

## The barriers of banking

Frandsen, Ann-Christine; McGoun, Elton G

*License:*

None: All rights reserved

*Document Version*

Peer reviewed version

*Citation for published version (Harvard):*

Frandsen, A-C & McGoun, EG 2019, 'The barriers of banking', *Bulletin: newsletter from the EABH*, vol. 3.

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

### General rights

Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

- Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
- Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
- User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of 'fair dealing' under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
- Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

### Take down policy

While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact [UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk](mailto:UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk) providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.

# **The Barriers of Banking**

Ann-Christine Frandsen  
Reader in Accounting  
Birmingham Business School  
University of Birmingham

Elton G. McGoun  
William H. Dunkak Professor of Finance  
Freeman College of Management  
Bucknell University

Address correspondence to:

Ann-Christine Frandsen  
a.frandsen@bham.ac.uk

# The Barriers of Banking

## Abstract

Bank architecture has always been about *barriers*, both material and immaterial, and in both respects, we argue here, structuring our ways of thinking about wealth and money. This paper offers an approach to addressing bank architecture as a whole, from its origins in ancient Mesopotamia (Frandsen and McGoun, 2019) to its current manifestations in such forms as financial markets and on the Internet. In doing so the paper conceptualizes wealth moving as constantly labile as well as stable, constituting ever-moving ranges of value positions that maintain both stability in accounting statements and an ability to adjust them across time and space. Two functions can be identified for the barrier, in each of which the barrier also operates as a *threshold*. First the physical barrier is the material means to enclosing the physical manifestations and embodiments of wealth of a given era, keeping danger out while allowing initiates, e.g. those who guard and use that wealth, in. Second the immaterial barrier guarantees that the archives in which wealth as measured via money of account to present themselves as an accurate record of the bank's current wealth and of the current claims and uses of that wealth. This paper explores illustrates how physical and 'psychological' barriers interact in three different times and places—ancient Mesopotamia, 19<sup>th</sup> century America, and the 21<sup>st</sup> century Internet. It thereby seeks to open up the possibility of seeing continuities as well as differences in the long-term development of bank architecture. In that regard it seeks to suggest that bank architecture continues to form barriers as thresholds in both material and immaterial ways even in the case of 21<sup>st</sup> century banking.

# The Barriers of Banking

## I. Introduction

Although historical studies of bank architecture have produced excellent analyses of individual structures or the collected structures of specific eras, it is uncommon to find examinations of how underlying broader social, political, and economic forces have interacted to generate the observable architectural outcomes over longer periods of time.

McGoun (2004) proposed that noteworthy banks in the past which deviated from the familiar *architectural styles* of their times did so in order to signal that they did not practice the familiar *banking* of their times, in most cases serving groups that most contemporary banks eschewed. Frandsen et. al. (2013) hypothesized that the post-WWII abandonment of classical and monumental stone edifices in favor of modern glass and steel ones resulted from a change in the perceptions and forms of money driving a change in the services customers expected from their banks. That is, money, as coins and notes, was not something to be locally secured and stored and to prevent losses but translated into new forms of money of accounts statements that could travel easily and be released into the global financial network of opportunity of investments to pursue gains and intensified by the notion and perception of time is money. In turn, this meant banks adopting a new architectural style to signal that customers could trust that their banks were providing the new services. Is it possible, however, to identify some of the common features that have shaped bank architecture throughout history and how they have done so more widely and not only in such relatively specific circumstances?

This paper draws on a re-conceptualization of accounting as statement rather than practice, from its first appearance in Mesopotamia, form (Bassnett et al, 2018), and on recent work (Frandsen and McGoun, 2019) which has looked in the light of this value' the 25th century BCE could be understood as a continuation or extension of the resource allocation activities of earlier forms of 'sovereign/ruler power' embodied in practices undertaken with the earliest 'units of account' for grain. For grain was accounted for in mathematically regularized measures using standard volume containers (each containing one *khar* in the Mesopotamian system). Thus

there was a stable 'use value' of *'khar'*-denominated grain units, known to all who produced and accounted for this commodity, which thus became the measure of rations or resources 'paid' both to agricultural and non-agricultural state workers, and duly accounted for in the state's labour accounts. Thus 'use value' was remade as 'exchange value' which then became the means of valuing other commodities and for putting an agreed value on bilateral contractual arrangements. This form of exchange valuing precedes but also makes possible the constitution of money as 'money of account' (Keynes, 1930; cf. Peacock, 1930). Thus this first form of accounting is also increasingly recognized not as a 'proto-writing' but writing as such, given how it produced both accounting and monetary statements before 3,000 BCE, and did so at least 5 centuries before the earliest records of narrative forms of writing (Nissen, Damerow, & Englund, 1993; Damerow, 1999or). Accounting already produced, as it still does today, non-narrative statements which 'name and count' objects, as the precondition for accounting then functioning as 'calculative technology' (e.g. Miller and Napier, 1993). Through these statements it constructed equivalence relations between such mathematically regularized objects as units of grain, and later measured amounts of precious metals, so producing accounting-based value statements which could then take material form as 'deposits' of precious metals, jewels, or other material assets, which then needed to be stored and guarded in safe places. Typically these would be defensible and well-constructed state edifices, such as a temple or store house within a walled compound or citadel.

