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The Social Life of Port Architecture: History, Politics, Commerce and Culture

Introduction

Inevitably, the architecture of port-cities is entangled in the social, political, economic, and cultural histories of these places and their wider role in international trade. Historically, the merchants constituted the dominant political elite in port cities and the major architectural projects which they commissioned, whether relating to dock development, the creation of a civic and commercial infrastructure, or the construction of domestic residences, enabled them to materialize their status in prominent urban spaces. The political and cultural frames of reference into which such buildings were inserted also served to provide a way to embed trade and commerce in a clearly defined set of broader civilizational values. As such, architecture was one of the key sites for referencing the cultures of other places, either through the use of historicist styles and discourses which were designed to civilize the working class, or by the deliberate choice of 'exotic' motifs. More crucially, port-city architecture offered visual representations of local traditions and achievements, whether in the context of major public architecture, commercial buildings, or even residential housing. But port architecture also reflected the social interactions which were crucial for knitting together trading networks both within and beyond the city, while the configuration of internal building spaces reveals both implicit and explicit assumptions about the ordering of social relationships and the structuring of class-specific hierarchies more widely.

This chapter is designed to address a number of interrelated issues relating to the structure, function and perception of port-city architecture. How did the trading function of port cities affect the construction of urban space and the proliferation of architectural styles? To what extent did the social practices and values (whether religious or secular) which were crucial for assembling and maintaining trading networks effectively shape the architecture of port cities? Historically, the demographic growth of port cities was generally characterized by a disproportionate dependency on long-distance immigration, often with a markedly variegated ethnic structure.¹ But how far did ethnic in-migration and the selective consolidation of diasporic networks affect the physical and experiential qualities of port-city architecture? From the early nineteenth century onwards, there was a rapid professionalization of architectural practice, but to what extent did practitioners in port cities draw on international symbols and construction techniques or attempt to particularize them in seeking to create a distinctive, local, urban image? And perhaps most challenging of all in terms of a specific research agenda, what can we conclude about

the general perception and interpretation of port city architecture beyond the realms of literary writings and professional critiques? In order to address these issues, this chapter will focus on a number of interrelated themes: the significance of trading empires, whether Venetian or British, in disseminating specific architectural styles in port cities; the impact of trading patterns and commercial relationships on the availability and use of raw materials in building construction; the role of architects in reinforcing the language and materialist imagery of imperial authority; the processes of wealth creation through commerce and trade and their legacy in terms of the business centres of port cities and the domestic residences of individual merchants; and the configuration of sailortown itself, particularly in relation to the establishment and use of seamen's homes. But it will also analyse the significance of in-migration and settlement as a contributing factor in configuring the ethnic and cultural identity of port cities. Finally, it will discuss issues relating to the perception of port-city architecture, its symbolic relationship with political and economic actors, and wider issues relating to redevelopment and the need to preserve the legacy of the past in a way which reflects a better understanding of its social life and significance. In order to take forward this agenda, the paper will draw on a wide range of material, but it will also reflect recent research on Liverpool within the framework of the Mercantile Liverpool Project and by architectural historians, cultural anthropologists and sociologists who have begun to explore the social life of its architectural history and the cultural, economic, and political significance of many of its key buildings.²

Establishing a port-city typology

At one level, any attempt to analyze port-cities within a comparative context must recognize that functional differences between various types of ports became more apparent over time. Some ports benefited from their multi-functionality, such as the capital cities of Buenos Aires, Copenhagen, London, Montevideo, and Stockholm; naval ports (including Kiel, Portsmouth and Toulon) had a negligible amount of commercial traffic; the development of Bremen and Hamburg, together with Singapore (following full independence in 1965) was influenced by their distinct political framework as city-states, while *entrepôt*, ferry and free ports have increasingly fulfilled a more specialized function. To this extent, a comparative analysis of port city architecture must take into consideration not only a range of economic criteria, including port function, relative size, principal trades,



Figure 1: Venice, *Ca' Loredan or Ca' Farsetti*

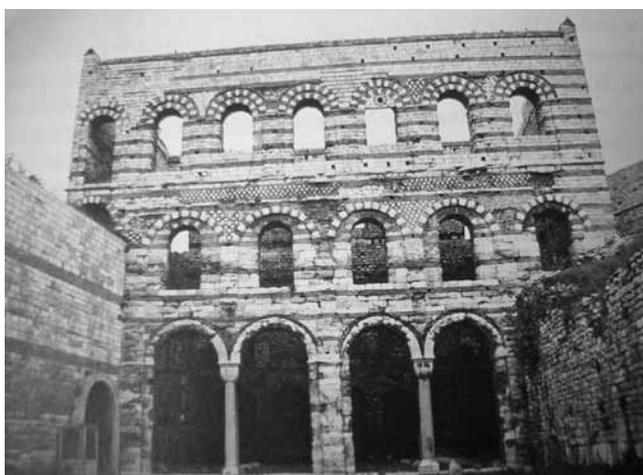


Figure 2: Istanbul, *Tekfur Sarayı*

and the extent of local industrialization, but also the political framework of long-run development in terms of different forms of governance, ownership and administration, as well as specific locational factors relating to the quality of both the land and water site, which undoubtedly played a key role in underpinning the success of individual port-cities and influenced both the form and nature of urban building construction, whether in the case of Genoa, New York or Rotterdam.³

Irrespective of site-specific differences the process of urban expansion (or decline) has been strongly influenced by the changing pattern of world trade: maritime commerce has been a powerful factor behind urbanization and ports, after capital cities, have often registered the highest rates of population growth. Because of their maritime nexus, the architectural development of port cities has been influenced, to varying degrees, by links with foreign lands, the changing nature of international trade, and by the in-migration and settlement of diverse ethnic communities.⁴ Despite their functional diversity, the urban structure of port cities particularly in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has also been influenced by a number of generic socio-economic factors. The nature of their local economies was associated with a high dependency on casual employment, a markedly unequal distribution of wealth, and a range of adverse

social conditions. Long-distance in-migration, a pronounced degree of ethnic and class-specific residential segregation, together with the ideology of merchant capital, also directly affected the cultural identity of port-city architecture in a context where both public and private buildings were configured by power and the 'resource of power'.⁵

Trading Empires and the Architecture of Port Cities

Trading empires with port cities as their focal points have often used architecture to reinforce authority or to symbolize their power. In line with the Lacanian theory of signification, the design of specific buildings has therefore reflected the perceived historical relationship between architecture, culture and imperial power.⁶ But the ways in which trading empires have sought to use architecture as a means of sustaining world domination have varied considerably, both in the colonial territories themselves, as well as in the metropolitan and port-city centres of commercial power. A great deal has been written about the architectural history of Venice, the important legacy of 'Veneto-Byzantine' houses and palaces, and the development of Venetian Gothic.⁷ But the Venetian Republic can serve as an instructive example of how trading empires contributed to the transfer and assimilation of architectural styles based on a significant degree of artistic and intellectual reciprocity.⁸ The development of the Piazza San Marco undoubtedly reflected contemporary inspirations from eastern architectural practice, in particular the profusion of mosaics represented a thematic borrowing from the Great Mosque in Damascus; the outer cupolas of the palace itself were an adaptation of the well-known profiles of Islamic mausolea in Egypt; while the *campanile* of San Pietro di Castello was modeled on the Pharos lighthouse of Alexandria.⁹ The design of many of the *palazzi*, with semicircular arches opening on to the canal and extended second-storey loggias (Fig. 1), as well as some of the warehouses, demonstrated clear similarities with the domestic architecture of Byzantium, whether in Constantinople or elsewhere (Fig. 2).¹⁰ The mercantile prosperity of Venice was dependent on the exploitation of trading opportunities in the Adriatic, the eastern Mediterranean, and the Middle East, within the framework of a dynamic, if at times problematical, relationship with Islam. But spatial consciousness, like a sense of its historic past, was a crucial ingredient in structuring the Republic's self-identity and the assimilation of key elements of eastern architectural practice helped to convey its collective aspirations, both materially and spiritually.¹¹ Moreover, there was an important degree of reciprocity in terms of architectural styles between Venice and its overseas colonies with cultural forms exchanged and transferred from and to the metropolitan centre, as the case of Crete and the influence of its Byzantine architectural heritage on the Venetian townscape clearly illustrates.¹²

