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Christopher Drew Armstrong, *Julien-David Leroy and the Making of Architectural History*. New York: Routledge, 2012, 2021. xix + 300 pp. Figures, bibliography, and index. \$182.86 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9780415778893; \$48.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 9780367617684; \$44.00 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9780203723722.

Review by Sun-Young Park, George Mason University.

Etymology, heredity, ancient measurement methods, shipbuilding, and food provisioning: These were just some of the interests that comprised the intellectual cosmos of architectural theorist Julien-David Leroy, whose life spanned the eventful decades of 1724–1803. Christopher Drew Armstrong’s book, originally published in 2012 and reissued in paperback in 2021, compellingly charts how this wide web of concerns informed the career and teachings of an oft-overlooked figure. While Leroy has largely played a supporting role in existing literature on architecture during the Enlightenment, Armstrong argues for his centrality in reframing the very nature of architectural scholarship.[1] In an era still dominated by the Renaissance theory of the classical orders as fixed and absolute, Leroy demonstrated a progressive understanding of history, in which the accumulation of knowledge engendered change and improvement over time. A clear view of Leroy as *philosophe-architecte* emerges in Armstrong’s study. Through his pioneering research on ancient Greece and pedagogical activities, Leroy aimed to reform the culture and taste of a society recovering from the excesses of rococo.

The book is divided into two parts, the first focusing on the production of Leroy’s magnum opus, *Les Ruines des plus beaux monuments de la Grèce* (1758; 2nd ed. 1770), and the second examining his career as an academician and teacher. Part one, titled “Voyageur/Philosophe,” begins with the fascinating family dynamics and aspirations of the Leroy family. Leroy’s father Julien was a well-known horologist whose esteem for the theoretical work of the royal academies intersected with a strong commitment to applied knowledge and cooperative research in industries. This vibrant intellectual household yielded multiple academy memberships among the four Leroy brothers, including Julien-David’s induction into the Académie d’architecture (1758) and the Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres (1770). Chapter one traces Leroy’s familial context and his formative student years at the Académie de France in Rome, during which he traveled to Greece and gathered the research that would become the basis of *Les Ruines*.

The following two chapters examine intellectual discourses that reinvigorated the study of Greek history at the time when Leroy’s own theories were germinating. Armstrong discusses contemporaneous textual influences on Leroy’s work, from Robert Wood’s *The Ruins of Palmyra* (1753), a new travel genre that advanced the empirical study of architecture, to Charles Rollin’s

De la manière d'enseigner et d'étudier les belles-lettres (1726-31), which looked to classical Greece as a model for French educational reform. He also delves into Leroy's contribution to scholarship on ancient measurement methods, which was part of an academic interest in reevaluating and validating ancient science, astronomy, and geography.

Architectural debates, meanwhile, centered on the exact development, proper design, and use of the classical orders. Chapter four looks more closely at the research and arguments framed in *Les Ruines*, which was particularly important in scrutinizing and correcting received Vitruvian principles. By identifying different phases of the Doric order and documenting temples that combined different orders in their design, Leroy demonstrated that progression and adaptation had always been present in classical architecture. Armstrong develops this point in the following chapters, stressing that Leroy's analysis of interactions between past cultures theorized historical development as open-ended rather than linear, and hybrid rather than singular. Building on his studies of etymology and biology, Leroy conceptualized architectural change as historically contingent—not limited to fixed types, but rather, akin to a developmental tree, shaped by evolving tastes and cultural encounters through trade and commerce. These ideas were both empowering and controversial. Leroy's most vocal critic may have been Giovanni Battista Piranesi, who passionately defended Roman superiority. But Armstrong claims that even those who held differing notions about geographical determinism and the fixity of architectural ideals, such as Quatremère de Quincy and Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand, were influenced by Leroy's empirical research methods and his recovery of ancient Greek history.

The concluding chapter of part one elaborates on other aspects of Leroy's book that engaged Enlightenment discourses. Of particular note is his emphasis on the experiential qualities of architecture—its lights, shadows, and movement, especially in a *promeneur's* interaction with colonnades—which related to both sensorial philosophies (e.g., Condillac) and Rousseauian pedagogical theories about learning through direct experience. As Armstrong argues, Leroy's study of architecture was not a search for absolute ideals, but a framework for new design possibilities in the future.

From these theoretical underpinnings, part two of the book, titled "Academician/Mentor," turns to Leroy's contributions to architectural education and social advancement. Leroy played a key role in reforming the Académie d'architecture curriculum, first as *adjoint* to his former teacher Jacques-François Blondel and later as the main professor. His interests in science, technology, and public health were manifested in the school's design competitions, which included lighthouses, quarantine facilities, and public bath programs. Adhering to his father's belief in the social importance of the mechanical arts, Leroy also dabbled in ship design and planning a rational network of food provisioning for the nation.