This initial history is an important key to understanding the subsequent history of bank architecture across its many architectural changes. Wealth in one respect should be seen as the constant labile /stable value positions as already expressed in the accounting statements articulated in the era before narrative forms of writing. But confidence in such statements began to be transmitted to those outside or beyond the material barriers of a bank building through the depositing of material expressions of wealth out of sight to such outsiders but signalled as present to them through the massive and enduring external façade of 'the banking edifice', in the form of 'storehouses' or 'treasure houses'. But such barriers were also thresholds, across which those involved in both governing the state and pursuing the state's mercantile or commercial objectives could pass in order to access and use measured amounts of that wealth. Thus there was an architectural involvement with resource protection and allocation from outsiders, either as the *oikos* such as the God protected city-states, or and as the different spaces of the temples where

some spaces are more sacred than others. But at the same time, the treasure house became one potent form of signaling the power and prestige of the 'sovereign'/'ruler' and 'sovereign state'.

Hence the point being made here is that physical barriers as well as ways of thinking about banking and wealth, can be seen a form of barriers, and in this context about keeping the right people inside and the wrong people outside of banking, in an ongoing architectural physical structur-*ing*. From this conceptualizing two functions can be identified as producing outcomes of barriers; (i) the means in having the physical manifestations and embodiment of wealth, (ii) the ability to *know* the current wealth position and the current claims and usages of that wealth.

We propose that bank architecture has always been about *barriers* and offers an approach to addressing the whole of bank architecture from its genesis in ancient Mesopotamia to its current manifestations. As addressed in McGoun (2004), banks have always had to deter the “wrong” sorts of people (and encourage the “right” sorts of people) behind some sort of ‘psychological’ barrier – a barrier of ways of thinking and acting. The following sections illustrate how the varying demands for physical barriers and ‘psychological’ barriers further an understanding of bank architecture in three different times and places—ancient Mesopotamia (Section II), 19<sup>th</sup> century America (Section III), and the 21<sup>st</sup> century Internet (Section IV)—which combine to tell a greater story regarding the long-term evolution of bank architecture.

## II. Barriers (?) in Ancient Mesopotamia

It is somewhat remarkable that the world’s earliest narrative written records concern lending at interest in ancient Mesopotamia<sup>1</sup>. The creditors named in those records can be broadly grouped into two categories, private persons and public officials, administrators, or agents. The private persons were often merchants or family businesses who loaned silver out of their personal capital. Other private lenders were wealthy women who engaged in such lending in order to augment their dowries. The public officials or administrators, as agents of a “temple” or

---

<sup>1</sup> While , interest was well established in royal inscriptions by 2400 BC loan contracts was rare (van de Mieroop 2002, pp.62-64). Between 2000-1600BCE is where we find that clay loan contracts as the most common text (van De Mieroop, 2005 p. 20; Skaits 1994 p.11)

“palace”—the contemporary structures do not necessarily conform to the current usages of those terms—loaned silver and other commodities out of the resources of the temple or palace. Although the *private* persons were not “bankers”, lending with interest not being their primary business and their not taking deposits in order to do so, it is nonetheless accurate to describe them as performing a banking function. On the other hand, whether the *public* officials of the temples and palaces were performing a banking function when they made loans with interest is more difficult to ascertain, given the features of their lending that are uncharacteristic of banking: they loaned commodities, they charged constant—and differential—interest rates on silver and barley loans (that is, not risk-adjusted and not responsive to changing supply and demand), and they made other loans without interest.

That their lending does not resemble “banking” in the modern sense of the term is not so surprising, given that it was mainly for governing and allocation of resources rather than commercial objectives per se. Temples and palaces made commodity loans because these were the resources they had available to them from tithes and from tax payments and from the income and proceeds from their properties and business ventures (Bromberg, 1942; Harris, 1960).<sup>2</sup> As Hudson has argued, such loans were not only the effective way of ensuring that farmers had the resources necessary for cultivating crops or managing animal herds, but also minimized the likelihood of default and permanent indebtedness (Hudson and Van de Mierop 2002, Hudson and Wunsch 2004). A better way to understand these practices as a form of banking is to see it as an extension of early forms of the accounting specified above, an accounting which specified a readable ‘stable’ use-value, which then came to function as an exchange value providing an equivalence between commodities in store at any given time, manifested in store among commodities of various kinds and therefore a knowing of any excess in place. And at this point in time BCE 2500ff trading of commodities, accounting functioned as a ‘money of account’ as a numeraire, store of value (in the treasure house) and means of exchange. Mesopotamia during 2500-1600 BC is a place where we will find not only loan contracts, but also complex interplay of non-narrative writing such accounting, and narrative writing, oikos the city, standard measures of weights, volume and time (Nissen et al. 1993). They are part of the God motivated city-states, run

---

<sup>2</sup> There is little evidence that temples in ancient Mesopotamia took deposits, although temples at other places in antiquity did do so. (Bromberg, 1942)

by rulers and administrators in temples and palaces, and in particular running re-distribution systems of crops and products and long distance trade (Hudson and Van de Mieroop 2002, Hudson and Wunsch 2004, Nissen et al. 1993; Peacock 2013; Wengrow 2010).

