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# *The Greek revival in Finnish architecture around 1800*

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HENRIK LILIUS

When a country founds a scientific institute in some other country, one may well ask why. In the case of Finland at least part of the answer is clear. The main research focus of our new Athens Institute will of course be the culture, history and language of classical Greece. Only time will show the extent to which Finland will be able to develop its own research also on classical Greek art and architecture, since these fields – unlike history and philology – lack a research tradition. Another natural research area will be the orthodox tradition and its art. Yet we can ask what a scholar of Finnish and modern art history may expect from our new institute of Athens.

The answer to this question is to be found in one of the research interests of the Finnish institute in Rome: that is, the study of the classical tradition. In the same way as our institute in Rome has specialized in the analysis of the Roman classical tradition, so it is clear that in Athens the emphasis will be explicitly on the Greek tradition. In this paper my intention is to outline a particular problem which links the classical Greek tradition itself with the architectural history of Finland. I shall discuss the contacts between the architecture of classical Greece and that of Finland during the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries.

I would like to emphasize that in my analysis of various Finnish architectural monuments I shall focus only on features relevant to the problem at hand – the Greek revival in Finnish architecture, and

that I do not try to give a comprehensive picture of the Greek revival in Finland, but to illustrate with some examples the main features of this architectural movement.

One of the basic characteristics of classicist architecture is its historic nature: whatever the particular tendency, classicist architecture is always based to some extent on an older classicist tradition. When we speak of a classical revival around 1800, we need to ask whether we can state that certain buildings e.g. in Finland were consciously designed on an ancient Greek or ancient Roman model; or was it in fact the case that the historical knowledge of classical architecture was not yet adequate, in the Finland of that period, to allow a distinction to be made between the two architectural traditions? If this was so, we can speak of a classical revival only in a rather general sense.

The answer to the question is as follows: in Finland it was certainly possible to separate the two traditions, even to the extent that at the beginning of the 19th century the classical Greek and Roman traditions could be used deliberately, to contrast with each other. The Greek revival is thus a clear tendency in Finnish architecture around 1800. However, it is also true that in Finland the Greek revival was not the same kind of unified and extensive stylistic period that it was e.g. in the USA,<sup>1</sup> but rather one trend among many others.

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The Greek revival in Finland developed in two distinct stages. Between about 1785 and 1818 the main sources of inspiration were the Greek temples of Paestum and Sicily. The Doric architecture of these temples had indeed made an indelible impression on some of the leading architects of the period, and this first stage of the revival can fairly be called a kind of ultradoric period. During the second stage knowledge about Greece became more widespread, and the principles of classical Greek architecture began to be applied at a more general level, at the same time as the monuments of mainland Greece increasingly became sources of inspiration.

When we study the influence of classical Greek architecture on Finnish architecture we need to distinguish a genetic or direct influence and an indirect one. By genetic influence I mean that a Finnish architect had a direct contact with ancient Greek architecture. From the theoretical point of view it is a secondary matter whether the source of this personal, genetic influence was an actual trip to Greece, or an acquaintance with the relevant art-historical research and illustrated publications. The evaluation of the indirect influence is more problematic. On the one hand there are monuments inspired e.g. by the Greek revival in Germany, and on the other those influenced by earlier buildings in the Greek style in Finland itself. I feel that only the latter group can be classified as belonging to the genuine Greek revival, whereas buildings of the former type are classical in a more general sense. The essential thing is thus to show that what was sought after was a contact with Greek architecture that was as direct as possible.

The Greek revival began around 1780 when a group of leading Swedish architects left on a study-tour of Italy. One of the foremost of these was Erik Palmstedt. Another highly significant event was the journey king Gustav III made to Italy in 1783–84. It was this journey that gave rise to a radical change of style in the architec-

ture of the kingdom, towards a style strongly influenced by ancient architecture. The rapid change was further aided by the fact that Gustav III took into his service the French architect Jean Louis Desprez, who was studying in Rome with a *prix du Rome* scholarship. Desprez had travelled widely in Italy, and had participated in the publication of the abbé de Saint-Non's book "*Voyages pittoresques*", which contained e.g. illustrations of the temples of Paestum and Sicily. After arriving in Stockholm Desprez planned a number of buildings where the inspiration of the Doric temples of Magna Grecia is very clear<sup>2</sup>: it was the breakthrough of the Greek revival.