But not all trading empires were characterized by extensive reciprocity in terms of artistic and intellectual cross-fertilization, the dissemination of architectural styles, or the social structuring of the urban landscape of port cities. If the architecture of Trieste before 1914 reflected the 'language

of hybridity' which underpinned the multilingual character of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the extension of Italian control in East Africa in the interwar period, particularly in coastal towns, was associated with the emergence of the imperial apartheid city, reflecting the fascist belief that Africans were 'a-historical' and incapable of modernization.¹³ Both the British in India and the French in Indo-China sought to retain effective control of the semantic context of the styles in which they built. Imperial authority was created and reinforced by the explicit use of classical prototypes, as the example of the Town Hall in Calcutta (1807–13) clearly illustrates, while many of the early Anglican churches simply used the same prototype derived from James Gibbs's St. Martins-in-the Fields, as was the case with St. John's, Calcutta, erected between 1788 and 1787.¹⁴ Moreover, the Gothic revival in England, associated in particular with A. W. N. Pugin, with an implicit belief that it represented a product of a visibly purer society, also influenced colonial building styles in India, particularly in the port cities of Calcutta and Madras.¹⁵ But both public and domestic architectural styles imposed by the colonial power had to be adapted to the exigencies of the Indian climate, in particular the intense heat and blazing light. In the longer term, however, the dominant architectural forms imposed by the British colonial authorities were modified by the assimilation of traditional Indian practices and the use of elements of western architectural vocabularies to create essentially hybrid products. But the narrative of adaptive strategies also reflected the changing policies of colonial rule, particularly after the Indian Mutiny of 1857, and the creation of pseudo-Indian (or Indo-Saracenic) architectural styles with their explicit borrowings from the Islamic architecture of India's previous Mughal and Afghan rulers can be interpreted as a means of strengthening imperial control by incorporating a visible element of continuity with the Indian past.¹⁶ Indeed, this process was also reinforced by the British Orientalist movement which contributed substantially to the Hindu architectural renaissance, as well as by ethnographic research which increasingly posited a direct relationship between architectural styles and race.¹⁷ It is important to note, however, that the flow of architectural forms from the imperial metropolitan centre to India was not reciprocated by any perceptible influence of Indian practices on British design. The relatively brief vogue for the 'Hindoo style' was influenced by the landscape painters Thomas Daniell (1749–1840) and his nephew, William Daniell (1769–1837), with the belief that Indian architecture 'presents an endless variety of forms' and it was reinforced in the late-eighteenth century by travel writers, such as William Hodges, but apart from a few select buildings (including the Pavilion at Brighton), its overall impact on Britain and its port cities was either marginal or non-existent.

Trade and the flow of building materials and architectural ideas

However, the presence of a colonial power was only one factor which influenced the configuration of port-city architecture, as the pattern of international trade by itself often served as a mechanism for facilitating the flow of build-

ing materials and architectural designs across oceans and continents. A number of examples will be used to illustrate the impact of trade flows on the configuration of port-city architecture. First, the coastal areas of the Red Sea provide evidence of a sustained cross-cultural continuity in terms of the use of building materials, as well as the spatial organization and functional use of port-city buildings.¹⁸ Maritime trade, with a significant degree of involvement by Indian merchants and Baniyan brokers (both Hindu and Jain), tied the Red Sea to both the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean.¹⁹ In ports such as Mocha and Jidda both the design and structure of urban housing reflected the needs of 'commercially oriented residents' and the availability of building materials made available through established trading patterns. The *rawshan*, the elaborate carved woodwork which was a feature of housing in many Red Sea ports played a 'critical role' in defining an early modern cosmopolitan maritime community', but it was made from Asian hardwood which was imported from abroad, from ports such as Cochin, as a convenient and profitable ballast for Indian Ocean-going vessels.²⁰

Secondly, in coastal areas of Ghana (previously the Gold Coast), elite residential architecture between the 1860s and 1920s sought to combine elements of the Akan courtyard house with European Palladian architecture and the Afro-Portuguese *sobrado*.²¹ In ports such as Anomabo the hybridity of domestic architecture was a source of cultural authentication and demonstrates how the Fante and other coastal Africans succeeded in appropriating and transforming building designs and technologies which enabled them to communicate visually their status and identity. But if some elements of architectural design were derived indirectly from the British colonial authorities and the Methodist Church, the availability of suitable stones for house construction was a result of existing patterns of trade, while the adoption of the *sobrado* reflected the importance of trade links with Brazil and the employment of Brazilian masons.²²

Thirdly, international trade often acted as a conduit for the dissemination of innovative architectural practices and the application of new technology. As a key element in the redevelopment of Liverpool's waterfront in the early years of the twentieth century, the construction of the Liver Building (commissioned by the Royal Liver Friendly Society and designed by a local architect, Aubrey Thomas) represented a significant break with traditional design principles which had previously influenced the development of commercial buildings in Liverpool (Fig. 3).²³ When completed in 1911 it was the tallest office building in Britain with an extensive basement area, ten upper floors and six further stories located in the twin towers above the roof level. More importantly, it signified the application of new building techniques, in particular a system patented by François Hennebique using reinforced concrete as a skeletal framework on which was hung grey granite cladding in thin blocks.²⁴ As such, it reflected key structural developments in America between 1885 and 1895 which fostered the greater efficiency, height and stability of multi-storey buildings, namely the replacement of cast iron by steel, the introduction of sway-rod wind bracing, and the development of portal framing.²⁵ The fact



Figure 3: *The Liver Building, Liverpool*

that Liverpool was the first British city to emulate American architectural achievements was almost certainly a result of the interconnectivity of trade and commercial links. The Atlantic trade had underpinned Liverpool's rise to international prominence: in 1850 American cotton accounted for 67 per cent of Britain's imports and Liverpool was 'the chief emporium for cotton in the Empire'.²⁶ The majority of emigrants who passed through Liverpool in the period prior to 1914 were bound for North America and banking, commercial and trading links between Liverpool and east coast American ports were not only long established but particularly intense.²⁷ Many Liverpool businessmen and ship owners had a fascination with American technology and there were strong trading links with Chicago and New York in particular where the development of skyscrapers around the turn of the century was most apparent.²⁸

Fourthly, commercial and trading links played an important role in the internationalization of architectural practice. In terms of cultural production, it has been argued that architects increasingly operated as 'mediators' between authoritarian power and humanistic aspiration, but their ability to fulfil this function was a result of the professionalization of architectural practice from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.²⁹ The key elements behind professionalization were similar to those of other professions: they included the creation of institutional structures, including associations, the control of licensing laws, the establishment of schools, and the exclusion of competitors, in particular general builders.³⁰ It was predicated on the development and dissemination of specialist journals, including *The Builder* (first printed

in 1842), which became the most influential weekly journal devoted to the world of building, and national publications such as *The American Architect*, *The Architectural Record*, and *The Inland Architect*.³¹ It was also reinforced by architectural competitions which increasingly attracted international submissions: in nineteenth-century Britain there were over 780 separate competitions, many of which were held in port cities such as Liverpool (42), Newcastle-upon-Tyne (32), Bristol (25), Hull (24), Sunderland (23) and Glasgow (20).³²