The manifested commodities of defined different values were now in a space, and if there were no immediate use for them, and especially if there were the possibility that they would deteriorate, and value, it made sense to lend them out but also to make space for other commodities. If interest were charged this would also have augmented them, and would have converted them to a more liquid form if repayment were to be made in silver (as expressed in accounting statements). Loans without interest or with food offerings to the god in lieu of interest, which were made to borrowers in difficult financial straits, served a charitable purpose for the temples and a welfare purpose for the palaces.<sup>3</sup> (Harris, 1960). However, it is worth noticing that while, interest was well established in royal inscriptions by 2400 BC it was still rare within loan contracts (van de Mieroop 2002, pp.62-64). In understanding barriers in this context of who to keep inside and outside it is important to remember that these structures, even outside the space for God appearance and offerings, and the temples outer walls were part of a bigger plan. As Frankfort points out, the city in itself was the means to an end of man serving the city God. (p.5). The city was owned by the Gods, and all its labored citizens was there to serve service the gods and be protected from enemies and natural disasters by the steward of the King, (F p.22). The obligation and morality of producing goods and feedings the gods could then explain the stockpiling of asses in temples (Wengrov, 2010:98) rather from a pure economic argument. Or as Wengrove (2010: 31) argue, it was their relation with the gods, integrated into most aspects of their lives that made this society so special. And it is form this view point knowing the wealth as expressed in accounting statements and manifestation in store is to be understood as underpinning the barriers in place.

However, temple loans were rarely made just by officials of the temple, however. They were usually made jointly with the god of the temple and often by the god as sole creditor. A god

---

<sup>3</sup> Interest-free loans were also made to what appear to have been VIPs, which is of course not unheard of nowadays. (Price, 1916; Bromberg, 1942)



might also witness the loan or sponsor the business transaction for which the loan was being made. (Bromberg, 1942; Harris, 1960) This too is not so surprising, as the tithes being loaned would certainly have belonged to the god. Somewhat more surprising is that the loans made by private persons very often had some association with the temple and/or with the god. The aforementioned female lenders were even called priestesses of the temple, although Bromberg (1942) considers “priestess” to have been an honorary title given to distinguished women who were not residents of the temple and these loans to have been purely private transactions. Loans made by merchants might include the god as a partner and joint creditor. (Harris, 1960) This all suggests that lending with interest in ancient Mesopotamia, which at least in *some* circumstances had *some* characteristics of a banking function, was not largely associated with temples and palaces simply because that was where the capital was in the form of tithes and tax receipts. For some reason, something about the *structure*, or at least the *place*, mattered. Although there were no “banks” at the time in any modern sense of the term, there *was* an association between banking functions and architecture in the second millennium B.C.E.

As tenuous as the association might have been, it was sufficient for there to have been considerable enthusiasm at one time to use the term “bank” in reference to ancient Mesopotamian temples. “In financial or monetary transactions the position of the Babylonian temples was not unlike that of national banks; they carried on their business with all the added weight of official authority.” (Jastrow, 1911/1971, page 277) The temple of Šamaš at Sippar, which has perhaps the strongest association with loan contracts of any structure, was labeled “the first bank in the world” in an article in 1897. (Bromberg, 1942) Price (1916) was especially effusive: “[The temple] was probably the largest and most successful, because best-regulated, banking establishment in the land.” (*Ibid.*, page 253); “[The temple] was the banking-house of the community.” (*Ibid.*, page 253); “Probably the most profitable division of the temple activities was its banking business.” (*Ibid.*, page 254); and “[The temples were] the leading loan and trust companies of the first Babylonian dynasty.” (*Ibid.*, page 257) Much later, Harris (1960) too makes a similar, albeit more tempered, assertion: “. . . the prominent role played by the temple as a kind of bank” (*Ibid.*, page 126) and “Furthermore, the very fact that so many temples are found in the role as creditor is reason enough to assume that temples must have had the resources to act as banks.” (*Ibid.*, page 126) It isn’t “reason enough”; this is clearly hyperbole, as the preceding discussion of the banking

functions performed in temples has argued. Yet Šamaš was the “sun-god and lord of justice and righteousness” (Bromberg, 1942, page 77) and overseer of the standardization of measures and interest rates, so it was no coincidence that so much lending with interest—he is the creditor in more than 80% of the temple loans—would have occurred under his auspices. (Harris, 1960)<sup>4</sup> He “assumed in the tradition of the people the role of the creditor par excellence.” (*Ibid.*, page 128)

While ancient Mesopotamian temples are one of the earliest expressions of monumental architecture serving to represent the grandeur of its patrons and banking over subsequent centuries was usually undertaken in similarly prominent structures, two less striking features are also relevant to the history of the architecture of banking: (1) The temples were in fact complexes of buildings which included many modest structures surrounding a more dramatic one and (2) The ground plan at the heart of the temple was that of a Mesopotamian house, as the temple was the home of the god. In ancient Mesopotamia, the “temple” was not just a sacred place for religious observance, as we would envision a temple today. It was also a wealthy administrative and economic institution that was involved in a wide range of activities. (Silver, 1995) Bromberg (1942) describes the temples as not only “religious centers, law courts, and archive depositories” but also “banks and mercantile establishments.” (*Ibid.*, page 77) They manufactured textiles and were engaged in the commercial production of agricultural products. (*Ibid.*) Therefore, a “temple” then would have included what we call “courthouses,” “office buildings,” “warehouses,” and “factories,” and outside the core religious precinct, these auxiliary structures would not have been at all architecturally distinguished.<sup>5</sup>