In Finland the Greek revival started in two ways. One important influence was the series of lectures on Greek art by Henrik Gabriel Porthan, professor of rhetoric at the Turku Academy. Secondly, shortly after Gustav III's journey in Italy a group of buildings in the Greek style were designed, partly at the king's own suggestion, some even based on his own sketches, together with Desprez. The years 1785–88 seem to have been of critical importance for the breakthrough of the Greek revival in Finland.

Church architecture became the main sector of the revival. In secular architecture I actually know of only few designs which belong specifically to the revival. One of the most important was never realized, and only the floor plan survives. This was the design for the Helsinki Town Hall, dating from 1786. Judging by the plan (Fig. 1), however, the main motif of the façade would have been an enormous temple gable of the whole height of the building, evidently in the Doric style.<sup>3</sup>

My first example of a church monument is the Hämeenlinna church, because it is a good illustration of the dialectic between the Greek and Roman traditions.<sup>4</sup> One of Gustav III's pet ideas was to build a copy of the Roman Pantheon in Stockholm.<sup>5</sup> The idea was never realized in Stockholm,

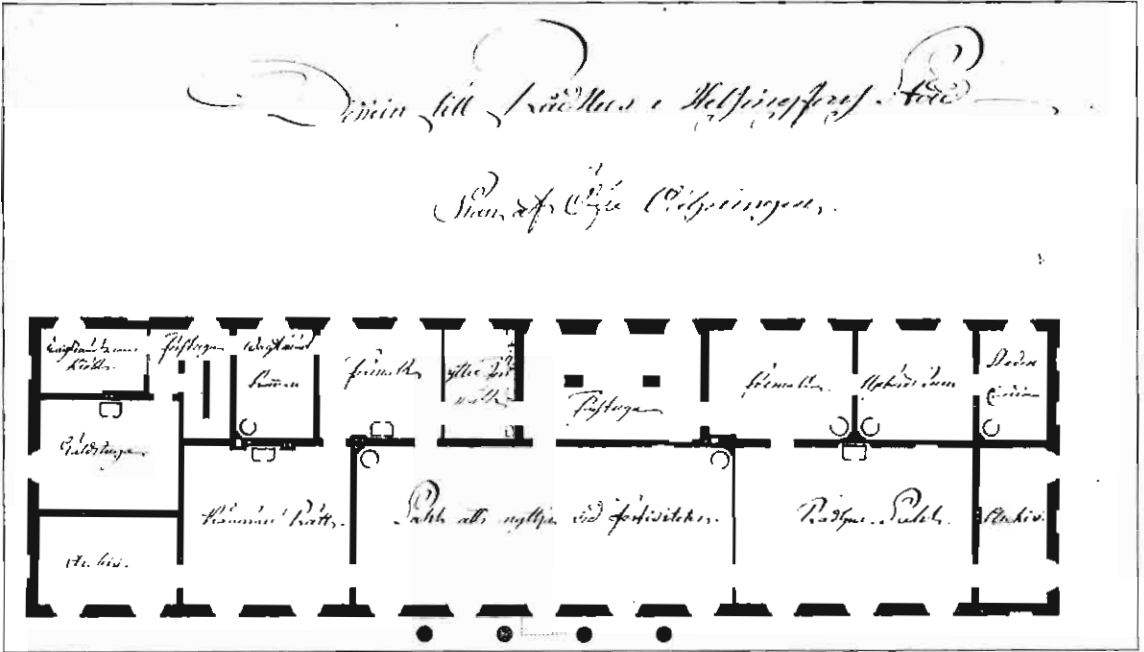


Fig. 1. Design for the Town Hall in Helsinki from 1786. Riksarkivet, Stockholm.



Fig. 2. The church at Hämeenlinna before its rebuilding in 1891-92. Photo Museovirasto, Helsinki.