The professionalization of architectural practice also facilitated the dissemination of best practice within the framework of a rapidly changing discourse, particularly in terms of the need to establish larger partnerships, to improve office procedures, and to design more cost-effective buildings.³³ The inter-connectedness of commerce and trade was replicated by the international links of architects practicing in major port cities and other metropolitan centres. For example, Charles Herbert Reilly from the Liverpool School of Architecture (1904–1933) was able to utilize his contacts in the USA to place students for office practice on a regular basis, largely in New York, at least until the onset of the interwar depression.³⁴ Moreover, the establishment of architectural schools in universities, whether in Britain, France or Italy, also reinforced the transfer of design concepts and architectural styles within a framework of cultural imperialism. Again, the case of the Liverpool School of Architecture is instructive in this context: Liverpool graduates took up official positions as government architects in Egypt and Iraq; they also undertook commissions in Baghdad, Cairo and Zanzibar, in some cases combining European Modernism with local architectural traditions.³⁵ But the School also accepted between five and six overseas students each year and played an important role in training native-born architects and in exporting the Liverpool system of training to both Egypt and Thailand.

But the existence of extensive trading links and business connections did not necessarily imply a rapid adoption of new building styles in individual port cities or the implicit rejection of traditional architectural practices. Despite the fact that Hamburg improved its comparative ranking amongst European ports from fifth in 1879 to second by 1900 and its shipping companies had extended significantly their world-wide links, the early twentieth century witnessed a reassertion of traditional construction methods for commercial buildings.³⁶ From the early 1900s onwards, the 'common ordinary brick' had become associated with a range of political, social and even spiritual qualities by a number of architects and writers: modernism was increasingly criticized for its disregard of place and location; and, according to Paul Bröcker in the city's planning department, 'the brick skin of an office block should tell us; this is a Hamburg building'.³⁷ The ten-story Chilehaus, completed in 1924, was symptomatic of a deliberate attempt to provide a local synthesis of modernism and tradition, with the use of 4.8 million bricks representing an explicit symbol of continuity with earlier traditions of office construction.³⁸ It could of course be argued that the reaffirmation of a traditional brick culture in Hamburg after 1918 reflected a wider sense of middle-class disillusionment with American-inspired mod-

ernism resulting from Germany's defeat in the First World War which resulted in the need to revive local (or regional) architectural styles, but it also suggests that embeddedness in international trading networks was not a necessary precondition in major port cities for the direct assimilation of new building concepts and techniques.³⁹

In-migration and the structuring of the port-city townscape

As a result of their seaborne links, a significant proportion of port-city in-migrants were of non-national or overseas origins, given that the final destination was often a function of information disseminated through existing communication networks. Because of their international connections, port cities attracted human capital from relatively distant regions; they were focal points for the circulation of peoples, goods and information; and there was a high degree of continuity in the maintenance of family trading networks and diasporic memory.⁴⁰ For example, Genoa housed migrants from all over the Mediterranean; Trieste accommodated different Armenian, Greek, Jewish and Serbian 'nations'; and a complex mix of French, Italians, Greeks, Albanians, Bulgarians and Germans exercised a powerful influence in shaping the character of Odessa.⁴¹

Whether in the case of Baniyan brokers and money-changers in the Red Sea port of Mocha or Tatar merchants in the river port of Kazan, in-migrants often influenced the design and spatial configuration of residential buildings.⁴² In other cases, in-migrant communities were responsible for the construction in port cities of communal buildings, including churches, which helped to reinforce their sense of national identity and separateness. In Sweden, for example, the German parish in Gothenburg was founded in 1623 only two years after the city's establishment and its church (the *Christinenkirche*) was consecrated in 1648 as a focal point for in-migrant Protestants from Germany, Holland and Scotland (Fig. 4). But it was not until 1855 that the foundation stone for St Andrew's, a separate church for the increasingly influential English (Scottish) community, was finally laid by Robert Dickson a 'Merchant and Senior of the British Factory of Gothenburg'.⁴³ In the case of the mission churches established overseas by the Swedish Patriotic Evangelical Society from the early 1860s onwards the intention was to seize every opportunity to proclaim God's word amongst Scandinavian sailors in foreign ports and to offer a welcoming, but clearly recognizable, environment with a range of local newspapers, traditional refreshments, and, when necessary, welfare support.⁴⁴ Where new mission churches were built in major port cities, such as Liverpool and Hamburg, they invariably incorporated Swedish or Scandinavian design elements.⁴⁵ In Liverpool, in particular, the church designed by W.D. Caröe (1883–1884) incorporated many distinct, Scandinavian features, including stepped gables and a concave-sided, lead-covered spire over the entrance (Fig. 5). It is often argued that architecture, in a reflexive way, can express 'contested and ambiguous national identities'.⁴⁶ For Scandinavians nationality itself became an increasingly important issue in the course of the nineteenth

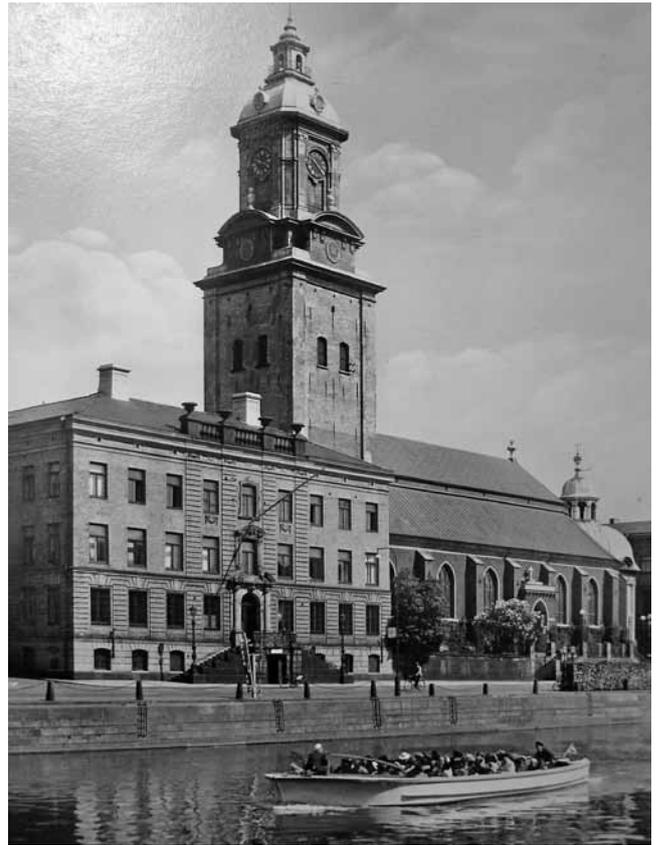


Figure 4: The Christinenkirche, Gothenburg (1648)

Figure 5: Gustaf Adolfs Kyrka, Liverpool (1883–84)