As the temple was the home of the god, making a contract such as a loan in his (or occasionally *her*) presence provided some assurance that the parties to the contract would execute it honestly. This is why Šamaš, the lord of justice and righteousness, was an especially popular overseer. Silver (1995) assembles what he admits is circumstantial evidence, largely

---

<sup>4</sup> The moon-god Sin is the next most frequent creditor. The gods Tutub, Bel-gašer, Ninšubur and Išarpadda and goddesses Inanna Kitītum, Ištar, Gula, Ninlil, Ninegal, Inanna of Zabalam, and Aja (the consort of Šamaš) are also creditors. (Harris, 1960)

<sup>5</sup> This was also true of palaces. According to Pruessner (1928), “palace” was a metonymic reference to “the administration of the royal domains” (*Ibid.*, page 93) He describes both temples and palaces as “the great business establishments of the country” and “the owners of large landed estates.” (*Ibid.*)

derived from the layout of temples throughout the ancient world other than Mesopotamia, for loans being made in a temple literally in sight of the god. “. . . [I]t is likely that on occasion contracts were formed in front of a temple gate or window through which the statue of a god or goddess was visible.”<sup>6</sup> (*Ibid.*, page 12) “. . . [I]n some instances at least, Babylonian temples had doors on their short sides through which the statue of a god was visible from the courtyard.” (*Ibid.*, page 13)

It is frequently asserted that “banking” occurred in ancient temples because of their physical impregnability that would have safeguarded assets deposited there. Some slight evidence exists that merchants deposited valuables in Babylonian temples around this time (Silver, 1995), but there is no evidence that deposits were taken for the purpose of making loans. According to Badawy (1966), the temple was not only the home of the god, but “. . . the city as a ‘fortress’ of a god or a king is clearly implied, at least since the First Dynasty of Babylon, in such names as Kar-Ilu-Šamaš (“Fortress of Šamaš) . . .” (*Ibid.*, Page 112) We cannot be certain, however, whether the purpose of the fortifications was to protect the wealth, whether the wealth accumulated where there were fortifications, or whether the wealth and the fortifications coincided for unrelated reasons.

The association in ancient Mesopotamia between temples and banking in the form of lending with interest might be because this was where the wealth of the community had accumulated in the form of tithes, because this was a permanent, public location known to everyone and able to accommodate a relatively large scale of trading activity, or because this was a physically secure location where one could trade valuable commodities without fear of theft. It is more likely, however, that it was because this was a morally secure location, where one could trade with reduced fear of being cheated. In specific terms of barriers, temples/palaces did have secure storage facilities, but these were not clearly associated in any way with their banking functions, other than the aforementioned expediency of lending commodities in order to minimize storage costs. And their imposing physical features do not appear to have been intended to prevent anyone from entering; these were expressions of the glory of god along with being public places where much of the commerce of the community occurred.

---

<sup>6</sup> He quotes two loan contracts that call for repayment “at the gate of the cloister” or “at the opening of the lattice” and interprets this as “. . . a manifestation of a widely diffused practice, the taking of commercial oaths before windows framing the image of a goddess.” (Silver, 1995, page 15)

Most likely, the “wrong” sorts of people, that is, those without property to trade let alone to lend, would not have considered entering the precincts of a temple/palace, or at least the more distinguished areas where lending transactions were negotiated. It would have been understood that they didn’t belong there, although they might have been permitted in the areas where their labor would have been required to manufacture products or move goods around. The differential access between the areas would have been unequivocally signaled by the architecture, which was more magnificent in the proscribed places than the places that they would have needed to enter, although such signals were unlikely to have been necessary. Although one might argue that belief was also a barrier, every resident of the city would likely have subscribed to the single religion served by the temple and would have expected to worship there. The reason that subsequent banks often resembled temples was not because temple architecture possessed the barriers required by banks but because features of temple architecture could serve as the barriers which dedicated banks required.

### III. Classical Barriers in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> America

But still the principal force of grandeur in architecture is *association*, by which the columns suggest ideas of strength and durability, and the whole structure introduces the sublime ideas of the riches and magnificence of the owner. (Gerard, 1780, Part I, Section II, Page 21)

“Strength” and “durability” are descriptors still used over a century later by early twentieth-century architects to describe classicist bank architecture. They describe the physical barriers to whatever forces threaten the customer’s funds held inside. On the other hand, the assertion that classical architecture has a social role expressing the “riches and magnificence of the owner,” while more or less implied by those twentieth-century architects,<sup>7</sup> would have sounded too arrogant were they to have stated it so explicitly. This social role comes as no surprise. “Classical culture was once a temple at which we worshipped and our entry into it frequently confirmed our own cultural worth.” (Wyke and Biddiss, 1999, page 13) Furthermore:

---

<sup>7</sup> “. . . the bank seeks to elevate and maintain [the highest ideals] in the business and social life of the community. . . . Such in brief is the distinguished position of counselor and friend which the bank has come to occupy in the community.” (Hopkins, 1922, page 1)

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries classical columns, particularly in the form of a portico, were associated with the highest social values, and had been used both for the great houses of the aristocracy and for great civic buildings. Their message was appropriated by the new industrial plutocracy for their own houses, and for the new banks and commercial offices which were springing up. (DeLaine, 1999, page 149)

One might easily conclude, then, that from the late eighteenth, through the early twentieth, any individual, business, organization, or government with the financial wherewithal to afford it would prefer a classicist structure in order to claim “cultural worth,” “the highest social values,” “secular achievement,” and “civic power.” Although it would not have been put so bluntly, classicist architecture was a barrier against those not having the cultural capital—and *financial* capital—to behave appropriately inside.