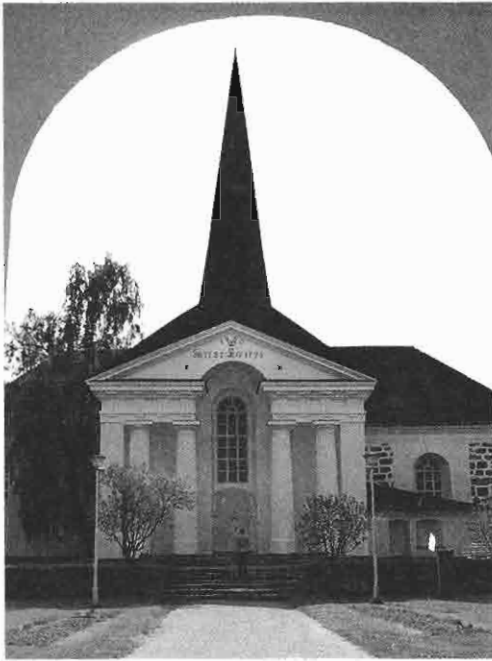


Fig. 3. The new gable of the church at Pedersöre. Photo R. Nikula.

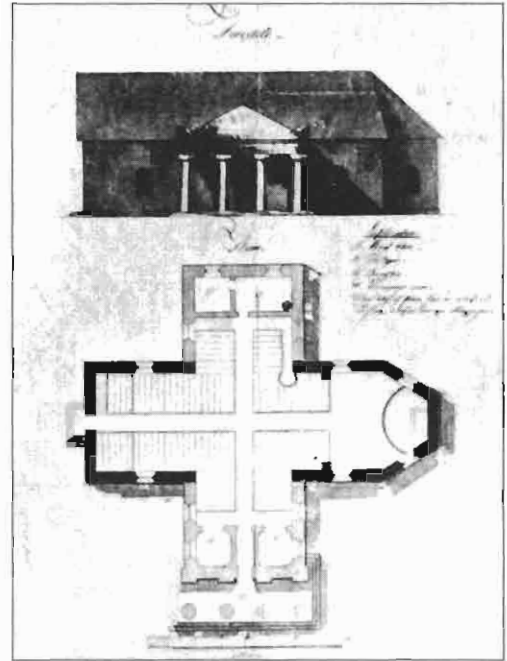


Fig. 4. Charles Bassi, design for the enlargement of the medieval church at Halikko from 1813. Valtionarkisto, Helsinki.



Fig. 5. Louis Jean Desprez, design for the mausoleum for Gustaf III from 1792. After Wollin.



Fig. 6. Jacon Rijk, design for the church at Oravainen from 1792. Riksarkivet, Stockholm.

but in 1788 the king commanded Desprez to plan a Pantheon at Hämeenlinna. The final plans (Fig. 2) were not approved until 1795. All in all the building is a much simplified version of the Roman Pantheon, but the original model is clearly recognizable, even down to the geometrical proportions. The final result is thus a Pantheon in terms of its volume, but the church totally lacks the ornamental abundance of the original building. At Hämeenlinna this has been deliberately replaced by Greek simplicity, and above all the Corinthian order of the Pantheon has given way to a Doric style clearly deriving from the new ideal, Paestum. Desprez has stressed the weight of the joists, reflected in the low, sturdy columns. The stems of the columns are fluted, and the capitals have an interesting form. This kind of column came to be called a Paestum column. The Hämeenlinna church is thus strongly marked by a Doric, Greek style: a Roman monument was given a Greek spirit.

A year later, in 1787, plans were completed for the extension of the medieval church at Pedersöre.<sup>6</sup> The plans have not survived, but they were undoubtedly drawn up in Stockholm, perhaps by Desprez himself. Here too the main architectural idea was a noble temple gable (Fig. 3). Yet its structure is exceptional in that the series of beautifully proportioned, fluted columns carry joists, which have been split, and the resulting gap has been covered by a segment arch. The thematic whole is then united by a normal pediment. The main theme of the façade has a classical Roman origin: it is familiar from the triumphal arch in L'Orange in France and the palace of Diocletianus at Spalato, and during the renaissance the theme was used e.g. in Italy by Alberti in S. Sebastiano at Mantova.<sup>7</sup> The subject is repeated in many of Desprez' stage sets.<sup>8</sup> But at Pedersöre this Roman motif is again given a Greek visual form: the columns and the joists above them are pure Greek, borrow-

ed from Paestum.

