This wide-ranging collection of twenty-one essays by senior scholars honors the work of Eric Fernie, former director of the Courtauld Institute of Art and scholar of Romanesque, and more particularly, Norman architecture. Fernie’s work delves into issues surrounding the meaning of architectural form, such as can be gleaned from medieval buildings where only the stones still standing can lend voice to the architectural intentions of the builders. Although this festschrift honors Eric Fernie, there is regrettably only scant reference to his work or scholarship. At the very least a bibliography of his contributions would have been welcome, not to mention an essay providing context for the selections.

The editors express their desire to “broaden the discussion” of how architecture is interpreted. The stage is set with an extensive examination of big ideas: of building versus architecture, and of experience versus interpretation, layered with an understanding that architecture is the result of deliberate intention to be as well as to signify. It is perhaps with this expansive framework in mind that the book is best understood and appreciated. The essays range from traditional academic discussions and formal analyses of architectural elements and form and their meaning to speculative discussions about prehistoric structures and post-modern aesthetics. The contributors grapple with dilemmas such as whether “hard history” (history based on documents) is more valid than “misty history” (history relying on speculation and conjecture, albeit informed) (Heslop), or whether a modern lens offers meaningful views to understanding aesthetics or stylistic preferences of the past (Sekules).

The illustrations, while illuminative, are hardly sumptuous; but it is not that sort of book. It is a work of twenty-one questions and an equal number of investigations to help define an understanding of the meaning of structure, form, material, and space over time. Responding to Fernie’s interest in how the reception of a building changes over time, Hillenbrand suggests in his essay on the Dome of the Rock that meaning will change, especially for a monument that “will not lie down and stay in the past.” How are we to understand something that stands mute before us? Perhaps it is not mute. Perhaps we simply need to listen more diligently. Fernie’s work, celebrated in this book, demonstrates that it is possible to tease out both meaning and message from structure, form, material, and space.

The book includes footnotes to each essay, a list of illustrations, an index, a list of contributors with brief biographies, and an encompassing introduction to the essays. For its breadth of inquiry and variety of methodologies it is recommended for programs in architectural history.

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