This is somewhat oversimplified, though, and there is a more nuanced story. Classicism has been influential in the United States since the late eighteenth century and continues to be present in certain places today. But as different bits and pieces of classicism have dropped into and out of popular culture, the public meanings of classicism (that is, its connotations and denotations formed through the public’s *associations*) have undergone continual change. And its meanings have manifested themselves in different ways. (Malamud, 2009) This is certainly true too of classicist architecture. In its first wave in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the emerging United States imported *fashionable* classicism from Europe, and in its second wave in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the rising United States shared *imperial* classicism with Europe. Both waves (virtual tidal waves) featured classicist banks. These then gracefully—or not so gracefully—aged, and few new ones were built. Not coincidentally, this timeline roughly corresponds to the presence of classicism within American culture. During the first wave, the classics were the core of general education, and classical references permeated popular culture. By the time of the second wave, classicism maintained its intellectual force but had withdrawn to the cloistered halls of academia. After that it had largely disappeared even from there.

The architectural history of the early United States during the first wave makes much of those who traveled to Greece and Rome to view the architectural remains there or of those who, unable to travel, purchased for their libraries the published journals and drawings of those who

had made the journeys. Prior to any contact with architecture, however, these persons had already been immersed in the classical languages, literature, and art that constituted the bulk of their formal educations. This was true of anyone having had any formal education at any level—not only those who attended universities and/or who traveled or built up libraries but also those who had spent only a few years in a local schoolhouse. All had similar exposure, and classical references, allusions, metaphors, and imagery saturated popular culture. Those who were fortunate enough to make it as far as the Roman Forum or Athenian Acropolis had had to pass through London or Paris as well as modern Rome in order to get there, and in doing so they had been exposed to an assortment of classicist structures from the Renaissance onward. And there were many more travelers whose exposure to classicist architecture never made it past London or Paris. While the First Bank of the United States, its Boston Branch, and the Bank of Pennsylvania might have been more or less faithful assemblages of the elements of extant classical structures, what they meant to passersby had less to do with ancient Rome and Greece and far more to do with associations formed from the classical atmosphere that permeated the times.

During the first wave, the meaning of classical architecture was probably not its allusions to any characteristics of ancient Rome and Greece. It is doubtful that it “. . . pledged allegiance to the democratic principles that America traced back to ancient Athens,” as O’Gorman (1998, page 95) asserted. Such statements are more likely after-the-fact or *long* after-the-fact explanations. A more accurate interpretation of the architecture is that it signaled that those who commissioned, constructed, and inhabited the structure possessed the erudition required to make (or *appear* to make) such allusions and moreover the wealth to express them in stone. Classicism was likely to have been less a sign of loftier values than of obeisance to fashion. And the shift from Roman-influenced architecture (the First Bank of the United States and its Boston Branch) to Greek-influenced (the Bank of Pennsylvania and subsequently the Second Bank of the United States) might not only have been a response to changes in British fashion, but might also have been an effort to be fashionable on a budget—Greek architecture being much simpler (“chaste,” as it was nicely put at the time) and therefore less expensive. It was not yet so much of a barrier—as in the temples of ancient Mesopotamia, anyone who might have considered entering these banks would have belonged there.

By the end of the first half of the nineteenth century, the first wave had crested and begun to subside. Cultured rural landowners who were educated in the language of the classics and had

constructed large classicist homes had departed the scene, to be replaced by ambitious urban merchants and manufacturers educated in the language of business with more eclectic architectural tastes. (Andrews, 1964) Classical languages, literature, and art no longer made up a significant part of early general education and were left to higher education. Classicist architecture began being eclipsed by other styles more suited to new technologies, materials, and production methods, at least for more commercial structures. But it never entirely lost its luster for government, cultural, and educational institutions, and some variety of it became the expression of choice for the imperial ambitions of the European powers. In the United States, classicist architecture roared back into the limelight at the end of the century. It was re-imported by a generation of American-born architects who had been educated at the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris (Carlhian and Ellis, 2014) and acquired a high public profile from its dominance of the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago and in subsequent World's Fairs. Subsequently, the acquisition of an empire by the United States in the 1898 Spanish-American War gave the country a heightened sense of international prestige, which demanded the same visual expression that imperialism had abroad.