The same Greek temple gable reappeared in Finnish architecture in the 1810's, when Charles Bassi enlarged the medieval church at Halikko (Fig. 4) in 1813.<sup>9</sup> The columns follow the Paestum motifs, but both the joists and the pediment itself have a new shape. This is now a design which is only indirectly influenced by Paestum, and whose immediate model is Desprez' proposal, in 1792, for the mausoleum for Gustav III (Fig. 5), after the king's murder. This design, which was in the possession of the king's friend G.M. Armfelt (who also built the Halikko church extension) is most interesting. It is a burial chamber, partly carved out of the rock. Desprez decorated the rock-walls with runic texts relating to Swedish history, while at the central axis of the chamber there is a column gable in the Paestum style. The columns, however, do not carry the usual joists and pediment of a temple: the shape of the upper structures has been inspired by Greek sarcophagi. In this way Desprez created a new combination from basic Greek elements explicitly expressing the function of the building: it was a façade for a burial chamber. Whereas Desprez had created a kind of image of a burial chamber – the Germans would use the concept "Architektur als abbildende Kunst" – Bassi did not understand the nuances of Desprez' thinking but transferred the forms into a new context, from a burial chamber to a church façade. Later on the same theme was used in the parsonage at Ruovesi.

One of the basic features of Finnish architecture has always been that many forms originally based on stone structures have had to be adapted to structures based on wood. This was also the case with the Greek revival. One of the most interesting examples is the church at Oravainen.<sup>11</sup> The original plans (Fig. 6) were by Jakob Rijf in 1792, and even then we have a Doric temple gable formed of half-columns with fluted stems. The design as a



*Fig. 7. The Doric gable of the church at Oravainen. Photo H. Lilius.*



*Fig. 8. Sketch for the Karstula bell tower by Gustaf III from 1785. After Klemetti.*

