

**Manos Biris / Maro Kardamitsi-Adami: Neoclassical Architecture in Greece, Los Angeles: Getty Publications 2004, 312 S., 368 Farb-, 145 s/w-Abb., ISBN 0-89236-775-x, USD 70,00**

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Written by two architects on the faculty of the National Technical University of Athens, the 2001 Greek publication, and its 2004 American translation, examine the development of Neo-Classicism in Greece from the first decades of the nineteenth century to the post World War II era. The 1967 publication of the same title [1] voiced historic preservation concern as Greece began to witness the disappearance of its Neo-Classical heritage. In the Greek context Neo-Classical structures held special significance as they were tied to the expression of a national cultural identity which developed and evolved with the independent Greek state.

This study is closely linked to the historical context from the Greek War of Independence (begun 1821) to the territorial settlements which led to Modern Greece and to as late as the Metaxas dictatorship (1936-1941). Beyond the articulation of historical stylistic evolution in the capital, the authors also differentiate architectural developments in the various regions of Greece. This regional treatment remains closely related to history as the adoption of Neo-Classicism assumed different significance in areas independent from or under Ottoman rule. The authors' extensive knowledge of modern Greek architecture leads them into its specific contexts for several generations of Neo-Classical architecture throughout the Greek territories.

Greek Neo-Classicism occurred within the broader climate of Romantic Classicism, sparked in part by the Enlightenment and the 19th century reassessment of Antiquity. Italian architecture had been the primary source of Western inspiration prior to the more systematic archaeological study of ancient monuments. Beyond Pompeii, Herculaneum and Paestum, the examination of ancient Greek monuments was pioneered as of the 1760s by LeRoy and Stuart and Revett, with encouragement from J. J. Winckelmann's writings on Greek art. For Greece, the path to the ancient past was twofold. First, the struggle for independence attracted much European sympathy, sparked, in part, by the awareness of the country's neglected ancient heritage. This added a cultural connection between the nascent Greek state and the European powers which supported its efforts to gain independence. Four centuries of Ottoman rule had severed the ties of the Greek populations with their own Classical past. Second, the Greek orders acted as a rallying expression of

nationalism as early as the years of the first independent Greek governor, Kapodistrias (1827-1831). In addition, the first Greek king, Otto of Bavaria, invited European Neo-Classical architects to Athens, until the dismissal of foreigners from public service in 1844.

A backdrop of native Greek styles which continued to include elements from a Classical tradition, long removed from explicit knowledge of the models they had been derived from, and an array of fully developed local techniques and practices remained in place. This carefully woven vernacular thread enables inclusion of all regions and types of architecture in this study, giving it depth beyond the elite layers of public buildings and upper class residences. Careful differentiation of architectural developments between Old Greece and the unredeemed territories also modulates the development of styles and the cultural significance of the adoption of Neo-Classicism.

Primarily an urban phenomenon, Greek Neo-Classicism took hold during the first years of a struggling new state. Although the first years of the independent state did not support major architectural projects, initial city planning efforts created a framework for a century-long tradition of building Classical structures in the most prominent part of towns. After Athens became the capital in 1834, the Baroque inspired plan for a Neo-Classical garden city by Kleanthis and Schaubert was revised first by Leo von Klenze, architect to Ludwig I, King of Bavaria and father of King Otto, and later by Friedrich von Gärtner. Each revision reflected a more pragmatic acceptance of the lack of funding for expropriations and the abandonment of more rigid ancient Greek geometry. A legislative framework was put in place for the reconstruction of Greek towns and the training of architects. An existing cadre of military engineers did nonetheless play a significant role, especially in infrastructure projects carried out outside the capital, where reconstruction also meant erasing signs of Ottoman domination.

After Otto's Palace (now the Greek Parliament), designed by von Gärtner and built between 1836 and 1843, the more mature social and cultural Athenian context which evolved under the first king's Danish successor, George I (1863-1913), witnessed the erection of such international Neo-Classical landmarks as the Academy (1859-1885, T. Hansen), the National Technical University (1862-1876, L.Kaftantzoglou), the Zappeion (1879-1888, F. Boulanger, T. Hansen), the National Library (1858, T. Hansen and 1884, E. Ziller) and the Archaeological Museum (1866- L. Lange and T. Hansen). At the end of this prolific period of monumental projects, the figure of Ernst Ziller (1837-1923) contributed greatly to broadening the stylistic spectrum. Silesian born, he came to Athens in 1861 as Theophil Hansen's assistant and remained there until his death. Fully versed in the Classical formal language, he increased his knowledge by participating in archaeological projects. He assisted in the completion of T. Hansen's designs but also attracted a large number of commissions where a decline of Classicism might be viewed as a creative, more inclusive maturing of architectural production. Beyond the monumental

use of Neo-Classicism as the aesthetic of choice for public spaces, the vocabulary was also adopted by many as a connecting link to a glorious past recently brought back into active memory.

In addition to the broad strokes sketched here, more subtle influences add complexity to the rich historical landscape of Modern Greek architecture. These include, for instance, British influence on the Ionian Islands where the Venetian mode had been established by political occupation. In the east, a 1917 fire demolished the city of Thessalonica, which had seen the introduction of European styles under Ottoman rule. Reconstruction included a Byzantine revival component, not as widely accepted as Neo-Classicism, but nonetheless significant. And as new styles superseded Neo-Classicism in the West, their limited penetration in Greece is also examined.

A number of factors contributed to abandonment of Classical models. These include the association of Classicism with the totalitarian regimes of Europe and the former Soviet Union, the Asia Minor disaster which put an end to the dream of further expansion and the pressing needs of a political and social context where lower class housing took precedence over national monuments. Also, unlike the foreign Eclectic vocabularies which did not have autochthonous resonance in Greece, the first modern designs of the 1930s can be viewed as products of a Greek school, relying on ancient ideals of proportion and harmony.

Profusely illustrated with beautiful color photographs and historical or architectural documentation, the text is enriched by this carefully referenced visual portfolio of the Greek Neo-Classical heritage and related developments. The inclusion of plans for major buildings discussed in greater detail is, however, not systematic.

The scholarly apparatus for the work is minimal. Beyond a short index, a few in-text notes refer to citations in a three-page bibliography with most entries in Greek (Roman alphabet being used only for authors and publication data). This may suffice for the Greek audience familiar with the country's history and geography. For readers of the English translation, maps of Greece and Athens as well as a chronology of major historical events would be useful as the text assumes some familiarity with the context. Dates are frequently lacking in captions and after the name of most architects. Although quite readable, the translated text reveals its foreign origin and, in some cases, uses questionable architectural terminology.

For the reader familiar with modern Greece or willing to fill lacunae with reference tools, the work offers substantial rewards. The concluding claim of Greek Neo-Classicism as, perhaps, the "last historical style of European architecture" (302) is overstated but the English translation of the book brings to a wider audience the richness of post-independence Greek architecture and secures its place on the map of international Neo-Classicism.

Note:

[1] Neo-Classical Architecture in Greece. Athen: The Commercial Bank of Greece, 1967.

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