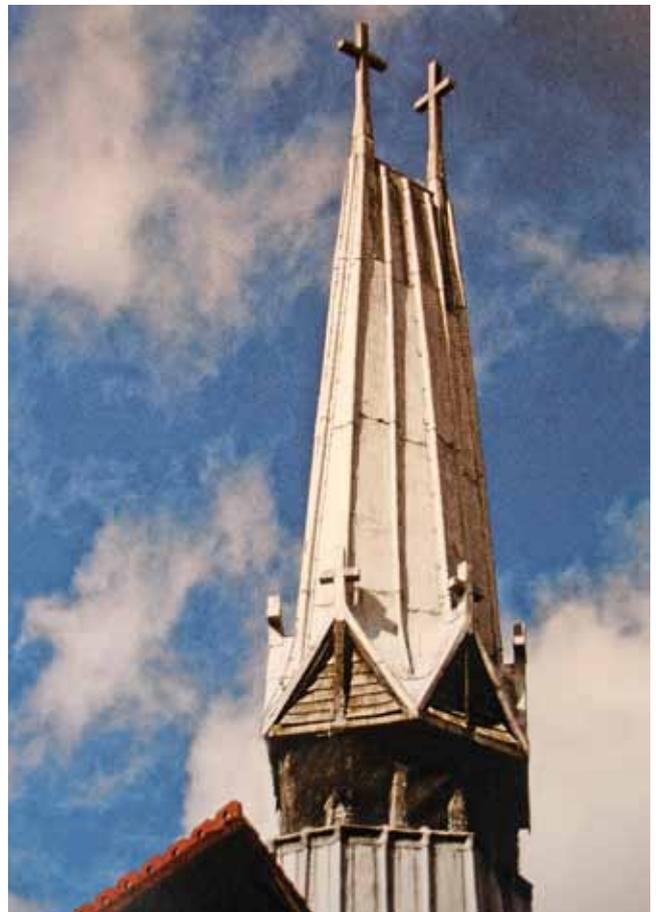




Figure 6: *The Scandinavian Church, Liverpool: advertising card from the mid-1890s*



Figure 7: *Gustaf-Adolfskirche, Hamburg (1906–07)*

century, whether within the framework of the personal union between Sweden and Norway, or within Finland where there is evidence of a united attempt to avoid the assimilation of Finnish culture by Russian laws and customs. But although the Seamen's Church in Liverpool catered for all Scandinavians, the local vicars became increasingly involved in defining or determining nationality entitlement, while its overall design (Fig. 6) served to reinforce a sense of 'separateness' and distinctiveness from the indigenous local community.⁴⁷ Similarly in Hamburg (Fig. 7), the Swedish

Seamen's Church with its network of related associations (including the Swedish School and Lecture Societies, the Swedish Ladies Club, and the Swedish Club, established in 1906) not only served the common interests of Swedish residents but sought directly to 'preserve' the national language.⁴⁸

By the early twentieth century the church authorities and mission societies of many European countries, including Britain, Denmark, Germany and Sweden, had established a dense network of overseas churches in individual port cities, reflecting the needs of in-migrant national communities, transient seafarers and emigrants. In Buenos Aires, for example, an Anglican Church (St. John's Cathedral) was established after the Treaty of 1825, the foundation stone of the Presbyterian Church was laid in 1833, and a separate Protestant Church, with English, Scots, American and German merchants as its principal supporters, was opened in 1862.⁴⁹ Frequently, church buildings associated with specific in-migrant groups reflected their continued sense of nationality and the architectural legacy of their countries of origin. This was certainly the case with the Greek Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas in Liverpool (executed by Henry Sumners following a competition won by W & J Hay in 1864) which represented a smaller-scale version of the Church of St. Theodore in Constantinople (Fig. 8).⁵⁰ But the wider cultural and social significance of in-migrant church architecture was absent in some port cities because properties were either rented or taken over from other denominations. The church maintained by the *Congregación Sueca* in Buenos Aires in the early 1930s, although it attracted over 9,000 visitors annually to its reading room left 'something of a provisional impression', just as the premises used for the Swedish Seamen's Church in Bremen in the period after the Second World War had simply been rented on a provisional basis.⁵¹ Similarly, despite the relative importance and commercial status of many German in-migrant merchants in Liverpool in the nineteenth century, the congregation of the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* (established in 1846) initially worshipped in Anglican premises, subsequently purchased the Newington Chapel in Renshaw Street, and finally occupied the Presbyterian Church in Canning Street.⁵² Although the church, with its extended institutional and welfare network, undoubtedly functioned as a focal point which helped to sustain a sense of Germanness, its visual presence was never made explicit and the difficulty of reinforcing a sense of German separateness without upsetting the local population was highlighted in 1877 when members of the congregation on their summer outing to New Ferry felt it necessary to carry both German and English flags.⁵³

Two points need to be emphasized. First, the architectural legacy in port cities of in-migrant communities, whether in relation to church, commercial or residential buildings, was essentially a result of trade patterns and the role of overseas commercial networks: it was not dependent on the extension of colonial power. Secondly, ethnicity became an increasingly dominant factor in constructing the international division of labour from the late-nineteenth century onwards, with the result that larger commercial port cities, such as Hamburg, Liverpool, Marseille, Portland, Rotterdam, witnessed the settlement of increasing numbers of in-

migrants from China, West Africa, the Middle East and the Philippines.⁵⁴ These communities were often characterized by spatial concentration; they attracted considerable attention from the indigenous population; and China Town (as a concept) was generally viewed as an ‘exotic’ place with a close association with drugs, gambling and prostitution.⁵⁵ But although these communities had a perceptible impact on the external appearance of their immediate environment, their initial influence on port-city architecture was marginal and it is only with the passage of time that ethnically distinct features have been developed.⁵⁶

Architecture, Commercial Practices and the Profits of Port City Trade: the case of Liverpool

Port cities, in general, were dominated not only by commerce and trade, but also by the ideology of merchant capital.⁵⁷ The townscape structure (including the docks and warehouse, the commercial centre and residential areas) as well as the social life of individual buildings often reflected the interplay between these two factors.⁵⁸ In order to explore the extent to which the underlying economic and social profile of port cities affected the relationship between architecture, culture and daily life, the social significance of three specific types of buildings from Liverpool in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century will be assessed as representative of distinct port-city typologies which provide a basis for understanding the historic organization of urban commercial sectors in the modern period.

Both in a Byzantine and Venetian context, public structures were provided for the facilitation of trade and for guaranteeing a certain degree of transparency over commercial transactions. Despite Liverpool’s rapid development during the second half of the eighteenth century, to a great extent directly connected with the slave trade, many of its merchants still preferred to do business in the open street as the earlier Exchange was no longer adequate for coping with the increased volume of business transactions.⁵⁹ At the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, a decision was made to clear away some remaining houses north of the Town Hall and to create commercial buildings which would harmonize with its neo-classical style. Significantly, the venture was taken forward by a share-holding company (valued at £80,000) which was over-subscribed within three hours. The three-sided structure of The Exchange enclosed an open area (‘a noble neoclassical quadrangle’) for conducting business and consisted of a news-room, counting houses and extensive warehousing facilities. It offered ‘dignity and repose’ and it was generally agreed that the combination of commercial and municipal buildings has ‘never been surpassed’.⁶⁰ But the facilities offered by the New Exchange, completed in 1808, failed to keep pace with the growing commercial needs of Liverpool’s merchants and it was replaced in the mid-1860s by a more substantial building in the Flemish (or French) Renaissance style, designed by T. M. Wyatt, with ‘numerous storeys and offices’: even if it was ‘not especially adapted for architectural effect’, its news-room was deemed to be ‘a noble apartment’.⁶¹ Later



Figure 8: The Greek Orthodox Church in Liverpool (1870)

