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Joseph Woods

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Letters of an Architect from France, Italy and Greece

In 1816, architect and botanist Joseph Woods (1776–1864) embarked on a two-year journey through France, Switzerland, Italy and Greece, documenting interesting flora as well as buildings of note. This two-volume work first appeared in 1828. The account stands apart from other contemporary travelogues owing to the application of Woods' architectural insight. By critically assessing ancient and modern buildings for strengths and defects, Woods hoped to inform fellow architects as to how they might produce beautiful buildings through the study of different modes of construction and decoration. Accordingly, the text is accompanied by Woods' drawings of important buildings and architectural features. In Volume 1, he charts his year-long journey through France and Switzerland to Rome, including discussion of the notable ecclesiastical edifices of Notre Dame and the Vatican.

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge, CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

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It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of
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www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108069410

© in this compilation Cambridge University Press 2014

This edition first published 1828

This digitally printed version 2014

ISBN 978-1-108-06941-0 Paperback

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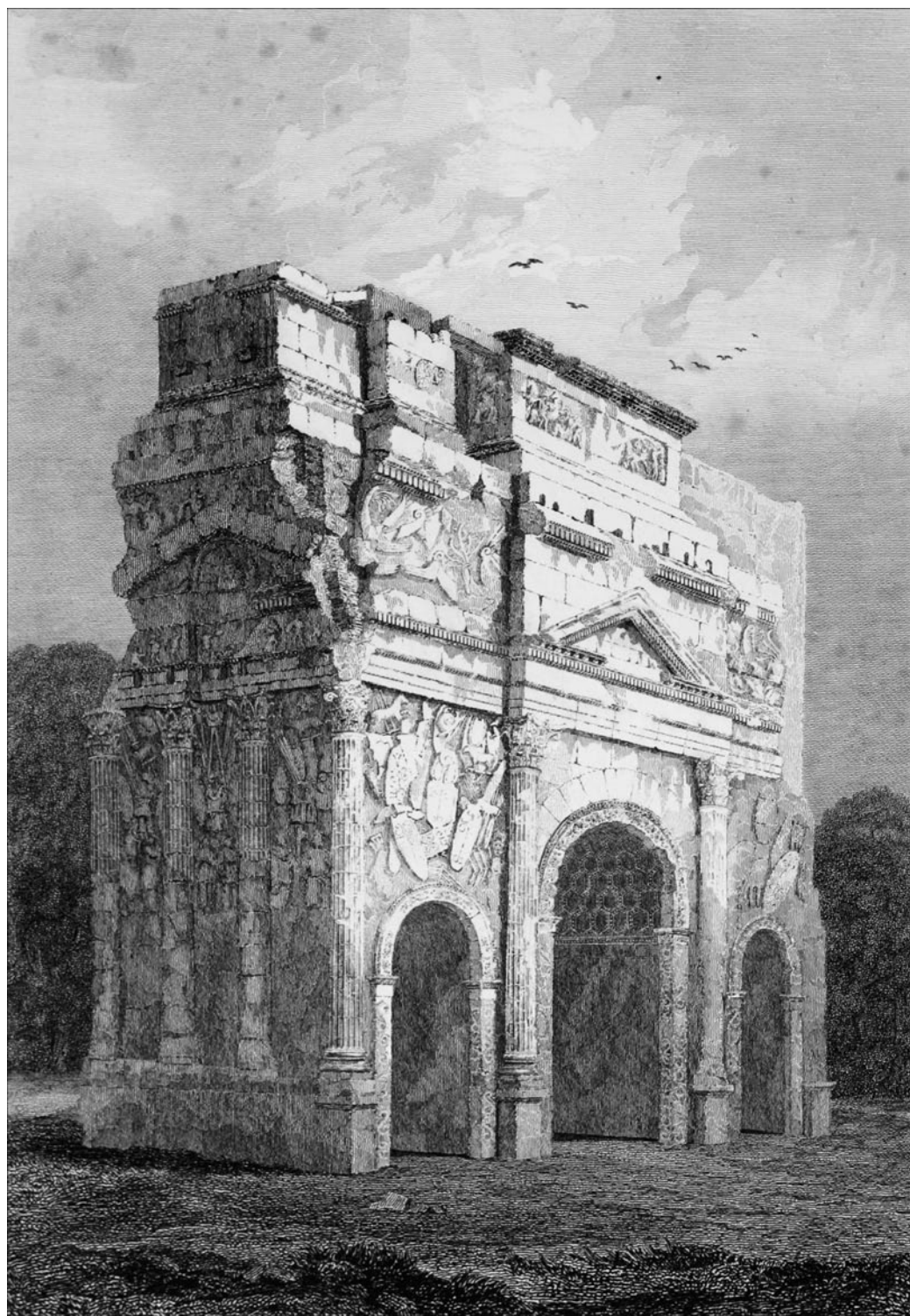
Cambridge University Press

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A.B. Clayton del. from Sketches by J. Woods.

ARCH AT ORANGE.