The architectural message of classicist banks was not a simple (accounting) statement of wealth, that is: "This is where the money is, literally and figuratively; consequently, this is where the power and status are." Banks were not classicist between 1904 and 1954 because banks had the funds for it<sup>8</sup> and whatever wasn't classicist was the domicile of someone too poor to afford it. It was also not so much a matter of fashion as it had been earlier in the nineteenth century. In the small communities where many local banks were built in the 1920s and remain today—often still as banks but now branches of larger banking corporations—everyone would have known where the money, power, and status were without architecture having had to tell them. And there being little or no competition for the provision of banking services, elaborate facades of columns and pediments acting as billboards would have been unnecessary. Moreover, banks were not the only profitable businesses in these communities, and others could certainly have afforded classicist premises but chose not to build them. Banks notably adopted this symbolism of institutionalized power (as opposed to commercial power) to express and manifest their roles as the heads not of

---

<sup>8</sup> However profitable or unprofitable a bank might be, it almost always has strong cash flow with which to build.

colonial empires, but at least of their local business communities. Their pillars were literally the pillars of their communities.

Although not made explicit by the banks or their architects—and perhaps not even consciously considered—classicist architecture, as does all architecture, has to have had an effect on those who inhabit it, as a form of insider of the barrier. (Wharton, 2015) The behavior of bank employees and bank customers was undoubtedly conditioned by the structures in which banking was conducted. We might speculate that the employees acquired a heightened solemnity and maybe even a certain imperiousness from their institutional environment. Customers might be rendered more deferential as they would have been in a classicist governmental, cultural, or educational building. Through association, those *inside* a classicist structure would have been ‘psychologically’ elevated over those on the *outside*. In effect classicist bank architecture was a significant barrier. Along with a stout physical appearance signaling that it would be fruitless to threaten the wealth inside, the connotations of the style kept out those who were unaware of the mandatory financial rituals performed inside or unable or unwilling to perform them.

#### **IV. Tearing Down the Walls?**

By conceptualizing banking as a constant labile /stable value positions in maintain stability in accounting statements and an ability to adjust them across time and space, we have suggested that *Banking* and *bank* architecture should perhaps be thought as just one manifestation of an existing relation between the circulation of resources and monumental manifestations of sovereignty in the form of such large-scale edifices or 'built environments' as the fortified compounds from early civilizations to our current times.

As referenced in the introduction, the post-WWII period witnessed banks literally tearing down their stone walls and replacing them with glass. Banks no longer wanted to be seen as exclusionary institutions but as welcoming retail businesses, inviting passersby to enter and see what products and services were displayed for sale. Although external barriers were taken down,



however, internal barriers remained. Customers were still separated from lower-level employees by counters and from the upper-level employees who passed judgement on their creditworthiness by gates if not by office doors. No one was able to enter the hierarchy of inner sanctums without permission. And a vault door was often still prominently on display, whether or not it was the entrance to the actual vault where any possible money as coins and notes inside was no longer the key money form but as in accounting ledgers and cables as 1:0s. This form of money was also a new barrier of how to think about forms of money to overcome, and trust the people in the bank who could invest them or from who you could get a loan from, for your present or future gain. Your wealth (or not) was however still an interplay of the accounting statements in the banks ledgers, and the banks ledger in the wider banking ledgers network, and materialized and confirmed by the new outside and interior, and objects of personal wealth in your books, but also a new washing machine, a car or even a house.

Two trends in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have removed these the last of banks' visual barriers. One, or course, is electronic banking, where anyone with Internet access is able to "enter" from the comfort of their own home (perhaps even in their pajamas in the comfort of their bed) or when buying milk and bread while performing their transactions. To a certain extent, though, this was presaged by the late 20<sup>th</sup> century automatic teller machines that anyone could walk up to and make deposits and withdrawals (albeit not in pajamas), even being able to do so anywhere in the world where there were networked machines.<sup>9</sup> Bank architecture barriers is also that of the bank webpages. This is a form of architecture, but not as a place we walk into at all. Instead, it is a place we can visit wherever we are which also *looks* like where we are in everyday life. While webpage architecture is not coherent across banks and financial institutions, we also see a trend where these webpages are designed to announce or market the idea of banking when we are on the move, but where for banking on the move *we* cross the barrier of having to be *fixed* to the mobile device. If accepted, this a trend here too that is towards making 'live' banking through a more 'retail' and everyday life inspired architecture, or even through the non-architecture architecture of the open countryside and the 'natural' world as in these 'visually stunning' sites, which we possibly miss while looking at the mobile screen.

---

<sup>9</sup> In many places, though, the machines are still secured in limited-access spaces and not facing the sidewalk.

The other trend is the interior redesign of physical facilities to eliminate—or at least reduce the number of—counters, gates, and doors. Customers entering a facility are greeted by nicely-dressed, friendly employees who find out what the customers' needs are and walk with them to the nearest furniture where the desired transaction can be completed. In fact, the “transaction” might just be enjoying a cup of coffee. But banks' 'interior' is also reaching out in the form of bank roadshows, as applied by HSBC in a recent marketing campaign, using the architecture of a moveable small cozy house placed in the major shopping centres offering mortgages barriers less than they seems. So while banks are changing their outside and inside to attract new customers this seems not enough. Instead, they also become flexible and actively move out extending their banking architecture to new places to help customers overcome the barriers themselves have put up in the first place.