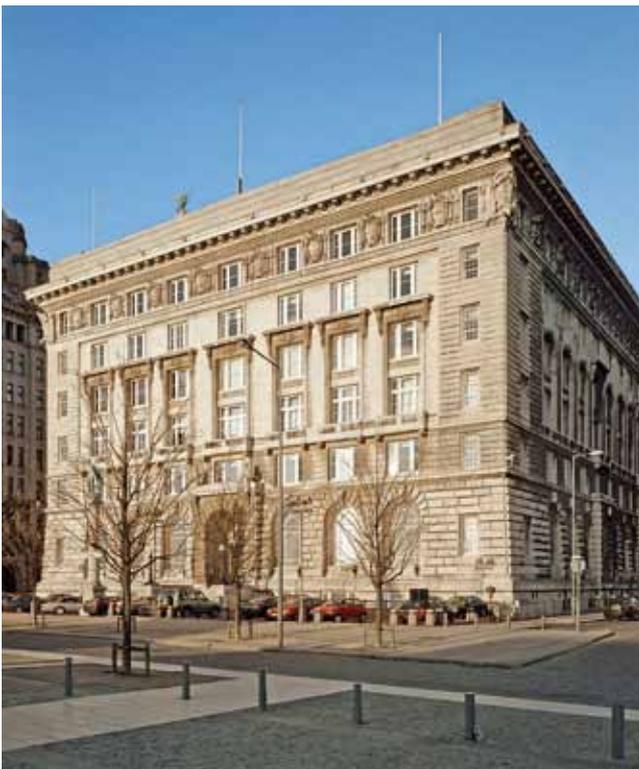
photographs (Fig. 9), including one by Francis Frith from 1893, provide a clearer indication of the social life of the Exchange and reflects its wider importance in the structuring of commercial relations within the city.⁶²

Commerce and long-distance overseas trade in nineteenth-century Liverpool (as elsewhere) were invariably associated with a high degree of risk and uncertainty. As a major port city, Liverpool attracted a large number of individuals determined to make a fortune as quickly as possible, either as agents, brokers, merchants or ship-owners. In the late nineteenth century over 50 per cent of the subscribers to the Exchange had not been members a decade earlier and it has been estimated that over three-quarters of them would encounter difficulties in meeting their liabilities at some point in time.⁶³ Indeed, the risk of failure was ever present. Of all the business partnerships registered in 1852, approximately 60 per cent had either been dissolved or had ceased trading by 1863 and 83 per cent of the sole traders operating within Liverpool’s merchant community in 1873 were never heard of again.⁶⁴ But business uncertainty and transaction costs could be reduced (although never eliminated) by the creation of a common business culture which reflected shared attitudes, aspirations and goodwill. Not only did the establishment and maintenance of personal relations offer a tangible solution to the persistent problems of agency and asymmetrical information, but networks were often of critical importance in determining commercial survival at a time when the business environment, as a whole, continued to be characterized by ‘low trust and morality’.⁶⁵ Within such a context, entrepreneurial networks embedded within an increasingly cohesive cultural framework helped to minimize market imperfections by coordinating valuable information and by strengthening trust and reputation. It is within this context that the social life of the Liverpool Exchange needs to be understood. Trading on Change, as it was known, brought together many of the key operators within the local business community within a carefully regulated framework: it promoted physical proximity and personal interaction; while the dress code required for ‘trading on the



Figure 9: *The Exchange, Liverpool (1864–67)*

Figure 10: *The Cunard Building, Liverpool (1916)*



flags' helped to reinforce reputation and trust. Indeed, Queen Victoria on a visit to Liverpool in 1851 observed that she had 'never seen so many well-dressed gentlemen together', as had been the case on the Exchange.

But external appearances were also important in defining and profiling the trustworthiness of individual companies. By the end of the nineteenth century, Cunard, with its government mail contract and its fleet of large, passenger-carrying steamers, was undoubtedly Liverpool's flagship shipping company.⁶⁶ The Company had also outgrown its previous offices and therefore utilized the opportunity created by the development of the waterfront site (following the closure and infilling of George's Dock) to develop a new headquarters designed by the Liverpool practice of Willinck and Thicknesse in conjunction with the Anglo-French architectural practice of Mewès & Davis in a style which represented a mixture of Italian Renaissance and Greek Revival influences.⁶⁷ The original architectural competition was intended to produce a design which would harmonize with the new offices of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company, but neither the winning submission nor the final building completed in 1916 ever fulfilled that purpose. Instead, the six-storey structure constructed by Holland, Hannen & Cubitts using a reinforced concrete frame clad in Portland stone sought to provide an impression of resilience, rugged strength and solidity, with public spaces, in particular the

first-class passenger lounge on the first floor, deliberately used to evoke the character of great Cunard ships (Fig. 10).⁶⁸ Indeed, the commercial success of the firm had been built on ‘convenience and comfort’, rather than gratuitous luxury or unproven technology.⁶⁹ Unlike many of its rivals, it had avoided the extremes of extravagance and parsimony; it had rejected any improvements which had not been satisfactorily tested; and it had prioritized the construction of strong, reliable and well-manned ships.⁷⁰ To this extent, the new Cunard headquarters was explicitly intended to reflect the key, underlying qualities of the shipping company itself.

In a wider context, the ideology of merchant capital which dominated many port cities in the nineteenth century implied a belief in the concept of the ‘night-watchman’ state, an adherence to liberal economic principles, and an underlying commitment to prevent any serious disruption to commerce and trade.⁷¹ It was also accompanied by a general unwillingness to countenance unnecessary social welfare expenditure and a disproportionate reliance on charity and philanthropy.⁷² The motives behind charitable involvement were undoubtedly varied: it often involved an emphasis on moral reform and seldom addressed the underlying socio-economic causes of ill-health, poverty and destitution.⁷³ The involvement in charitable activity was also a means of developing and consolidating network links within Liverpool’s business community; it served to enhance the reputational profile of individual merchants; and endowed them with additional powers of social control.

In individual cases, this was evident in the institutional structures which were established throughout the city as evidence of charitable and philanthropic activity by members of the mercantile community. The Royal Liverpool Seamen’s Orphan Institution (Fig. 11) is one example of the architectural legacy of local charity. Seafaring had always involved significant domestic costs in terms of the impact of the prolonged absence of maritime husbands on the allocation of family responsibilities and the high risk of occupational injury through accidents onboard ship and premature death by drowning.⁷⁴ In 1866, for example, almost 5,000 British seafarers died at sea (approximately 2.4 per cent of the registered workforce), of whom 2,390 were reported drowned: in 1880 it was reported that ‘sorrow on the sea is still very great, almost unabated’.⁷⁵ The initiative to establish a charitable institution to support and educate the orphans of seafarers was taken by a group of leading Liverpool ship owners at a meeting in December 1868 at the Mercantile Marine Service Association Rooms. The orphanage opened in August of the following year in temporary accommodation in Duke Street with 60 resident children, but the acquisition of land from the Town Corporation in 1870 led to the construction of a purpose-built orphanage designed by Alfred Waterhouse (1830–1915) which included a school, an infirmary, a chapel, a boy’s swimming pool, and shared dining facilities, with the children accommodated in separate boys’ and girls’ wings. By the end of the century 321 children attended the orphanage, while a further 508 were supported on the basis of outdoor relief. At its formal opening in 1874 Lord Derby emphasized that saving orphaned children ‘from the workhouse or the streets is not merely an act of charity; it is an act of duty and of justice’.⁷⁶



