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Frédérique Lemerle, *Le voyage architectural en France (XVe-XVIIe siècles): Antiquité et Modernité*. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2018. 287 pp. 29 b/w ill., 8 color ill., bibliography, and index. €35.00. (pb). ISBN 978-2-503-58128-6.

Review by Jason Nguyen, Getty Research Institute.

Frédérique Lemerle's book contributes to the growing literature on travel and mobility in early modern Europe. The majority of recent studies on this topic have focused on the city of Rome, which attracted countless pilgrims, politicians, humanists, and artists during the period, or the process of colonization and the development of international trade, for which explorers (often with artists and scientists in tow) left Europe in the pursuit of territorial conquest and financial gain. Instead, Lemerle casts an eye to her native France, a land rich in Gallo-Roman antiquities, medieval monuments, and modern architectural curiosities. In her detailed study, she considers how European travelers perceived and wrote about the French-built environment during the late fifteenth, sixteenth, and early seventeenth centuries (from the reign of Louis XI to the Fronde). Lemerle is therefore most interested in the mobility of people (as opposed to things). In this regard, her study eschews the materialist and object-oriented approaches of much recent scholarship in art history in favor of a more anthropological method that focuses on the human experience. In constructing this story, she relies on textual sources such as guidebooks, travel logs, and memoirs as well as printed illustrated compendiums, especially Jacques Androuet du Cerceau's *Les plus excellents bastiments de France* (1576-79) and Caspar Merian's *Topographia Galliae* (1655). As such, she proposes a history of architecture that is built on the personal views and vantage points of travelers in early modern France.

Lemerle is the Directeur de Recherche of the Centre d'études supérieures de la Renaissance at the Université de Tours. Architectural theory and other written accounts of the built environment are central to her research interests. In *Le voyage architectural en France*, we encounter a vast range of historical actors, from lesser-known voyagers like Élie Brakenhoffer to celebrated artists and philosophers like Gian Lorenzo Bernini and John Locke. Lemerle presumes a level of familiarity with many of these figures (as well as the places they visit), a fact that may limit the book's accessibility to non-specialists. By and large, she privileges first-hand written sources, which she contextualizes with historical information and period drawings and prints (images play a mostly illustrative function). She ends her study with the early reign of Louis XIV, writing that, from the late seventeenth century onward, Versailles became the overwhelming focus of travelers' accounts, a phenomenon that was at the center of the recent "Visiteurs de Versailles" exhibition (first at the Château de Versailles in 2017-2018 and afterwards at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2018).<sup>[1]</sup> As such, she attends more to the

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humanistic and artistic aspects of European travel than to the overtly political or economic functions of many later expeditions.

As with her earlier writings on antiquarianism, Lemerle sheds light on an understudied genre of writing in early modern France.<sup>[2]</sup> It is far too limiting, she tells us, for architectural historians to confine their archival sources to construction work orders, cost estimates, and traditional drawings and prints. By examining travel literature, we are able to see how period eyes, both foreign and French though always European, assessed the built environment at different moments in history. This is especially useful when considering structures that have been fundamentally altered (e.g., the Château de Fontainebleau) or that no longer exist (e.g., the Piliers du Tutelle and the Château de Madrid). Beyond this, she makes three important contributions to the history of early modern French architecture. The first is related to methodology, the second to geography, and the third to history. These areas are worth considering in greater depth, as they raise broader questions about the state of early modern architectural history, especially for those working in the French context.

Lemerle proposes a methodology based not on the intentions of the architect or patron, but on the visitor's reception of a building. While this is well-trodden territory for historians of painting, sculpture, and (especially) landscape, Lemerle notes that there are few books in the history of early modern architecture that take this approach. As such, she spends little time on questions of artistic biography and patronage structure, concerns that form the lion's share of early modern architectural history in France. As she argues, travelers rarely mentioned the names of architects, even for the most monumental of edifices. They never wrote about Pierre Lescot when discussing the Louvre of Henri II, Philibert de L'Orme or Jean Bullant for the Tuileries of Catherine de' Medici, Salomon de Brosse for the façade of Saint-Gervais or the Palais de Luxembourg, Jacques Lemercier for the Chapel at the Sorbonne, or Louis Le Vau for Vaux-le-Vicomte. What Lemerle offers instead is a glance into how period eyes saw and interpreted the built environment based on their own historical context (fifteenth, sixteenth, or seventeenth century), nationality (primarily Northern European, Italian, and French), and religion. She signals some regional and historical tendencies: Northern Europeans admired the French skill in building but lamented their seeming inability to complete construction or maintain old edifices. Italians took a greater interest in the Gallo-Roman antiquities of the south. Travelers of all origins remarked on the variety of materials, notably stonework and metal. Certain buildings received near universal acclaim, specifically François Mansart's Château de Maisons (1630-1651) (even the famously condescending Bernini admired it). In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, voyagers frequently remarked on French gardens, grottoes, automata, and fountain design (Locke's interest in the hydraulic technologies at Versailles is fascinating and deserving of more study).