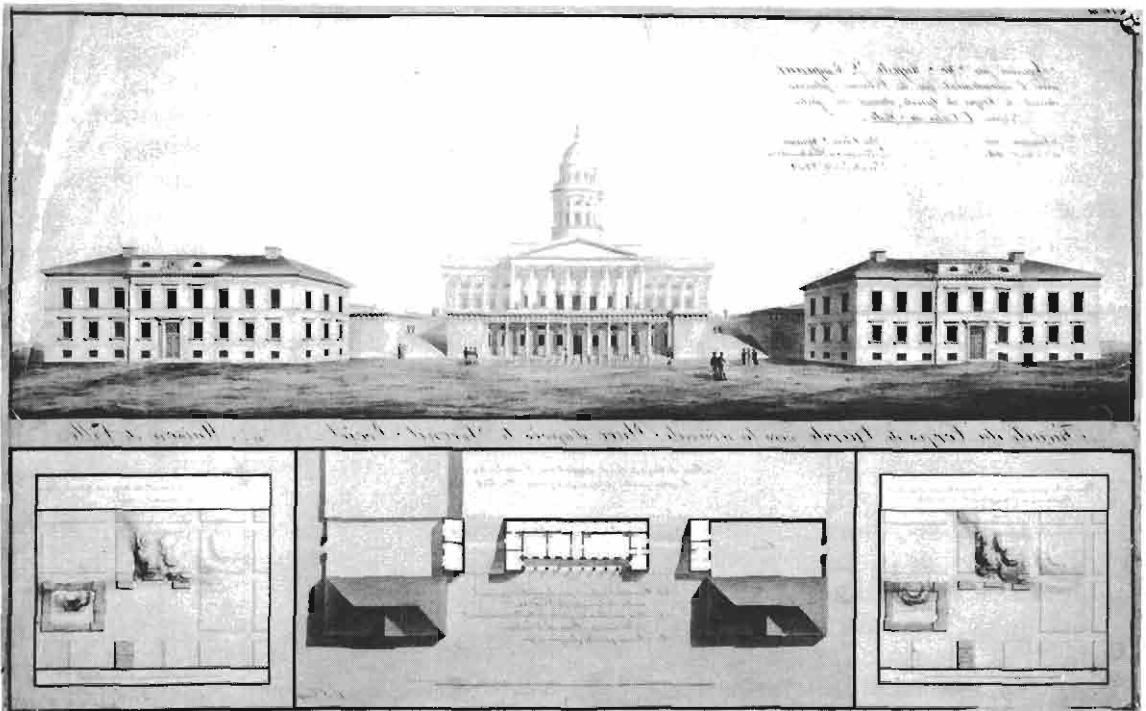


*Fig. 9. The bell tower at Saloinen built in 1786–7. Photo P. Korvenmaa.*





*Fig. 10. The bell tower at Vöyri. Photo H. Lilius.*



*Fig. 11. Carl Ludvig Engel, the first proposal for the northern side of the Senate Square from 1818 including the corps de garde. Valtionarkisto, Helsinki.*

whole, however, was stylistically very inconsistent, and the final plans were drawn up in Stockholm the following year. The church (Fig. 7) now has a simpler and stylistically more coherent look, and the proportions of the temple gable have been changed; they can again be derived from the temples of Paestum and Sicily. When the church was finally built the details of the gable indicate that the builders did not really know how e.g. triglyphs should properly be formed. All in all, the building in Oravainen is a distant reflection of the Doric temple architecture of Paestum.

Another group is formed by the miniature temples related to the European Greek revival, often of the type *templum in antis*. In this context Gustav III's own sketch (Fig. 8) for the Karstula bell tower (1785) is of interest.<sup>12</sup> It is an open belfry formed of four Doric columns, joists and a saddle roof, in fact a kind of simplified version of what was felt to be most important in the Greek style – the Doric order. This plan was never realized, but a similar Doric bell tower was built at Saloinen (Fig. 9), 1786–7;<sup>13</sup> originally there were no closed sides here but, like the Karstula plan, the frame was open. We realize how exceptional the bell tower was when we compare it e.g. with the bell tower in Vöyri (Fig. 10), which is of the traditional Finnish type. The *templum in antis* was used in English garden summerhouses, and also funeral chapels, of which examples are the ones in Pernaja for the Creutz and de Greer families and the Sederholm chapel in Helsinki, all miniature Doric temples.

These examples show how the world of ideas during the first stage of the Greek revival was relatively unified: the revival appeared above all in sacred architecture, and its architectural ideal was the Doric temple gable, particularly inspired by the temples in Paestum. During the second stage, after the end of the 1810's, the picture becomes more complex. I would like to illustrate this with some of the buildings Carl Ludvig Engel designed in Helsinki.

At this point I cannot avoid drawing attention to a certain parallelism that may be observed in the architectural development of Athens and Helsinki, in two senses. After being destroyed by fire during the Finnish War Helsinki was declared the capital of autonomous Finland in 1812, and was rebuilt completely in accordance with its new status.<sup>14</sup> The situation was exactly the same in Athens, which was similarly destroyed by war and then, in 1834, declared the capital of independent Greece. And just as the first architects of the new Athens – such as Stamatis Kleanthes, G. E. Schaubert, Leo von Klenge – were German,<sup>15</sup> or had at least studied at the same Berlin Academy of Art, so too was Engel, the main architect of the new Finnish capital.

The architecture of Carl Ludvig Engel is a complexity of many styles. The main features derive from the so-called St. Petersburg Empire style, but both Engel's style and the St. Petersburg style represent late Palladianism. Yet Engel's conception of architecture is rich in nuances: he is known to have been interested in the architecture of classical Greece, there were illustrations of Greek buildings in his study, and he tried to obtain prints of Greek architecture. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to identify these pictures or prints. In addition, Engel studied contemporary research on art history, and when necessary also consulted other architectural literature, in particular Vitruvius and Andrea Palladio. Of course, I cannot deal here with all Engel's buildings that reflect the Greek revival, but I shall take my examples from those around the Senate Square in Helsinki. I shall also restrict my attention to features relevant to my particular theme.