Figure 11: The Royal Seamen’s Orphan Institution, Liverpool

However, the establishment of the (Royal) Liverpool Seamen’s Orphan Institution has a wider significance in terms of understanding the social life of the city, the ideology of merchant capital with its emphasis on charitable giving (rather than improved social welfare provision), and the class- and gender-specific treatment of the asylum’s children. Despite Liverpool’s increasing dependency on commerce and trade from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, the foundation of a suitable institution for the children of sailors who had been lost at sea took place at a comparatively late date. The (Royal) Merchant Seamen’s Orphan Asylum had been established in London’s docklands as early as 1827, while the Seamen’s and General Orphan Asylum had been opened in Hull in 1866. Although a number of prominent Liverpool merchants played a critical role in developing the Seamen’s Orphan Institution, including leading ship owners such as Bryce Allan, James Beazley, and Ralph Brocklebank, many members of the merchant community remained ‘deaf to the loud calls which the widows and orphans of sailors continually make’: despite the fact that mariners ploughed the ocean and brought home their produce, too many simply made an excuse that the financing of the Institution did not concern them.⁷⁷ By 1912, the orphanage only had 507 subscribers, despite the fact that they were entitled to nominate children for admission, and it was disproportionately dependent for annual funding on the contributions to collection boxes on steamers and other ships which were subject to considerable fluctuation. Moreover, charity came at a price. The dining hall was ‘cavernous and austere’; the Institution was run on extremely strict rules and regulations; girls were trained to become domestic servants; and many boys were directed into seafaring through an arrangement with the training ship *Indefatigable* and suffered the same fate as their fathers.⁷⁸

Port cities were also generally characterized by extreme wealth inequality. On the one hand, significant wealth could be accumulated through commerce and trade, despite its inherent risks, while, on the other hand, both seafaring and the operation of dock and warehousing systems relied heavily on casual labour in a context where wages were driven down by high rates of in-migration. Even in relatively iso-



Figure 12: Broughton Hall, West Derby

lated coastal communities, such as the trading posts on the Lofoten Islands, merchants deliberately created information for other users of local space by the size and external colour of their housing in a manner which set them apart from other social classes, while in larger commercial ports the design and interior decoration of residential housing was intricately related to status and public standing.⁷⁹ This was explicitly the case in Liverpool, where people of wealth and position ‘surrounded themselves with certain attributes of power and wealth’, as means of providing the populace with ‘some indication of their rank and their social status’.⁸⁰ Indeed, in the window tax assessment of 1850 (which was based on properties with eight or more windows), Liverpool registered the highest assessment total in Britain (well in excess of Manchester or Bath), but the grandeur of a private residence was not necessarily a reliable indicator of status as references in the contemporary press to ‘shams and glitters’ suggests that it was widely understood that rapidly acquired wealth could just as easily be lost.⁸¹

The houses designed and constructed for Liverpool’s merchant elite, particularly in the late nineteenth and early-twentieth century, were intended to reflect the social and business lives of their occupiers. Although there were few residences with dining rooms for more than 30 guests, provision was regularly made for extensive picture galleries, libraries and billiard rooms.⁸² The imposing Gothic revival mansion, Broughton Hall (Yew Tree Lane, West Derby), designed by Walter Scott for the in-migrant German merchant Gustavus C. Schwabe (Fig. 12) could only be managed with the assistance of a large residential staff: the dining room was particularly spacious; while it was over a game of billiards here that Schwabe suggested to Thomas Henry Ismay the founding of a new transatlantic shipping line which later became the White Star Line.⁸³ Indeed, entertaining at home was an integral aspect of interaction and networking for Liverpool’s merchant elite, particularly during the winter season: it was arranged in a structured, reciprocal manner which still allowed opportunities for spontaneous celebrations, and its scale was sometimes very substantial. On 15 February 1882, for example, the Holts (one of Liverpool’s pre-eminent cotton-trading firms) held a party for

‘fully 140, chiefly young dancing people’, while the family residence (Sudley) also included ‘farming and poultry yards and fields’ which led to additional visits from close friends within the business community.⁸⁴ To this extent, architecture, artistic taste, as well as an interest in agriculture and horticulture, combined to reinforce the perception of reputation and social status.

Structuring the world of the seafarer ashore

Most ports had a distinct, if not notorious, sailortown which invariably served as a focal point for life ashore: Baltimore’s ‘The Block’ was ‘renowned among seafarers’; in Hamburg, St. Pauli (at least until 1939) was ‘one great web of predatory spiders’ with numerous beer-gardens, dance-halls and taverns; in Liverpool, the area in from the new quay was ‘a mass of sailor taverns and low-class drinking houses with gin palaces in every adjacent street’; while the ‘watering holes’ and bath-houses of Yokohama were well known amongst foreign seamen.⁸⁵ Sailortown, with its extended range of attractions, delights and depravities, was an important aspect of the social life of port cities: it was a ‘zone of cultural contact’ with a well-defined diaspora space where seafarers ashore spent their hard-earned wages on ‘beer, women and song’.⁸⁶

But the increasing establishment of sailors’ homes from the mid-1830s onwards modified the landscape of sailortown, as civic agencies and mission societies sought to cater for the welfare needs of seafarers.⁸⁷ By the early 1850s, the Sailors Home in London catered for approximately 5,000 sailors each year and its bed capacity was doubled in 1865, although many remained dependent on private sector lodging keepers, sometimes of questionable reliability.⁸⁸ The Liverpool Sailors’ Home catered for 1,822 sailors and 410 apprentices in 1845, its first year of operation, but by 1902 it accommodated 7,245 boarders.⁸⁹ It was a massive presence close to the waterfront: it was architecturally ‘extravagant externally’, while inside the simple and plain bedrooms opened off an impressive galleried atrium with decorative ironwork (Fig. 13, 14).⁹⁰ In Bombay, the Royal Alfred Sailors’ Home (Fig. 15), designed in the Gothic style by Frederick William Stevens (1847–1900) was a ‘rather luxurious hostel’ with large airy rooms and bathrooms.⁹¹ Its foundation stone was re-laid in 1872 and the work on the sculptures which were designed to enhance its appearance was supervised by John Lockwood Kipling, as Professor of Architectural Sculpture. In addition, sailors’ homes were increasingly provided by individual mission societies, sometimes for specific groups of seafarers, whether defined by nationality, religion or ethnicity. For example, the German Seamen’s Mission in Hoboken, New York, regarded as a ‘suburb of Bremen’ by many seafarers, attracted over 18,000 visitors in its first year of operation in 1907.⁹² In the course of the twentieth century individual shipping lines, such as the Blue Funnel Line and the Elder Dempster Line, also created hostels for their crew, particularly if they had been recruited overseas.⁹³

But the provision of sailors’ homes was designed to achieve wider objectives in changing or even transforming

the lives of seafarers, specifically by curbing the excesses normally associated with seamen on shore leave. The ministers at the Finnish Seamen's Mission in London perceived seamen in foreign ports as 'helpless figures, lonely, gullible and carefree to the point of recklessness' and always prone to fall victim to the 'Devil's emissaries'.⁹⁴ Similarly, in Liverpool the pastor and his assistant at the Scandinavian Seamen's Church regularly visited Nordic ships with the intention of distributing religious tracts. But there is some evidence to suggest that the provision of accommodation for seafarers, sometimes located in imposing architectural structures, did facilitate a more careful husbandry of financial resources. Or perhaps some sailors never fitted the dominant, stereotypical image. In its first 40 years of operation the London Sailors' Home had taken deposits of over £2m, of which over £700,000 had been remitted to family and friends: in 1902 the Sailors' Home in Liverpool accepted £31,073 on deposit for safekeeping or for remitting home; the Finnish Seamen's Mission in London registered annual deposits of £1,040 between 1889 and 1899; while the Scandinavian Seamen's Church in Liverpool received deposits valued at over £9,491 between 1940 and 1948 from 68 individual seafarers.⁹⁵ Sailors' homes, therefore, provide an invaluable insight into the social lives of seafarers while ashore and the extent to which they retained a sense of commitment and responsibility to family and friends, despite a persistent view amongst elite groups in society that they were generally 'dissolute' and 'easily led astray'.⁹⁶

