

Paper-Thin: Imagining, Building and Critiquing Medieval Architecture

Special Issue, Arts

Deadline: Jun 30, 2023

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Dora Wang

Dear Colleagues,

In his notorious assessment of medieval architecture, Giorgio Vasari attacked those buildings that 'have more the quality of seeming to have been made of paper, than of stone or marble'. Nonetheless, 'paper architecture' can be marvellous rather than flimsy: in the late-fourteenth century poem, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Hautdesert Castle has such fair spires, chalk-white chimneys, and painted pinnacles that it looks like a paper cut-out. This is an architecture of make-believe. However, cut-outs bridge the imagined and the practical, from Master WG's sophisticated vault designs to more common templates (such as the set for a window of Tervuren Castle, Belgium) and drawings. Cutting and folding can actively generate ideas: according to the ninth-century geographer al-Yaḥqūbī, the minaret of the Ibn Tulun Mosque in Cairo is modelled after a piece of paper (or perhaps papyrus) that had been rolled up absentmindedly by the commissioning sultan. Fragile paper was clearly a site for both highly controlled geometrical design and creative play, a freedom traditionally attributed to the Renaissance.

This Special Issue will consider paper, parchment and papyrus as instruments and subjects for medieval architectural imaginations. Articles may focus on the usefulness and fragility of cut-outs, templates, drawings, and papier mâché models; on temporary, unrealisable, or fictional buildings; on cutting, folding, rolling, turning over as paper-bound forms of design; on the artistic uses and representations of paper, parchment, papyrus, and other 'paper-like' materials. More broadly, they could consider paper's relationship to other media, and the paper and other supports in the historiography of medieval and Renaissance architecture.

We invite contributors to submit their research in English for consideration. Please note that there is a two-stage submission procedure. We will first collect a title and short abstract (maximum 250 words), 5 keywords, and a short bio (150 words), by January 15, 2023, via email to Dr. Costanza Beltrami (costanza.beltrami@history.ox.ac.uk) and Dora Wang (dora.wang@mdpi.com). Selected abstracts will be invited to submit 5000–9000-word papers for peer review by June 30, 2023. Journal publication is expected to occur from late spring through fall 2023, depending on the revision time needed after peer review. Each article will be published open access, on a rolling basis after successfully passing peer review.

Dr. Costanza Beltrami

ArtHist.net

Guest Editor

Reference:

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(accessed May 14, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/37943>>.