One essential aspect of Engel's architectural thinking was that the architectonic form of a building should express its function. In this, he was following the aims of the neoclassical architectural theory. The primary means whereby he sought to ex-

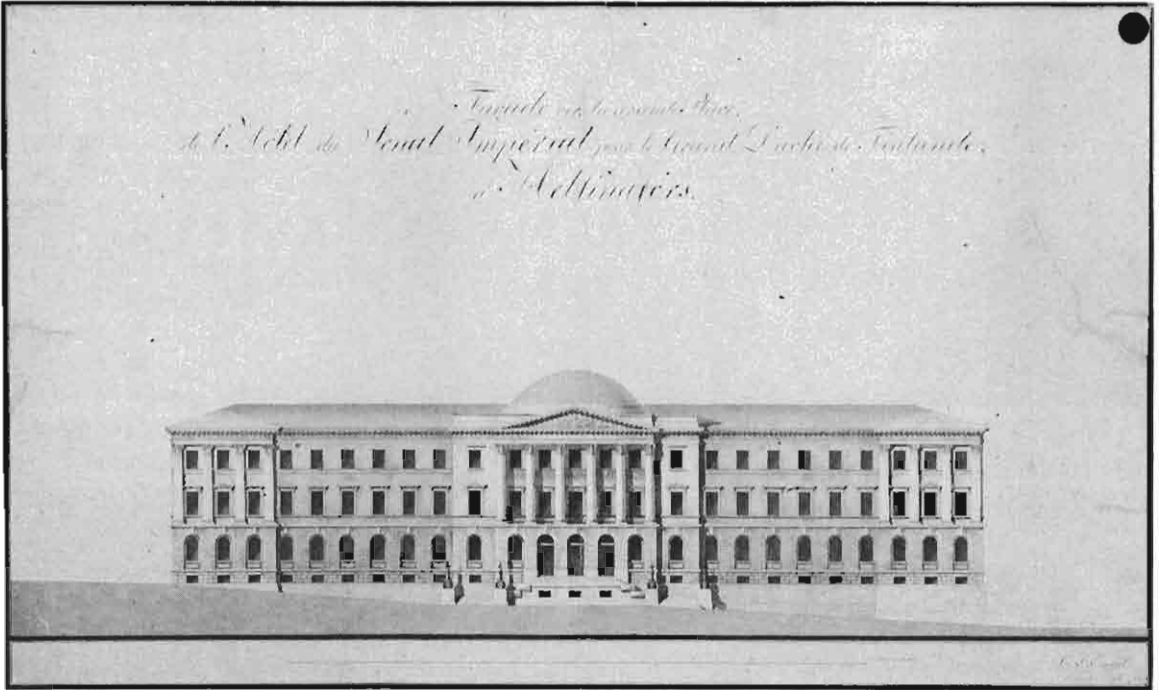


Fig. 12. Carl Ludvig Engel, the main facade for the Senate Palace from 1818. Valtionarkisto, Helsinki.

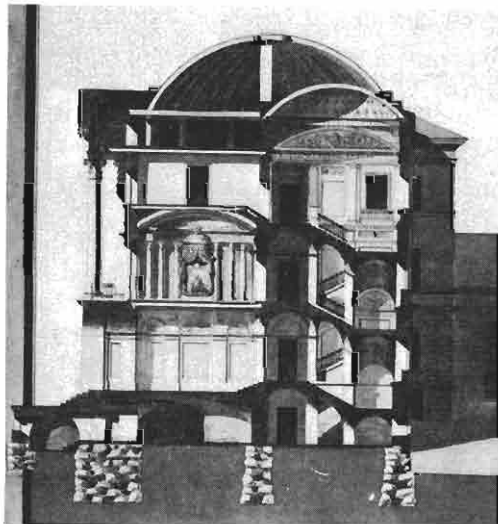


Fig. 13. Carl Ludvig Engel, section through the main wing of the Senate Palace. It shows the purely decorative dome of the building. Valtionarkisto, Helsinki.



Fig. 14. Carl Ludvig Engel, the final design for the main building of the university from 1828. Helsingin yliopiston museo.