Image: "PNC's Branch Without Barriers"(photography courtesy of PNC Bank)

At the same time, the 'interior' change dramatically if we also consider banking and bank concessions given to non-traditional financial institutions such as supermarkets or Richard Branson's Virgin Money. In the UK there are Tesco, M&S, ASDA, Sainsbury's. Some of these are now owned by traditional banks such as Lloyds and HSBC. But the point is that banking and so the architecture where such services take place is different and the barriers with them. It is no longer at the traditional bank anymore. It is also at the till while shopping for your milk and bread. In that sense banking is not only that of a retail store (Frandsen et al. 2013 ) but has 'merged' literally into retail stores like the supermarket where adverts are on display of discounted items in the big windows. This is now *one significant architectural form of banking*. The supermarket is the bank, the bank is the supermarket.

However, is this really the ultimate in barrier-free banking that it appears to be? One can utilize electronic banking without having to confront stone walls and iron grills, but one still has to negotiate a security system with usernames, passwords, and PINs along with personal identity questions to resort to in case of problems. Of course none of these identifiers can be obtained without having had to negotiate the paperwork maze that banks have in place to satisfy know-your-customer regulations. Customers must also be familiar with the conventions of web site design in order to use it successfully. And lurking in the background is the not inconsiderable expense required to purchase a computer or smart phone equipped with an up-to-date operating system able to run the bank's app and to make the regular payments that keep the device connected. Regarding the physical facilities, while customer standards are not explicit, one suspects that the nicely-dressed, friendly employee would politely steer someone out the door who is not appropriately groomed and dressed. And the décor of the offices is no longer classicist but still as fashionably upscale as classicism once was and still sending a signal that the wrong sorts of people are not welcome.

Has bank architecture really progressed as far as possible to eliminate barriers? Are web site and office interior designs the last remaining "architectural" deterrents, barriers which appear relatively insignificant in comparison to those of the past? Have passwords, plastic cards, biometric scans, and open access replaced the stone walls and iron grills along with electronic records replacing cash? Can one even rob a bank anymore, or at least get away with enough to make the risk worthwhile? The abandon of cash, if accepted, it will also intensified the velocity of

circulation money (as 1:0s) reaching every corner of the world and our everyday lives. An intensification of where and when such values travel. At the same time is also produces new complexity of interplays and barriers to manage and barriers in constant change. Once 'inside' banking barriers, whether in the supermarket or inside a 'new' traditional bank there is an outside inside too such as with the open access is an example of. As customers they are insider but now with a choice of inviting many banks to look at your accounts making multiple options are available, making the bank an outsider inside, where transactions and actors interplay with many authority barriers in play. A totally cashless society is still far from a reality. As reported by the UK Guardian newspaper (Tims, 2019), cash is still the most popular way of paying in the UK. Certainly at the same time many ATMs, particularly in poor neighborhoods, are being shut down, causing a lot of issues in actually getting cash out especially for people who are poor or for small business who also cannot afford the card transaction option with fees to pay. But the cashless ambition does also exclude 1.5 million adults who do not have a bank account (ibid). In Sweden where the cashless society has gone the furthest to date, we find many banks do not accept cash either as payment or making a deposit to your bank account: which is an interesting and perhaps surprising new barrier. Then the access to a bank card is definitely a barrier to overcome. A Swedish parliamentary commission has started a review (Sveriges Riskdag 2019) of the consequences of a fully cashless economy, not least at a serious crisis such as (major power failure) or war and the survival of the payment system per se as we know it. The key point made here for our purpose is that the distribution of wealth as expressed in accounting statements (for a moment or two) though this network of cables and Wifi worldwide and the links to wealth's physical manifestation is lost and needs to be restored and to put back barriers in place. This is the same reason for having fire watch man in banks not for the money but that of the materialized wealth as expressed in accounting statements is kept. Not least as it gives the outsiders the reassurance of their money in place. These moving barriers will also be changing and challenging current status of how resources in circulation as 1:0s is not passing through the barrier of any central bank such as electronic wallet filled with (safe?) cryptocurrency as per Zucherberg's Facebook Libra. Regardless, we do know that banks in all its forms still want to keep away the wrong sorts of people, who must make do with checks facilities and loan establishments. As long as they do so, there will be barriers of some sort, and change who is on the outside and inside, and outside in the inside, as we have showed from different places and times.

The latest trends of barrier, overlapping and interplaying, and producing new complexity of interplays of relations and barriers to manage, and shows barriers in constant change. Currently the 'traditional' and dominating large banks and other financial institution on oligopoly markets, are both driving and forced to redesign of what a bank 'is' as other banking spaces such as among milk and bread in large supermarkets (on other oligopoly markets) make claims to be inside the banking space, or because how customers are given new mobile tools – open access –blurring the big banks 'authority' to set barriers of who is inside and outside, even if being inside. What we have offered is a conceptualizing of bank architecture as barriers across time as an outcome of the interplay between a constant labile /stable value positions as per accounting statements and an ability to adjust them across time and space. Such conceptualizing allowed us to identify two key functions at play (i) the means in having the physical manifestations and embodiment of wealth and (ii) the ability to *know* the current wealth position and the current claims and usages of that wealth; and with which an overall understanding of what underpins the dynamics of barriers in and across time and place. Ensuring that only the right people get in, and other financial institutions too, those barriers will continue to be architectural and where these variations over time may evoke a renewal of the idea of something more fundamental like an 'eternal form' of banking, like the Black Monolith at the beginning and end of *2001: a Space Odyssey*.