The 1789 revolution hovers over the latter part of this book, and Armstrong devotes his final chapter to charting how Leroy weathered the revolutionary events until his death in 1803. As a reform-minded *philosophe* with expertise in civil and naval architecture, Leroy was valuable to the revolutionary regime and involved in numerous government commissions. However, the suppression of the academies in 1793 left him financially vulnerable, and despite continued teaching work under the revolutionary system, he died in relative poverty. Armstrong concludes his study with an account of the grass-roots campaign led by Leroy's former students to create a monument to his memory, which culminated in a marble bust by Antoine-Denis Chaudet that stood in the École des Beaux-Arts library for over a century.

This last anecdote, with its celebratory atmosphere, captures both the significance and limitations of this book. I finished it well convinced that Leroy was an important figure in the history of architecture who deserved further attention, yet slightly uncomfortable with the book's hagiographic portrayal. To reclaim an "overlooked" individual as a central historical player certainly makes for a strong and daring thesis, but it can also induce some healthy skepticism. There is no denying the broad reach of *Les Ruines*, its significance for the Greek revival movement, and Leroy's instrumental role in leading and shaping the Académie d'architecture. Yet Armstrong tends to assume that anyone with similar (or even different) ideas to Leroy must have been influenced by him, whether they acknowledged it or not. The book is punctuated with statements such as "In some measure, Blondel's sudden interest in Egyptian architecture shows the impact of Leroy's historical method" (p. 150); "it is conceivable that Leroy's research was somewhere in the background as [Labrousse and Vaudoyer] developed their ideas" (p.177); "The Earl of Aberdeen would not stoop to name Leroy...though he...felt no compunction echoing the French author's ideas" (p. 192). These suppositions may well be justified, but did all pathways of architectural inquiry in the Enlightenment and nineteenth century truly lead to or through Leroy?

Perhaps a more convincing approach would have been to situate Leroy as one node in the overlapping tapestry of discourses about antiquity and architectural history burgeoning in the late eighteenth century. Armstrong is clearly well versed in the literature, but his lens is so focused on Leroy that we get a limited view of these debates. Other key theorists of the era play supporting roles and are incorporated into the narrative when their ideas can be directly compared to Leroy's, generally to their detriment, as for example this passage: "Though Laugier's model [of the primitive hut] is far better known, Leroy's ideas were more logical and...had a tremendous though unacknowledged impact" (p.124). Leroy's antagonists, notably Piranesi and James Stuart, are acknowledged for their different opinions, but the merits of their work and critiques are not fully addressed.

A more even-handed treatment of the field would have highlighted Leroy's innovations without minimizing his contributions. This approach would also have allowed room for a conclusion that critically assesses *Les Ruines* in both historical and contemporary terms. For example, Armstrong periodically mentions the political stakes of Leroy's intellectual program, the way he "inscribed contemporary French architecture into a history of progress" (p. 162), and his interest in shipbuilding as a correlate to state power (p. 240). Reframing the introduction and conclusion around the larger motivations shaping the Greco-Roman debate and Leroy's place in it would help clarify its relevance to a wider audience.

This is not to detract from the many merits and important contributions of this book. Armstrong places Leroy's work in a dense network of academic disciplines and intellectuals of the era. His study reaches beyond architectural discourses and makes esoteric debates on everything from the true length of the Greek foot to the art of plant grafting at once accessible, relevant, and fascinating. *Julien-David Leroy and the Making of Architectural History* is a carefully researched, elegantly written, and beautifully illustrated work that deepens our understanding of the history of architecture and the Enlightenment.

NOTE

[1] For example, Leroy's influence is mentioned in books such as Peter Collins, *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture, 1750-1950* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1965); Werner Szambien, *Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand, 1760-1834: De l'imitation à la norme* (Paris: Picard, 1984); Anthony Vidler, *Claude-Nicolas Ledoux: Architecture and Social Reform at the End of the Ancien Régime* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990); Sylvia Lavin, *Quatremère de Quincy and the Invention of a Modern Language of Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992); and Barry Bergdoll, *Léon Vaudoyer: Historicism in the Age of Industry* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994). A more focused assessment of Leroy's influence on late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century architectural thinking is provided in Jeanne Kisacky, "History and Science: Julien-David Leroy's Dualistic Method of Architectural History," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 60 (2001): 260-289.

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