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Review of *Sir William Chambers: Architect to George III*, edited by John Harris and Michael Snodin; *Catalogues of Architectural Drawings in the Victoria And Albert Museum: Sir William Chambers*, edited by Michael Snodin

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have been criticized as excessive and in poor taste: Erwin Panofsky did not exempt them when he wrote that after Gianlorenzo Bernini, tomb monuments suffered from pomposity, sentimentality, and deliberate archaism. But by now even the tombs of Genoa's late nineteenth-century Cimiterio di Staglieno have found advocates (see H. Hofstätter in *Kunstwerk* [January 1971], or J. S. Curl, "Europe's Grandest Cemetery?," *Country Life*, 15 September 1977). A reassessment of Roubiliac's monuments is thus in order.

Bindman and Baker begin from material facts and present a compelling account of the work of the leading master of a genre which rose to great prominence in mid-eighteenth-century England. They find that new prosperity and social pretensions formed the taste for such tombs, which were informed by contemporary ideas about death recorded in some of the most famous elegaic poetry in the English language, in mostly forgotten sermons, and in sublime oratorios, notably Handel's. The authors also inquire into the reasons for Roubiliac's success in this domain. An outstanding craftsman in marble, he was clever and efficient in piecing together the marble components of figures and setting, and able to finish surfaces beyond the local standard. Attention to lighting and settings were also important factors in Roubiliac's dominant position. It would be interesting to know how he planned overhead lighting, but the authors do not speculate about this.

Roubiliac rebuilt a chancel to accommodate the Montagu tombs at Warkton, with a plan for indirect lighting possibly based on central European models, which he would have known from a plausibly reconstructed Central European trip in his youth. Moreover, he designed ingenious supports for his figures. Among the most striking is a form used in the Duke of Montagu's monument that the authors compare to a German or Austrian stove. In the astounding Nightingale monument, a couple's rustic idyll, under the sheltering arch of a grotto, is cut fatally short when Death looms up suddenly from a crypt, coming from the bowels of Westminster Abbey to aim a deadly dart at the wife's breast. (Bindman discusses the latter monument most interestingly as a rare example of Evangelical-Methodist art.) A comparison with theater

is apt because of the dramatic *mise-en-scène*, and also Roubiliac's impresario-like manipulation of the public reception of his monuments.

The book is of methodological interest because the material benefits from the interplay of two approaches. Bindman, an academic art, cultural, and social historian, wrote the first half, which places Roubiliac in context and covers the problem of the tomb in eighteenth-century England, the career of Roubiliac compared with those of continental and English sculptors, and a thematic study of the imagery. In the second half, Baker, a historian of sculpture at the Victoria and Albert Museum, examines the working processes and, with Bindman and Tessa Murdoch, catalogues the monuments, drawings, and models. Dialogue and synergy between two viewpoints, consideration and reconsideration of the monuments in different contexts, and probing discussions of each work create a polyphonic structure that enriches our perceptions of individual monuments and the group as a whole.

An unexpected payoff is that, by isolating a class of monuments by a single, admittedly brilliant, cosmopolitan, and diverse sculptor working in England, the authors illuminate vitally important aspects of sculptural practice on the continent as well. Baker is able to show how Roubiliac's procedure of making a model of the whole monument, including the architectural support, which can be traced to his French training, allowed him to make adjustments in the spatial relations of figures with each other, with architectural components, and with the viewer. The single-figure studies of the Flemish-born and -trained Rysbraeck result in quite different spatial concepts and less subtlety in the placement of figures than Roubiliac could achieve. Another enlightening contrast is with models for sculpture on the Town Hall of Amsterdam, in which Netherlandish sculptors squared the models for enlargement, without taking the intervening step of making full-scale plaster models to set in the intended places to judge of the effect. French and Italian practice included the making of such full-size models, which allowed adjustments to be made.

It is currently a commonplace to debunk "national styles" as ideologically loaded inventions of modern art histori-

ans. By making us aware that working methods account for significant aesthetic differences in the works of sculptors of different nations, Bindman and Baker open the door to a new understanding of that neglected stepchild, architectural sculpture.