## Bibliography

Andrews, Wayne, *Architecture, Ambition and Americans: A Social History of American Architecture*, Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964).

Badawy, A. (1966). *Architecture in Ancient Egypt and the Near East*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The M.I.T. Press.

Bassnett, Susan, Ann-Christine Frandsen, and Keith Hoskin (2018) 'The Unspeakable Truth of Accounting: On the genesis and consequences of the first "non-glottographic" statement form', *Accounting, Auditing and Accountability Journal*, Vol. 31, Number 5, pages 2083-2107.

Bromberg, B. (1942). The Origin of Banking: Religious Finance in Babylonia. *The Journal of Economic History*, 2(1), 77-88.

Carlhian, Jean Paul, and Margot M. Ellis, *Americans in Paris: Foundations of America's Architectural Gilded Age, Architecture Students at the École des Beaux-Arts 1846-1946*, (New York: Rizzoli, 2014).

Damerow, Peter, (2006) "The Origins of Writing as a Problem of Historical Epistemology," *Cuneiform Digital Library Journal*, Volume 1, , pages 1-10.

DeLaine, Janet, "The *Romanitas* of the Railway Station," in *The Uses and Abuses of Antiquity*, ed. Michael Biddiss and Maria Wyke, (Bern: Peter Lang, 1999), pages 145-166.

Frandsen, Ann-Christine and Elton McGoun (2019) *The Origins of Banking Architecture in Ancient Mesopotamia* (under submission).

Frandsen, Ann-Christine, Tammy Hiller, Janice Traflet, and Elton G. McGoun, "From Money Storage to Money Store: Openness and Transparency in Bank Architecture, *Business History*, Volume 55, Number 5, (July, 2013), pages 695-720.

Gerard, Alexander, *An Essay on Taste*, third edition, (Edinburgh, 1780).

Harris, R. (1960). Old Babylonian Temple Loans. *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, 14(4), 126-137.

Hopkins, Alfred, "Some Ideas on Bank Buildings—Artistic and Practical," *The Architectural Forum*, Volume 36, Number 1, (January, 1922), pages 1-8.

Hudson Michael and Marc Van de Mierop (2002) *Debt and Economic Renewal in the Ancient Near East*. Bethesda, Maryland: CDL Press

Hudson Michael and C. Wunsch (Eds) (2004). *Creating Economic Order: Record-Keeping, Standardization, and the Development of Accounting in the Ancient Near East*. Bethesda, Maryland: CDL Press.

Jastrow, M., Jr. (1971). *Aspects of Religious Belief and Practice in Babylonia and Assyria*. New York: Benjamin Blom. Inc.

Keynes, John Maynard, (1930) *A Treatise on Money: In 2 Volumes*, New York: Macmillan & Company.

Malamud, Margaret, *Ancient Rome and Modern America*, (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

McGoun, Elton G., "Form, Function, and Finance: Architecture and Rational Economics," *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, Volume 15, Number 8, (November, 2004), pages 1085-1107.

Nissen H., Damerow P. and Englund R. (1993), *Archaic bookkeeping: early writing and techniques of economic administration in the ancient Near East*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

O’Gorman, James F., *ABC of Architecture*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998).

Peacock, Mark (2013) *Introducing Money*. Routledge, New York.

Price, I.M. (1916). Some Observations on the Financial Importance of the Temple in the First Dynasty of Babylon. *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*, 32(4), 250-260.

Pruessner. A.H. (1928). The Earliest Traces of Negotiable Instruments. *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature*, 44(2), 88-107.

Sveriges Riksdag (2019) [https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/arende/betankande/statens-roll-pa-betalningsmarknaden\\_H601FiU44](https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/arende/betankande/statens-roll-pa-betalningsmarknaden_H601FiU44) (accessed 2019-08-19)

Silver, M. (1995). *Economic Structures of Antiquity*. Westport. Connecticut: Greenwood Press.

Skaist, A. (1994). *The Old Babylonian Loan Contract: Its History and Geography*. Ramat Gan, Israel: Bar-Ilan University Press.

Tim Anna (2018) The Rise of the Cashless Britain: the poor suffer as banks and ATMS are closed in *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2018/oct/01/cashless-britain-banks-atms> (accessed 2019-08-19)

Van De Mieroop, M. (2002). A History of Near Eastern Debt? In M. Hudson & M. Van De Mieroop (Eds.), *Debt and Economic Renewal in the Ancient Near East* (pp. 59-94). Bethesda, Maryland: CDL Press.

Van De Mieroop, M. (2005). The Invention of Interest: Sumerian Loans. In W.N. Goetzmann & K.G. Rouwenhorst (Eds.), *The Origins of Value: The Financial Innovations That Created Modern Capital Markets* (pp. 17-30). Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2005.

Wengrow, D. (2010) *What makes Civilization?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wharton, Annabel Jane, *Architectural Agents: The Delusional, Abusive, Addictive Lives of Buildings*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

Wyke, Maria, and Michael Biddiss, "Introduction: Using and Abusing Antiquity," in *The Uses and Abuses of Antiquity*, ed. Michael Biddiss and Maria Wyke, (Bern: Peter Lang AG, European Academic Publishers, 1999), pages 13-18.