London. Published by J & A Arch. May 1st 1828.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06941-0 - Letters of an Architect from France, Italy and Greece: Volume 1

Joseph Woods

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LETTERS

OF AN

ARCHITECT,

FROM

FRANCE, ITALY, AND GREECE.

BY

JOSEPH WOODS, F.A.S. F.L.S. F.G.S.

AND CORRESPONDING MEMBER
OF THE SOCIETY OF GEORGOFILI AT FLORENCE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON :

PRINTED FOR

JOHN AND ARTHUR ARCH, 61, CORNHILL.

1828.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06941-0 - Letters of an Architect from France, Italy and Greece: Volume 1

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**J. M'Creery, Tooks Court,
Chancery-lane, London.**

PREFACE.

MANY books of travels in the south of Europe have been published; some of them written by men of talents and information, who were attached to the fine arts, and to architecture as one of them; and many professional works treating on the architecture of Italy and Greece, of greater or less excellence, have been given to the world; but I do not know that there is any one in which the author, after examining the most celebrated edifices of ancient and modern times, endeavours to explain to what circumstances they owe their power of pleasing; and what are to be considered as defects, tending to diminish that power. The subject has been slightly and incidentally touched upon by more than one traveller, but not treated with that care and detail which it deserves. To the architect, it is of the greatest importance: it is no less than the knowledge of what he is to shun, and what to imitate; by what different modes of building he can produce the same effects, or how, by methods nearly similar, he can produce different effects. In short, in what manner, with means always in some degree limited, either by the nature of the material to be employed, the customs of the country, the expense, or the taste or no taste of the employer, he can produce BEAUTY. The plans and details of a great many edifices have been measured with

care, and published with considerable accuracy; and knowing the original building to be beautiful, we copy, and re-copy its parts, without considering whether all the particulars conduce to the same harmonious effect, or whether those forms which please under certain circumstances, may not displease in others: nor are we entirely free from the danger of neglecting that character and propriety of ornament, on which the beauty of the whole must in some measure depend. In all the fine arts, but particularly in architecture, the eye is frequently pleased without our being able to explain why; and this *why* has sometimes escaped in the drawings and measures which have been published of the edifices. This connexion of cause and effect is then the great end and object of the architect; the completion and consummation of his studies; and this it is the object of the author of the present work to explain, as far as his abilities and opportunities will admit. The sentiment of wanting such guidance on his own part, first incited him to make the attempt, and the frequent observation of how little the student in architecture, on first setting out on his travels, knows how, or what he is to study, has encouraged him to persevere. He wishes to shew that the young architect has a more important task to perform, than that of measuring and re-measuring what has been a thousand times measured: a task requiring much more mental exertion, and conducing in a much higher degree to his future excellence. The first place in the art is still unoccupied. The ancients had a Phidias, excellent alike in sculpture and architecture; but the moderns have certainly yet produced no one, who can occupy in architecture, the lofty eminence which Raphael does in painting.

This general and enlarged view of the subject will also, he

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flatters himself, be not without its use and interest amongst amateurs. The uneducated man judges by his feelings; the half educated by rule. He who is thoroughly master of the subject returns again to his feelings, but to feelings trained and purified by study and reflection: and this training of the mind to a true taste for what is good and beautiful, is an employment exceedingly pleasant in itself, and conducing to that perfection of the intellect, which it is the object of every man to attain. A person who thus criticizes every fine building which he sees, without vanity or presumption, with a sincere desire to find out whatever is excellent, and to understand, and fully enter into, the reasons for any admiration which has been generally bestowed upon it by others, yet at the same time not blindly following authority, but bringing everything to the test of his own feelings and judgment, will form to himself a habit, profitable not only when applied to architecture, and the other fine arts, but in every subject on which the human understanding is exercised.

The following work will be found to be composed, almost entirely, of observations on the principal buildings which occurred to the author in his route through France, Italy, and a small part of Greece. Yet, though always attending to this as the principal object, he does not profess to confine himself so closely to it, as not occasionally to have touched on almost every subject which came in his way, partly in the hope of communicating what is not generally known, partly with a desire of relieving his readers from a tedious monotony of subject, which after all, from the nature of a book of travels, must consist of observations in some degree loose and detached; and not of deep and extensive reasonings, even if the author's mind were capable of producing them; but more

perhaps to relieve the tedium of the writer himself, who, too much habituated all his life to diversify his studies, would have found himself cramped by restrictions which limited him to a single subject. The substance was contained in a series of letters written during the journey. Some things of a private nature have of course been omitted; others, consisting principally of dates and dimensions, have been added on the authority of books, or of his friends; and some observations made on a subsequent tour in 1825 and 1826, have been united to the present publication. The arrangement of the subjects has at times been altered, from that which they occupied in the original letters, and two or more letters have sometimes been compressed into one; but on the whole, neither the substance nor the form has been materially changed.

Some persons may deem an apology necessary for the positive tone which the author has adopted in mere matters of opinion. He had in fact, at first, frequently introduced the expressions, *I think*, *It seems to me*, and others similar. The reflection that whatever he could say on such subjects, was necessarily the mere expression of his own sentiments, has ultimately induced him to reject such phrases, except where his own mind was not fully made up.

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