— Betsy Rosasco
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John Harris and Michael Snodin, editors
SIR WILLIAM CHAMBERS: ARCHITECT TO GEORGE III
New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997, ix+ 240 pp., 287 illus., 76 in color. \$55.00 (cloth). ISBN 0-300-06940-5.

Michael Snodin, editor
CATALOGUES OF ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS IN THE VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM: SIR WILLIAM CHAMBERS

London: V&A Publications, 1996, 224 pp., 103 illus., 9 in color. £50 (cloth). ISBN 1-85177-182-4.

Sir William Chambers has never been forgotten. The early nineteenth-century plates in William Pyne, *History of the Royal Residences* (London, 1819) and the records of William Sandby, *History of the Royal Academy of Arts* ([London, 1862], 1: 115) acknowledge his official position in the Royal Academy and extensive work on royal residences. The account of his life and works in the later *Dictionary of National Biography* (vol. 4 [1887], 26) was at once respectful and comprehensive, even if the author, the connoisseur Cosmo William Monkhouse, was prepared to cite the critical remarks of James Fergusson in his *History of Modern Styles of Architecture* (London, 1862, 4: 323) and voice a certain hesitancy about the range and extent of what he referred to as Chambers's architectural imagination. In recent years more has been written; an unpublished thesis in 1949 by Heather Martienssen; a chapter, shared with Robert Adam, in John Summerson's great history of English architecture; a monograph by John Harris. And Howard Colvin's growing inventory of buildings and designs registers the remarkable expansion in the record of Chambers's work in architecture and kindred activities, including furniture, interiors, and designs for silver and clocks.

Yet, for all this attention, Chambers's place in the history of architecture is not fixed, or, like Somerset House, it has to be ever discovered and rediscovered. As Summerson observed, Chambers was a professional man, "conservative, balanced and civilised," conducting a well-regulated business (*Architecture in Britain 1530–1830*, 6th rev. ed. [London, 1977], 424). And, however partial or acrimonious he was to his colleagues, his work to establish the social position of the architect within the Royal Academy was of immense importance for the profession, both during his lifetime and later. Extraordinarily well traveled for his time, he had an association with the Swedish East India Company that took him from Cape Town and Bengal to Canton and Madras. And thanks to studies in France and Italy and his friendship and work with architects Charles de Wailly, C. L. Clérisseau, and Carl Fredrick Aldecranz, he was remarkably well versed in the traditions of architecture; as Nikolaus Pevsner put it in *Buildings of England: London* (vol. 1 [London, 1957], 332), Chambers had a truer understanding of Franco-Italian Renaissance architecture than any of his contemporaries, certainly than any in England. Passion he felt, but it often seems stifled, only to burst out in disgust at the Incorporated Society of Artists or the *Gusto Greco*. And he seems to have had singular ill timing in the positions he took up in matters of taste, criticizing Capability Brown when Brown had won the day, supporting rococo when its time was past, and attempting to thwart the influence of Abbé Laugier when architecture as a whole was moving toward Laugier's functionalism. Pevsner noted that if the style of Somerset House was essentially academic, it also contained an interest, if well concealed, in the unacademic. More commonly Chambers's works are described as having no fault, except, as an anonymous critic wrote in the *Times Literary Supplement* (17 December 1971, 1535), "they do not warm the heart" and that had been "a severe drawback to the architect's posthumous general reputation."

In different ways the volumes under review mark the two hundredth anniversary of Chambers's death in 1797. With wonderful appropriateness, an exhibition of work was held in 1996 at the Courtauld Gallery in Somerset House in some of the very rooms, newly refurbished, that Cham-

bers himself had designed for the Royal Academy (reviewed in *JSAH* 56 [1997]: 212–214). The first volume, edited by John Harris and Michael Snodin, commemorates and comments upon the material included in the exhibition: portraits, travel sketches, architectural drawings, designs for silver and furniture and various other objects that were part of Chambers's vast practice. After a general introduction by Harris, fifteen chapters cover many aspects of Chambers's life: his contacts with Sweden and his work at Svartsjö and Ulriksdal, the designs for the royal gardens being discovered only in 1993; his studies in Italy and France; his excursions into various types of buildings; his interiors; his interest in silver and ceramic and furniture; his professional relationships with craftsmen like John Yenn and Matthew Boulton and the many sculptors, silversmiths, gilders, and carvers whose work, as a part of his interior decoration, he had to supervise. Most striking, if perhaps not entirely typical of his decorative works, is the rococo design for the royal state coach, used still, done with the carver John Wilton and Giovanni Battista Cipriani, both of whom Chambers knew from years earlier in Rome.