How did one's confrontation with a foreign land and its buildings influence the traveler's understanding of history, culture, style, or even sense of self? Given that her study encompasses such a huge number and range of individuals (antiquarians, architects, diplomats, scientists, and philosophers), Lemerle answers this question in fragments. In this regard, she is more interested in the historical texture of her visitors' accounts than the philosophical or psychological questions raised by mobility and estrangement.<sup>[3]</sup> Nevertheless, the last three chapters offer some insights into the architectural stakes involved ("V: Voyages d'artistes et d'architectes," "VI: Goût et curiosité en architecture," and "VII: De l'utilité des voyageurs"). Of particular interest is the juxtaposition of Bernini and Claude Perrault's near-contemporaneous

voyages in France (pp. 201-15). An analysis of their memoirs, she suggests, helps explain their distinctive architectural outlooks. Bernini, who resided in France from June to October 1665, evaluated French architecture largely on formal grounds. His criticisms, she explains, can be attributed to the historical differences between Italian and French customs (*us et coutumes*) in design and construction, including building materials and techniques, roofing, and a specific approach to interior comfort (*commodité*). In his travels, Perrault adopted a different view, tending instead issues like building technology (vaults, stairs, wood beam flooring, etc.) and the unique characteristics of regional antiquities, notably the Piliers de Tutelle, which he studied during his voyage to Bordeaux in 1669. Perrault included an engraving of the Gallo-Roman monument in the 1684 reprint of his French translation of Vitruvius, a move that folded his travel experiences into his larger theoretical project.

Throughout the book, Lemerle provides a broad geographic view of France and sheds much needed light on a number of understudied buildings, ruins, convents, monasteries, fortifications, bridges, and aqueducts across the country. Alongside the Piliers de Tutelle, we have the many antiquities in Arles, Avignon, and Nîmes. The cathedrals in Amiens, Arras, Beauvais, Bourges, Chartres, and Orléans received far greater praise than Notre-Dame in Paris. The importance of the Collège at La Flèche (and the voyages of its architect, Étienne Martellange) is also discussed. Of the modern buildings, the Cordouan Lighthouse (1584-1611) in the Gironde elicited repeated comment. For instance, the Parisian nobleman Léon Godefroy left a detailed description of it in his travel logs, in which he called it the eighth wonder of the world, “voire mise pour la septième, savoir au lieu du Phare d’Alexandre” (quoted on p. 87). References to the remarkable structure, designed by the architect Louis de Foix, raise broader questions about the status of sea travel and trade, issues that Lemerle explains in symbolic terms related to the politics of Henri IV.[4] Beyond this, one wonders how period minds understood the global dimension of mobility in a more practical sense (i.e., related to actual maritime transit, trade, or an emergent colonialism), especially when they were confronted with a building whose purpose presupposed it.

In addition to the writings of her travelers, Lemerle introduces us to the impressive circumstances of their journeys: their itineraries, their methods of transportation, the conditions of the cities through which they passed, their accommodations, and even the weather. The printing press made travel guides and prints readily available, which meant that voyagers often had an idea of what they would see before arriving. Interestingly, she writes, it was Flemish-born immigrants who introduced copperplate engraving to Paris at the turn of the seventeenth century, a fact that highlights the mobility of both people and images during the early modern period. Lemerle goes some way toward detailing the long and often circuitous routes taken by her travelers. The itinerary of the French poet and geographer Pierre Bergeron is particularly astonishing. Given this, it is surprising that she includes so few maps in the book, especially since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed an explosion in printing and cartographic experiments. A greater number of maps and diagrams, whether from the period or constructed by the author, would have provided a useful spatial and temporal sense of their journeys. Following Tom Conley, one might also consider how travel writing embodied the kind of “cartographic impulse” as found in the period’s literature, which, in its very language and structure, conveyed a spatial awareness that was tied to the development of mapmaking, navigation, and mobility.[5]

In the book’s final chapter, Lemerle reaffirms the significance of this genre of writing for

history. These documents, whose fragmentary nature has contributed to their neglect by architectural scholars, offer a snapshot into the realities of the built environment at specific moments in time. Her voyagers experienced buildings and cities not as they are today, or even as they possibly appeared in period illustrations, but in their actual states (including when they were under construction or in ruins). Moreover, they did not view architecture with our sense of history. In this regard, Lemerle troubles the accepted categories of art historical periodization: ancient and modern, medieval and early modern, and Renaissance and *l'âge classique*. She thus asks us to consider the long lifespan of buildings, specifically how people viewed them, used them, and adapted them throughout their history. Lemerle's call has a timely relevance, given the debates encircling the restoration of Notre-Dame in Paris. Throughout, she offers us access to the wide-ranging sentiments of her voyagers. Though they are often elusive, their viewpoints provide an alternate history of architecture in early modern France.

## NOTES

[1] Daniëlle Kisluk-Grosheide and Bertrand Rondot, eds., *Visiteurs de Versailles: Voyageurs, princes, ambassadeurs, 1682-1789* (Paris: Gallimard, 2017).

[2] Frédérique Lemerle, *La Renaissance et les antiquités de la Gaule: l'architecture gallo-romaine vue par les architectes, antiquaires et voyageurs des guerres d'Italie à la Fronde* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005).

[3] For the early modern Italian context, David Young Kim provides a theoretical interpretation of artists' travel and mobility. See Kim, *The Traveling Artist in the Italian Renaissance: Geography, Mobility, and Style* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014).

[4] Lemerle writes that the lighthouse, whose ornamentation blended Valois and Bourbon symbols, helped grant legitimacy to Henri IV's dynastic claims. The building, like the monarchy under his command protected the mariner (a stand-in for the French people) from the dangers of the sea (an allusion to the civil wars that ravaged sixteenth-century France) (p. 89).

[5] Tom Conley, *The Self-Made Map: Cartographic Writing in Early Modern France* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

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