



FACTVM FOVNDATION

FOR DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY
IN CONSERVATION

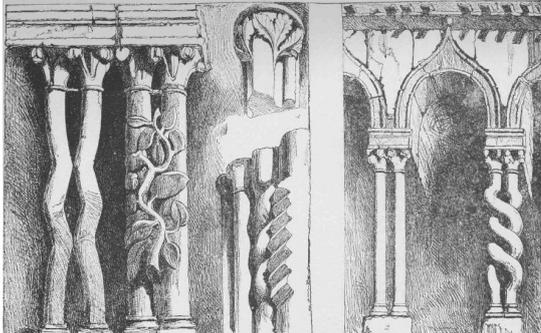


PLATE XIII—(Page 161—Vol. V)
PORTIONS OF AN ARCADE ON THE SOUTH SIDE OF THE CATHEDRAL OF FERRARA.

Ruskin's Ruins

09-10-2014

There is a tremendous show at the Barbican in London at the moment of photographic images of modern ruins - it is a considerable show - these images are extraordinarily evocative and their subject matter incredibly diverse and exciting so a very large number of exhibits are being displayed. And the added irony is that it is housed in this monumental concrete statement to the solid 1980s. The subjects range from blighted council blocks in London, subway stations in Brazil, grandiose Chinese projects, Portuguese colonial structures in Mozambique to sad forgotten Venezuelan dreams - all statements of vulnerability and fragility - and beauty.

Last week I was in a meeting explaining some work we are aiming to do in Lebanon and the discussion of architecture and ruins was part of that conversation - the idea that great architecture can be measured in the beauty of its ruins is a thought that has been with us since antiquity. I remember the idea behind Albert Speer's *Die Ruinenwerttheorie* - (The Theory of the Value of Ruins) drove his 1936 Olympic's stadium design - it was certainly not a new concept but one that was sadly twisted by Hitler who eagerly thought the ruins of these monuments to his Third Reich would mean to future generations what Greek and Roman ruins meant to his.

Ruskin can be relied on to state with clarity what this is all about - in *The Seven Lamps* - (this from the *Lamp of Memory*) he says "...the greatest glory of a building is not in its stones, nor in its gold. Its glory is in its Age, and in that deep sense of voicefulness, of stern watching, of mysterious sympathy, nay, even of approval or condemnation, which we feel in walls that have long been washed by the passing waves of humanity."

This section is a preamble to a discussion of restoration and the absolute importance of recording. He strongly advocated the exact and accurate copying of objects and buildings using the devices of the time - pencil and paper (this was 1849 so photography was just evolving). In the *Stones of Venice* he tells us he must "... trace the lines of this image before it be for ever lost, and to record, as far as I may, the warning which seems to me to be uttered by every one of the fast-gaining waves, that beat like passing bells, against the Stone of Venice."

We now have devices that can do so much more than record with pencil on paper - we can record in absolute detail and with great profundity and still without touching. Ruskin's powerful argument was that to understand an object one must draw it - now that is still true, but we can help - we can record and distribute that recording by the use of technology so that the images and information can be widely possible - even to those who can't draw. The details of subjects of recording are preserved for ever and their secrets revealed through high definition display. Look at the projects on this website for some examples of this process in action. This is what we can now do with the Lucida 3D scanner and is what we are doing in as many places as we can - what we are doing is deeply important both for preservation and for understanding - it is an activity whose result we are all aware of and can now achieve almost perfectly - if we understand.