The essays are well written, detailed, and interesting; those that stand out are the accounts by John Newman of Somerset House and the other public buildings Chambers designed, the analysis by Robin Middleton of Chambers's treatise on civil architecture, and the brief account by Giles Worsley of his architectural designing, an important topic yet difficult for us now to unravel since we know so little of the organization of Chambers's architectural office. The plates, many in color, are full of interest; it is especially useful to have a visual record of the buildings now demolished, like Gower House, Whitehall, or Chambers's own house at 56 Berners Street, London, or altered beyond recognition, like the interiors of Charlemont House, Dublin, or those at Buckingham Palace. At the end of the volume are a checklist of the items in the exhibition, some 233 in all, a chronology of the life of Chambers, a bibliography, and notes to the articles. Only an index is missing.

The second volume is of a different order. It is the fifth in a series of catalogues of drawings in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, following earlier volumes on Robert Adam, A. W. Pugin, Sir John

Soane, and John Pollard Seddon. A series of essays lay out, clearly and interestingly, the history of the collection and how it was assembled. The inventory covers some 864 drawings, by or after Chambers, running from those of his earliest student days in the 1750s to later sketches for Somerset House, Kew Gardens, and many other projects, some not identifiable. Perhaps the most suggestive and interesting item is the so-called Franco-Italian album of 525 drawings, 507 by Chambers, which date from his years of study in Italy and France between 1749 and 1755 and which stand, as Janine Barrier suggests, as one of the major documents of early European neoclassicism. The loose sheets are a mixed bunch: copies after familiar older Italian designs, many of course by Palladio, plus a predictable range of Roman palaces—the Chigi, Farnese, Massimo, and Spada. Beyond one or two designs for theaters, the only post-seventeenth-century building drawn is S. Maria dei Gradi at Viterbo, by Nicola Salvi, one of the few contemporary architects Chambers admired. Plans outnumber facades, reflecting what is termed the influence on Chambers of the interest of French *pensionnaires* in theoretical planning. There are batches of designs for Charlemont, the Casino at Marino, and especially Somerset House, the subject of forty-one drawings, including an interesting early scheme for the riverfront and many sketches of interior decorations. As we would expect, most of these drawings were prepared not by Chambers himself but by assistants in his office.

All the drawings in the collections are treasures. But it is also striking that enough drawings of various kinds have survived, as the authors of the catalogue point out, to reconstruct the stages in the design process Chambers devised. The rough sketch of Marino House, Dublin, done on the inside of an envelope, is clearly by Chambers himself. There is an instance of what can be called contract drawings: two sheets of designs for the elevations of Peper Harrow House, Surrey, produced by Chambers's office and dated and signed by both Chambers and his patron, the third Viscount Middleton. There are also many finished drawings, some for the approval of clients, others to gain clients or for public exhibition at the Society of Arts or the Royal Academy. Unlike the practice of

Adam, Chambers employed the same techniques in his drawings of interiors and exteriors. In some of most interesting drawings, carried out in pure watercolor, ceilings are shown in what the authors refer to as a partial and picturesquely ruined sketch, a technique Chambers first used to record remains in Italy and abandoned shortly after his return to England.