Conclusion: the interpretation and preservation of the social life of port-city architecture

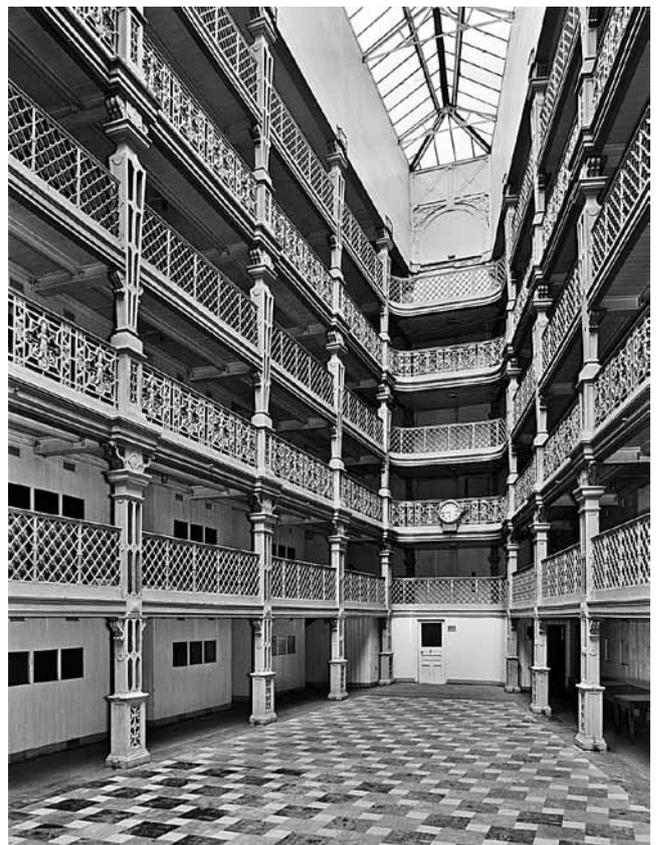
Today, as was the case in the past, architecture plays a key role in terms of how port cities represent themselves to external observers and the wider world.⁹⁷ The architectural profile of port cities reflects a changing and symbiotic relationship with economic actors involved in trade and commerce; civic buildings were designed to display the aspirations and influence of the political elite; office buildings reflected a deliberate use of historical styles and building materials to reinforce status and to emphasize their role as a 'visible embodiment of modern commerce'; while places of worship were often structured to justify the manipulation of the social order by the dominant, mercantile classes or to reinforce a sense of confessional, ethnic or national identity.⁹⁸ Even within an established port-city typology, architectural styles could sometimes reflect the need to assert a specific local or regional identity (as was the case with Hamburg after the First World War), but the changing pattern of international commerce and trade with port-cities as a focal point also served as a mechanism for the assimilation of historic design features as well as for the dissemination of new architectural forms.

This chapter has attempted to raise some general, theoretical questions relating to the social life of port architecture drawing on a range of historical and site-specific case studies. It has sought to disentangle the factors which have helped to structure the townscape of ports, not only in relation to their commercial operations, but also in the context



Figure 13: The Sailors' Home, Liverpool

Figure 14: The interior of the Sailors' Home, Liverpool



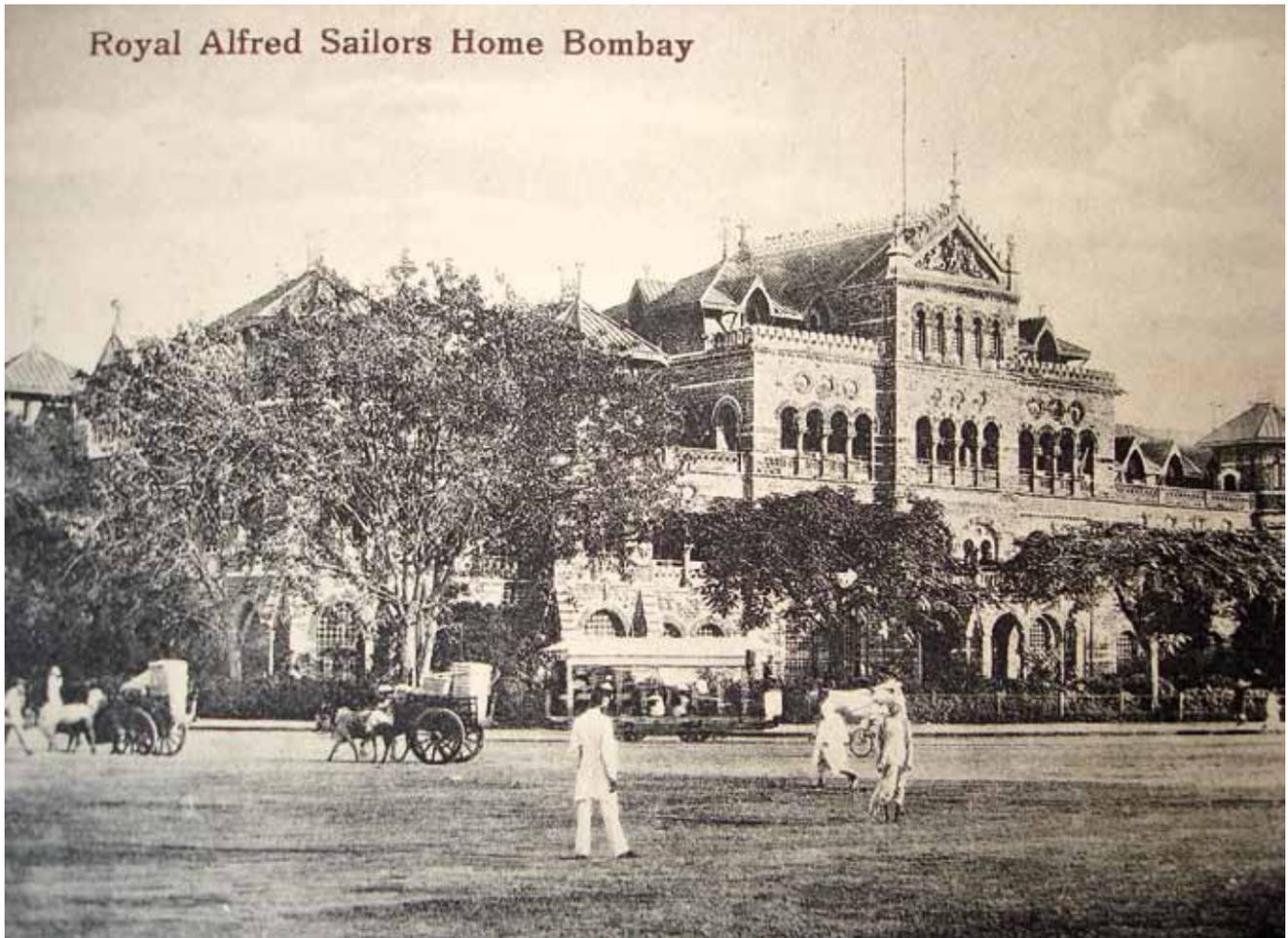


Figure 15: *The Royal Alfred Sailors' Home, Bombay*

of the provision and significance of charitable, civic, religious and residential buildings. Too often, architectural historians and city planners are concerned primarily with the design and structure of port architecture, rather than its wider social life or the relationship between building design and the articulation of economic and political power, despite the fact that the ground used for building in most cases has been defined by the state or set aside by legislative decrees.⁹⁹ There is seldom any attempt to analyse the role of individual buildings within the framework of a social theory of space, to disentangle the wider objectives of commercial, political or religious actors in structuring urban space, or to conceptualize urban landscapes as public history.¹⁰⁰ The waterfront regeneration of many ports in the last few decades has also served to undermine a traditional sense of place identity, as links with the maritime and trading past become weaker, just as recent economic development has sometimes changed the character of commercial areas and led to the demise of sailortown.¹⁰¹ But the architectural history of port-cities is embedded in a range of cultural, economic and political factors; it reflects the importance of the business community and the ideology of merchant capital; the influence of ethnic in-migrants and alternative sub-cultures; and the mediating role of a rapidly professionalizing architectural profession. All of these issues need to be addressed if we are to provide a more convincing appreciation of the social life of port

