

■ Middle Ages and Renaissance

**Carl F. Barnes, Jr.** *The Portfolio of Villard de Honnecourt: A New Critical Edition and Color Facsimile.* Foreword by **Nigel Hiscock.** Glossary by **Stacey L. Hahn.** xxvi + 266 pp., illus., bibl., index. Surrey, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009. €75 (cloth).

Villard's portfolio is not a model book—"that is, a collection of iconographic or stylistic exempla" for the use of other architects and artists or masons, according to Carl Barnes (p. 23). But what is it, then? It depicts insects, several birds and beasts, the tomb of a Saracen, a labyrinth, biblical figures, and wrestlers.

Villard must have been fascinated by mechanical devices: he drew an eagle lectern that turned when the deacon read the gospel, a saw

that cut pilings under water, a crossbow that could not miss, a trebuchet, a horologue house, a wheel of fortune, and a technique for propping up a sagging house (fols. 17v, 22v, 23). Not only are there portions of planar and elevation drawings for great cathedrals and roof structures for barns, but also a Cistercian church plan (fol. 14) and a plan for a double ambulatory (fol. 15), the Laon tower, windows at Cambrai, and the Reims series (fols. 30v–32v). Some folios show buildings already under construction that Villard could not have designed himself; by comparison *in situ*, Barnes was able to determine that Villard altered details of what he saw. He must have traveled far to sketch a church pavement in Hungary, perhaps identified at Pilis; see pages xxv–xxvi for location and building names.

Villard said that in this book you can find sound advice: “en cest libre on puet trover grant conseil.” But it is disorganized and “contains too much that is curious and discursive to have served as a pattern book for working craftsmen” (p. 23). Such model books or pattern books for architects in this period survive in Freiburg and Wolfenbüttel, though only in fragments; but this is not one of them. This is not an album or shop manual or workbook or notebook or sketchbook; it should be called a portfolio to be carried about—or in French a *portefeuille*.

Many claims have been made for this odd assemblage because it reveals aspects of technology in medieval culture that are often ignored in literary and historical studies. With his more balanced approach, Carl Barnes asks, “What was this curious hodge-podge?” His restrained analysis of details and his overall interpretation, presented along with facsimiles of the whole collection, are quite reliable, even though he is led to conclude that Villard “was not an architect or master mason” (p. xxv).

The manuscript, now Paris, BnF Fr 19093 [Grand Réserve 1515], contains thirty-three folios. They were gathered at different times, as Villard traveled and worked in various places, for the leaves are of various sizes and of uneven quality. The irregular gatherings with leather stitching numbered six in 1858, but in 1926 they were rearranged into seven, held together by a brown pigskin cover.

Texts were added after drawings. There are no rulings for the texts. It is Barnes’s expertise in codicology and paleography that gives his evaluations and conclusions a high degree of reliability, improving on the earlier “Codicology” article by Lon R. Shelby and Barnes (1988). He is able to distinguish eight different hands for the texts.

Villard did not use Latin but wrote himself or

dictated in a combination of Old French and Picard dialect. His entries were not dated after 1244 and probably were written during the 1220s and 1230s. A second anonymous scribe wrote in the 1240s and no later than circa 1250; this script is similar to Hand I but may be distinguished easily because on folio 31v it repeats Villard’s text on folio 32, including modifications to the text. A third anonymous Hand wrote poorly in Picard and imperfect Latin, no later than about 1250; again there are paraphrases of Hand I. A fourth Hand of the 1275/1300s wrote new Picard texts to new drawings over erasures on folios 20 and 20v. Four more Hands are much later: in s.XIV there is the signature of Jehanne Martin on folio 33v and in s.XV that of J. Marcel, who also enumerated forty-one leaves; some of his leaves were closed before the ink had dried, smearing his numerals. A seventh Hand entered a Greek inscription and an Arabic text on folio 8 and the name of the constellation LEO on folios 24 and 24v. The family Félibien acquired the portfolio before 1666; there are inscriptions on folios 1, 2, and 23v by members of the family from the late 1600s and 1700s. There are erasures, and folios 5, 20, 20v, and 21 are palimpsests.

Thus, in Barnes’s summary: Someone stitched together the leaves, and someone else paginated leaves *a* through *r*, perhaps before Hands II and III made various textual additions and paraphrased some of Villard’s inscriptions, attempting to identify some of the drawings; this was after they left Villard’s possession but no later than circa 1250. It was Hand IV who scraped away Villard’s work on folio 20 and the upper half of folio 20v, making room for his own contributions. The portfolio passed through the hands of a fifteenth-century librarian and into the family Félibien before reaching safety of the Abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, thence into the royal library and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

With these distinctions, Barnes is able to confirm that Villard was active in the 1220s and 1230s, when “Gothic architecture was reaching maturity,” and that he “understood and correctly used the new architectural terminology of his day” (pp. 16–19). He used architectural drawing tools (pp. 19–21). But his drawings were of buildings that existed already or were then under construction but apparently were not designed or constructed by him. For example, his drawings were not intended for the construction of the Reims cathedral, as once proposed. In order to indicate convex construction in one of its radiating chapels, he “attempted to fuse the two types of architectural drawing that existed in his day: planar and perspective” (noted by Wolf-

gang Schöller in 1994), but he also used “head-on” or orthogonal perspective (fols. 31v, 32v).

This book takes up the drawings and texts of each separate folio, recto and verso, of which forty surfaces “bear drawings and text by Villard,” as well as those by later users. Twenty-four surfaces have drawings only, two have texts only. They are described systematically in terms of their size, paginations, condition, drawings, transcriptions of texts, translations (both literal and free), attribution, commentary, and reference to previous facsimile editions. These concordances will all be useful to current and future users of the manuscript.

*The Portfolio of Villard de Honnecourt* is a very thorough and systematic analysis of a book of which it is fair to say, with Barnes: “The Villard Portfolio is among the rarest and most famous of Gothic survivals” (p. 22). The work is excellent.

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