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Claudine Piaton, Ezio Godoli and David Peyceré (eds.), *Building Beyond the Mediterranean: Studying the Archives of European Businesses (1860–1970)*
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*B**uilding Beyond the Mediterranean: Studying the Archives of European Businesses (1860–1970) explores the agency of European urban planning, infrastructure and architecture in Northern Africa and the Middle East. This handsomely produced and copiously illustrated edited volume encompasses research from a diverse group of scholars with shared interests in modern architecture in the Mediterranean and explores the potentials of new archival sources. Crucially, the volume is focussed not on individualised works of architects, but rather on the pervasive engineering and architectural works of European construction companies engaged in the region since the 1860s. With this focus, and drawing upon a range of company archives, it is further concerned with the multifarious networks and exchanges that occurred within the region and across the shores of the Mediterranean. The result is a positioning of regional built production within an expanded transnational environment.

The book is divided into two parts: firstly, *Cities and Networks*, and secondly, *Building and Embellishing*. Within, short essays consider the contexts for built production and a breadth of projects across scales, ranging from the major infrastructure works operating at a territorial level through to applied artistic craftsmanship.

The collection opens with an important contextual overview framed by the arrival of French contractors and the establishment of public works priorities, and in relation to geopolitical developments across Northern Africa and the Middle East from the 1860s through to the 1940s. With a broad context in place, subsequent essays examine the individuals, relationships, commercial motivations and strategic operations behind the establishment and expansion of European contractors in the region, chief among them the Belgian company Baume & Marpent, the French companies Hennebique and Perret Frères, as well as the Italian-based Società Nazionale Officine Savigliano [National Ironworks of Savigliano]. A survey of other Italian contractors is also provided, further building an understanding of the dynamics of corporate networks operating in the region.
The role of European contractors in the design and construction of public works infrastructure in Egypt and North Africa is examined through the metal and reinforced concrete bridges of Baume & Marpent and Hennebique, respectively, and extended via the consideration of urban water tanks by Porcheddu, an Italian civil engineering and construction company and Hennebique licensee. Whilst drawing upon European expertise, it is argued that the realisation of these major projects in Northern Africa consolidated international reputations and growth: Isabelle Sirjacobs argues the significance of Baume & Marpent Egyptian bridges, including the emblematic Imbaba Bridge, Cairo, in establishing that company’s international reputation, and Guy Lambert uses archived company design files to demonstrate processes by which Hennebique’s use of reinforced concrete was accepted within official agencies, tacitly supporting the company’s further expansion.

Specific forms of urbanism associated with large-scale infrastructure and mining projects undertaken by European contracting companies in the Middle East and Northern Africa are discussed in an engaging group of essays in a section on settlements. Bertrand Paponot and Véronique Laurent use company archives to investigate the temporary canal construction camps of the Paponot company and the planning and administration of European company towns of the Compagnie universelle du canal maritime de Suez [Suez Canal Company] in Egypt. Reinforcing one of the key rationales of the volume, Claudine Piaton observes that whilst these archives of the Suez Canal Company have been used in other fields of history, they have yet to be examined by architectural historians. She proceeds to demonstrate the potential of this rich vein of documentation available in relation to the planning, design and administration of company towns of the Suez Canal Company in Egypt. The essay, along with others in the collection, highlights the complex day-to-day realities of commercial contracting in foreign environments, which are crucial to understanding design decisions.

As the discussion shifts from infrastructure to settlements, an important distinction is identified in the levels of innovation for large-scale engineering projects versus smaller scale urban and building works. Essays by Antonella Cabassi and Tom Avermaete on European mining company towns in Egypt and Morocco, respectively, expand the discussion. Although the designs for these towns were typically the work of company engineers and technicians (rather than architects), and predicated upon an engineering logic, they demonstrate processes of acculturation in relation to contextual settings as well as international discourses on urbanism and architecture. Avermaete thus refers to forms of urbanism that might be understood in terms of “zones of pragmatic acculturation.”

The focus of the second part of the volume is on buildings, the detail of interior design and artistic craftsmanship, as well as heritage conservation. Anna Nuzzaci describes the development of a wide network of expertise, involving architects, engineers and technical officers in Italy and aboard, enabling the Italian missionary organisation, Associazione Nazionale per Soccorrere i Missionari Italiani [National Association for the Assistance of Italian Missionaries] to undertake an extensive programme of foreign building works of mainly hospitals and schools, with key examples discussed and illustrated. Assia Samaï Bouadjadja and Boussad Aiche extend discussions of the expansion and diversification
of applications of the Hennebique reinforced concrete construction system through evaluations of early twentieth century public and private building commissions in Algeria, many of which still survive as important urban and cultural heritage elements.

Although the basis for research into interiors and applied artistic craftsmanship is less developed elsewhere, through a consideration of the role of Italian interior decorators, Paola Ricco begins to reveal the agency and networks of European decorators supporting built production in Egypt in the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Karin Blanc documents French architectural and artistic metalworkers that operated in the Southeastern areas of Mediterranean during the twentieth century, providing an essential platform for further research on the topic.

A final section on building restoration and preservation presents another important channel in further understanding the transnational exchanges of specific design, engineering and building expertise within and beyond the region. Here, two Egyptian restoration projects undertaken by European firms—the partial rebuilding of the Muhammad Ali Mosque in Cairo and the relocation of Abu Simbel—are presented as case studies. As discussed by Mercedes Volait, these two major restoration projects are only the “tip of the iceberg in a region steeped in history” and hence a field of work ripe for further investigation.

Beyond documenting the presence and production of European companies operating around the Mediterranean, Building Beyond the Mediterranean contributes to the field of urban and architectural history research by identifying and revealing the opportunities of contracting company archives that have been hitherto overlooked by urban and architectural historians. This occurs across the body of essays, while the final section of the volume provides a brief survey of the archives that underpin the work throughout. In addition to encouraging further research in support of history and conservation, and as noted in Mercedes Volait’s introduction, the volume offers an invitation for the unearthing and preservation of future archives. In this respect, the volume serves as both a record and catalyst for the history and conservation of the constructed environments of the Mediterranean, with methodological relevance for urban and architectural histories in other regions of the globe.

Whilst individual contributions, or groups of essays, may be used selectively, the historical value of the volume is in the complex sum of its parts. However, beyond a brief introduction to the overall volume, there are no additional introductory essays to the major sections of the volume to assist the reader in assimilating the breadth of material presented. Additional framing essays would have had the potential to highlight methodological concerns, especially in relation to the broad examination of company archives and their implications for furthering understandings of urban and architectural histories that look beyond the constraints of nationalist paradigms, thereby further strengthening the contribution of the collection.

Published in English and French, this attractively designed, full-colour volume incorporates many archival photographs and drawings. Individual contributions within it combine to provide a rich documentary source of previously unpublished material.
Across them, a multi-faceted picture of intersecting networks of agencies, corporations, contractors, exchanges and built works emerges. Given the scope of unpublished material, drawn from a breadth of company archives, an apparent focus on documentation, coupled with a generous explication of sources, the usefulness of *Building Beyond the Mediterranean* as a resource for general readers, researchers and practitioners in history, heritage and conservation is ensured.

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Chronological index: 19th century, 20th century
Schlagwortindex: Archive, Unternehmensarchive, Mittelmeer
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Index chronologique: xixe siècle, xxème siècle
Parole chiave: archivi, archivi di impresa, Mediterraneo
Indice geografico: Nordafrica, Medio Oriente
Indice cronologico: xix secolo, xx secolo