architecture or to offer a better interpretation for the choice of form and materials in the design of specific port-city buildings and their wider significance both for contemporaries and for wider audiences today.

I would like to express my thanks to my colleague Paul Jones and other participants at the international workshop on the Social Life of Port Architecture, held at the Centre for Port and Maritime History, University of Liverpool, in June this year and supported financially by English Heritage. Without such a lively and productive exchange of ideas, this contribution would never have assumed its final form.

Abstract

Das soziale Leben der Hafen-Architektur: Geschichte, Politik, Wirtschaft und Kultur

Die Architektur von Hafenstädten ist untrennbar verknüpft mit der gesellschaftlichen, politischen, wirtschaftlichen und kulturellen Entwicklung dieser Städte und ihrer Rolle im internationalen Handel. Historisch waren es Kaufleute, die die herrschende politische Elite in den Hafenstädten stellten. Sie waren es, die größere Projekte in Auftrag gaben: Ob beim Bau von Docks, der Schaffung einer Infrastruktur für

Bürger und Wirtschaft oder bei der Errichtung von Wohngebäuden – die Kaufleute konnten auf diese Weise ihren Status an herausragender Stelle im städtischen Raum manifestieren. Der politische und kulturelle Bezugsrahmen, in den diese Bauten und Gebäude hineingesetzt wurden, bot die Möglichkeit, Handel und Gewerbe in klar definierte, breit angelegte zivilisatorische Werte einzubetten. Die Hafenstadt-Architektur wurde so zu einem der Hauptausstragungsorte der Beschäftigung mit anderen Kulturen, indem man sich historisierender Stilmittel bediente und in einen Dialog mit der Arbeiterklasse trat, die es zu zivilisieren galt, oder, indem man bewusst ‚exotische‘ Motive verwendete, die ein Spiegel der Handelsverbindungen des Hafens in alle Welt waren. Vielleicht noch entscheidender war die Tatsache, dass die Hafenstadt-Architektur eine visuelle Manifestation lokaler Traditionen und Leistungen war, und zwar besonders im Kontext öffentlicher wie gewerblicher Großarchitektur. Sie war jedoch gleichzeitig Spiegel der gesellschaftlichen Interaktionen, die wiederum Voraussetzung waren für das Knüpfen von Handelsnetzwerken sowohl innerhalb der Städte als auch darüber hinaus. Die Baugliederung der inneren Räume macht die impliziten und expliziten Prämissen sozialer Beziehungen der Zeit und ganz allgemein der klassenhierarchischen Strukturen sichtbar.

Der vorliegende Beitrag befasst sich mit Faktoren wie Struktur, Funktion und Wahrnehmung von Hafenstadt-Architektur, die miteinander in enger Beziehung stehen. Wie wirkte sich der Handel auf die Bebauung des öffentlichen Raumes in Hafenstädten und auf die Verbreitung bestimmter Baustile aus? Wie wirkmächtig waren gesellschaftliche Usancen und Werte (religiöse wie weltliche) angesichts ihrer Bedeutung für die Herstellung und Aufrechterhaltung von Handelsnetzwerken bei der architektonischen Ausgestaltung von Hafenstädten? Der Bevölkerungszuwachs der Hafenstädte war durch eine übermäßige Abhängigkeit von der Zuwanderung aus fernen Ländern geprägt, mit dem Ergebnis einer oft deutlich multi-ethnischen Bevölkerungsstruktur. Inwieweit hatte diese Vielvölker-Einwanderung und die selektive Festigung von Netzwerken in der Diaspora Einfluss auf die physischen Eigenschaften der Hafenstadt-Architektur und wie wirkte sie sich auf das Erleben dieser Architektur aus? Seit Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts professionalisierten sich die in der Architektur praktisch Tätigen zusehends. Aber in wie großem Umfange bedienten sich die Praktiker in den Hafenstädten dabei internationaler Symbolik und moderner Bautechniken? Bemühten sie sich um die Schaffung eines eigenen, lokalen Stadtbildes, das sich von anderen abhob? Und, was für die Forschung von vielleicht größtem Belang ist: Was lässt sich – außerhalb von literarischen Beschreibungen und in der Fachkritik – über die allgemeine Wahrnehmung und Auslegung der Hafenstadt-Architektur sagen?

Um die aufgeworfenen Fragen anzugehen, konzentriert sich der vorliegende Beitrag auf eine Reihe miteinander in Beziehung stehender Aspekte: Die Bedeutung von mächtigen Handelsimperien wie Venedig und Großbritannien für die Verbreitung bestimmter Architekturstile in Hafenstädten sowie der Einfluss von Handelsströmen und -beziehungen auf die Verfügbarkeit und Nutzung von bestimmten Baustoffen; die Rolle der Architekten, die den Sprachduktus und die

materialistische Bildsprache imperialer Macht noch verstärkten; ferner die Entstehungsprozesse des durch Handel und Gewerbe wachsenden Reichtums, das architektonische Erbe, das in den Geschäftszentren vieler Hafenstädte sowie an den Wohnhäusern einzelner Kaufmannsfamilien erkennbar wird; und die Herausbildung von Matrosenvierteln, insbesondere in Bezug auf die Schaffung und Nutzung von Seemannsheimen. Der vorliegende Beitrag analysiert darüber hinaus die Bedeutung der Einwanderung sowie Niederlassung von Einwanderern als Beitrag zur ethnisch-kulturellen Identitätsstiftung in Hafenstädten. Schließlich soll diskutiert werden, wie die Hafenstadt-Architektur wahrgenommen wurde, welche symbolische Beziehung zwischen ihr und den politischen und wirtschaftlichen Akteuren bestand und es soll eine Erörterung des Spannungsfeldes zwischen Stadterneuerung und Erhaltung historischer Bausubstanz vorgenommen werden, in der ein vertieftes Verständnis für das gesellschaftliche Leben in Hafenstädten aufscheint, das über sie selbst hinausweist. Um die aufgeworfenen Fragestellungen voranzubringen, stützt sich der vorliegende Beitrag auf eine breite Materialauswahl. Jedoch sollen auch jüngste Forschungsergebnisse aus Liverpool herangezogen werden, die im Rahmen des Mercantile Liverpool Project erzielt wurden, sowie die Arbeiten von Architekturhistorikern, Kulturanthropologen und Soziologen, die damit begonnen haben, das gesellschaftliche Leben von Hafenstädten im Laufe ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung zu erkunden sowie die kulturelle, wirtschaftliche und politische Bedeutung vieler maßgeblicher Bauten zu beleuchten.

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