Yet the character of Chambers's work is limited. He raised the general quality of draftsmanship in England, but seems to have done little to work with the new techniques appearing in the offices of some contemporaries; record drawings, perspectives, the use of colors to depict different materials. Despite a vast amount of work, the organization of his office seems not to have been notably methodical or standardized. Worsley considers the use of drawings in his office, compared to that of Adam or Robert Mylne, relatively unsubtle; very few drawings are signed or numbered or dated, and very few are of a standard size. This practice seems to have changed with Somerset House. Here a new vigor can be seen in the way Chambers used drawings to control the processes of design; as the authors of the Victoria and Albert Museum catalogue say, we can see his extensive reliance on office assistance to work through the designs, some of these, especially from John Yenn, being of a very high quality, imitating the style of Chambers in both the techniques of drawing and the style of the

inscriptions. Yenn, it is interesting to note, was appointed Clerk of the Works at Somerset House in 1776 and after that he held a number of posts on the Office of Works. In the introduction the editors remark that many of the drawings by Yenn are in an album, then attributed to James Paine, purchased in 1863 from Bernard Quaritch. The others came from varied sources: the Franco-Italian album was bought in 1868; the loose drawings from about 1860 onward through a firm, E. Paris and Sons, located near the Victoria and Albert Museum; others from the architect C. J. Richardson, who worked for many years with Sir John Soane, suggesting that some of what was assembled may once have been owned by Soane himself. Another set of drawings was purchased in 1910 from J. Starkie Gardner, an art metalworker; there are a remarkable number of drawings by or attributed to Yenn, and the authors of the catalogue suggest that these may all have come from a source other than Chambers himself. The volume includes an appendix of drawings in the Franco-Italian album by artists other than Chambers, a bibliography, and an index.

These two volumes provide a striking amount of material for an accounting of Chambers's work and his place in the history of English architecture. What conclusions can we draw? Of his professionalism, there are no doubts, despite the some-

times confused details of his practice, but there may still be questions about his taste and imagination. Fergusson was prepared to admire the Strand side of Somerset House but considered the scale of the riverfront beyond Chambers's abilities; his imagination "could rise no higher than the conception of a square and unpoetic mass" (*History of the Modern Styles of Architecture*, 4: 323). Perhaps we will agree with Summerson's judgment that the design failed to give a total impression "either of magnitude or magnificence," but the details, as he notes, are often extraordinary (*Architecture in Britain*, 420). Cars still impede the view of the central courtyard, but despite these distractions the quality of the stucco and stonework is immediately evident. Chambers was above all else a great synthesizer and borrower. Perhaps, as J. Mordaunt Crook has said, much of what is here comes from elsewhere—from Vignola, the Farnese Palace or the Louvre, A. J. Gabriel and Jacques-Germain Soufflot (*Times Literary Supplement*, 8 Nov. 1995, 9). But in the end there is nothing in London like the riverfront—a view now best seen from trains making their slow way to London Bridge Station—and we can only be grateful that by a recent agreement, the British government will lease the building to a new trust which will restore Somerset House to its former glory, inside and out.

— David Cast
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SACRED SPACE

William Tronzo

**THE CULTURES OF HIS KINGDOM:
ROGER II AND THE CAPPELLA PALATINA
IN PALERMO**

Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997, xviii + 280 pages, 162 illus., 10 in color. \$69.50 (cloth). ISBN 0-691-02580-0.

The Cappella Palatina in Palermo stands among the greatest ensembles of medieval architecture and interior embellishment—floors, walls, ceiling, and furnishings—to have come down to the modern world, rivaled in its integrity only by the likes of Chartres cathedral and, more on its own scale, the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris. Just as

the Sainte-Chapelle was built by Louis IX as part of an enveloping royal residence, so the chapel at Palermo was one unit within the grandiose Palermitan palace from which the Norman kings—perhaps even before the time of Roger II, the chapel's original patron—reigned over the changing fortunes of their south Italian and Sicilian kingdom. The Cappella Palatina is hardly a neglected monument; its bibliography is significant. Yet until now no scholar has attempted a unified analysis of the constituent parts of the chapel. William Tronzo is to be congratulated for his comprehensive treatment of the subject and his method.

The volume is divided into four appropriately unequal chapters. Chapter 1, "The Ensemble: '... *et ornamentis variis ditavit* ...,'" sets the stage for the subsequent analysis by locating the physical place of the chapel within its urban and palatial setting, the general chronological frame of its construction, and the tradition of scholarship it has engendered. Chapter 2, "New Dates and Contexts for the Decorations and Furnishings of the Chapel," is the analytical core of the book. Here the various sections of the building's embellishment are studied from an almost archaeological point of view in an attempt to understand some of their most characteris-