype of regional (national) significance that embeds a new structure in a manufactured 'regionalist' tradition; Cologne Cathedral, whose completion was inspired by nationalist sentiment in the nineteenth century, had been

founded at the height of the Rayonnant Gothic, a style that attracted regional and ethnic connotations, since it was referred to in contemporary written sources as *opus francigenum* (building like the French do) and Gerhard, the first master mason had indeed learned his ropes while working on French cathedrals. Competition between bishops, popes and emperors was one of the driving forces of building and building replacement throughout the Middle Ages. To characterise the relationship between Emperor and Pope with the constitutional term 'condominium' (p. 15) therefore appears unfortunate, since it neither takes into account the struggle between both powers – in particular over the investiture of bishops – nor the discrepancy, administrative as well as territorial, of their realm. Finally, with regards to the missing link between Antiquity and the Modern age, at least one regionalist comment from a writer of the Italian Renaissance about Medieval architecture would have been worth mentioning: in 1450 Filarete cursed Gothic architecture as foreign and inappropriate for Italy. In short, the coverage of the long period between Roman Antiquity and the Italian Renaissance appears less informed than the remainder of the book – in terms of absent, as well as presented, material.

A more fundamental question concerns the alleged dichotomy between regionalism and globalism and whether this can or cannot explain diverse issues in different periods and cultures. One may be tempted to take the book itself as proof that the bipolar model alone does not suffice – the text resorts to adding intermediate terms such as 'super-regional' to the vocabulary, in order to cope with obvious complexities. Buildings are indeed 'excellent devices to construct a fictional collective identity and encourage regionalist separatism'. Regionalism tends to have ethnic connotations since it involves communities of people who form an identity defined, at least partially, by regions and places. Differentiating the 'regional' and the 'regionalist' therefore poses a challenge. The Mycenaean site Pylos and, say, the simultaneous Bronze Age stilt house settlement in Lake Constance could not be more different in terms of materials, building techniques, structure, form and place-making and they

respond to very different environments. Both sites are unquestionable expressions of their regional contexts, but would it be plausible to detect in their design indications of an inherent 'regionalist' consciousness? Did regional builders not simply replicate and modify what they were acquainted with or did they indeed consciously align themselves with the regional tradition rather than adopting 'super-regional' influences that would advertise their universal horizon? It is difficult to establish this without written evidence. Potentially, all 'regional' architecture could be 'regionalist' architecture, depending on the intention of the architect. Is the term 'regionalist', one might ask, just a synonym of 'provincial'?

Be that as it may, the significance of Lefaivre's and Tzonis's new book lies in its ambition to prove the universal applicability of the alleged dichotomy. It is nothing less than a coherent theory and deserves recommendation as a worthwhile introduction to the universal history and theory of regionalist architecture. It will certainly draw attention to the global phenomenon of localism and the balance between distinctiveness and standardisation. Any future edition would benefit from a complete index – currently only a selection of people and buildings have been entered and the page references are incomplete. A further improvement would be the introduction of colour: the inspirational image of the clash between slum and new housing by Alfonso Reidy in Pedregulho needs colour in order to come to life; as for Yu Kongjian's powerful installation at Qinhuangdao, 'Red Ribbon on a Garbage Dump', the title makes its own argument.

*Michael Asselmeyer is an architect and historian. He studied in Münster, Bologna and Berlin and, among other posts, has been Site Architect at the Neues Museum, Berlin, with Julian Harrap Architects, and a Senior Urban Designer at the London Borough of Islington. He is a Senior Lecturer in Architecture at the University of Central Lancashire*



### **Georgian Architecture in the British Isles, 1714–1830**

By James Stevens Curl  
English Heritage, Swindon, 2011  
452 pp., 465 colour and mono illus.  
ISBN 978-1-84802-086-3  
£50.00 (hb)

*Reviewed by Giovanna Costantini*

The Georgian period – from the ascendancy of George I of Great Britain and Ireland in 1714 to the end of the reign of George IV of the United Kingdom and Hanover in 1830 – was a time foundational to the modern British nation, when interest in the social cohesion of the British Isles was accompanied by prolific theoretical debate and an architectural expression often regarded as the most accomplished in British architectural history. English Heritage's fine new edition of Curl's book (originally published by David & Charles, Newton Abbott, 1993) does it full justice, examining both the architecture and the cultural history of the British Isles; the size of the original text is doubled (from 224 to 452 pages), the scope extended to many new areas, the research brought up-to-date, and the whole enhanced by the addition of numerous high quality illustrations.

As a sweeping history of Georgian architecture, Curl's study explores in depth the dominant stylistic categorisations of the period: Palladianism, based on Inigo Jones' seventeenth-century interpretations of Renaissance Antiquity; the Second Palladian Revival of the eighteenth century, led by Lord Burlington, Colen Campbell's publication of *Vitruvius Britannicus* (1715–25) and Giacomo Leoni's *The Architecture of A. Palladio* (1715–20); contemporaneous eighteenth-century Romanticism, from the Castle Style and Gothic