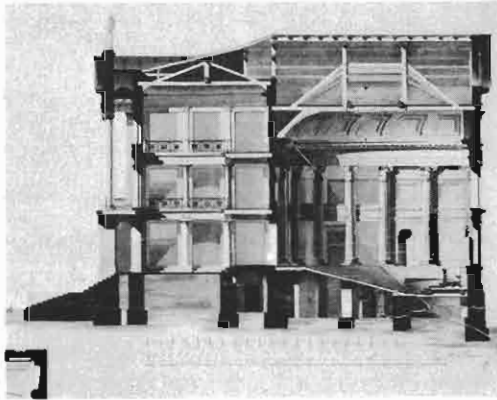


Fig. 15. Carl Ludvig Engel, section through the main building of the university. Helsingin yliopiston museo.



Fig. 16. A view to the vestibule of the main building of the university. Photo H. Lilius.



Fig. 17. The vestibule of the main building of the university. Photo H. Lilius.

press a building's function was an extremely subtle use of the classical orders. Underlying this was the so-called anthropomorphic theory according to which each order had its own basic character, and so the choice of orders was determined by the function of the building. Engel might have read about this theory in Vitruvius, who in turn based his ideas on Greek sources. As regards the Greek revival, the main point was that during the neoclassical period this theory was considered to be one of the quintessential features of Greek architecture.

The first plan Engel made for the Senate Square was the design for a *corps du garde* on the north side of the square.<sup>17</sup> The plan (Fig. 11) dates from 1818. I bypass here many other interesting problems concerning this plan, and point out only that the *corps du garde* is unambiguously derived from the Greek stoa. The Greek style is further emphasized by the Doric order, which now has an anthropomorphic explanation: the Doric order was held to be appropriate for military architecture – it was a heroic order. When the plan was sent to St. Petersburg for the Tsar's approval, he asked for changes in the structure of the colonnade. One of Engel's basic ideas had been to create the illusion that the church on the north side of the square actually rested on the *corps du garde*. The Tsar felt that the columns were too slender to achieve this illusion, and ordered them to be replaced by others of the Paestum type. This was done, and in 1819 a deliberately Greek-looking stoa was completed on the Senate Square. We may mention in passing that in the early part of the century the stoa was also used as a market hall.<sup>18</sup>

Engel began planning Finland's most important administrative building, the Senate Palace, in 1818. This plan too has a wealth of classical associations.<sup>19</sup> The order of the monumental facade is Corinthian (Fig. 12), and according to the anthropomorphic theory this was particularly appropriate for administrative buildings.

In addition, in neoclassical theory it was considered to be emphatically Roman. The facade also has other ancient Roman features, including the decorative general appearance and the arcade of arches in the ground floor story. Above the Corinthian temple gable Engel placed a purely decorative dome (Fig. 13). By means of the Corinthian gable and dome Engel in fact made the central axis reflect the gable end of the Roman Pantheon. This, together with the general Roman effect of the whole, is easily explained. The Pantheon symbolized the eternity of the Roman Empire, and just as the Roman Empire has been governed by the Senate, so autonomous Finland was governed by the imperial senate. Thus Engel expressed the function of the Senate palace, using the Pantheon motif and the general classical Roman manner.

When Engel began planning the new main building of the university (Fig. 14) on the opposite side of the square, in 1827, he once again wished to express the building's function. Greece was the homeland of art and science, and so he gave the university building an emphatically Greek touch. Anthropomorphism came to his aid again: Apollo, patron of art and science, was associated with the Ionic order. Accordingly, the Corinthian order of the Senate is balanced by the Ionic order of the university. The idea is further stressed by the statue of Apollo at the top of the gable: the building is a temple of knowledge, protected by Apollo.<sup>20</sup> Other Greek features are the simple overall effect and the fact that the form of the capitals of the columns and the base profiles are copied directly from the Erechtheion in Athens, i.e. Engel had the actual Erechtheion measurements available.<sup>21</sup> Attention is also drawn to the structure of the ground floor storey. Instead of an arch motif Engel uses pillars and straight joists. He was of course aware that arches and vaults were typical to classical Roman architecture, whereas they were not used in ancient

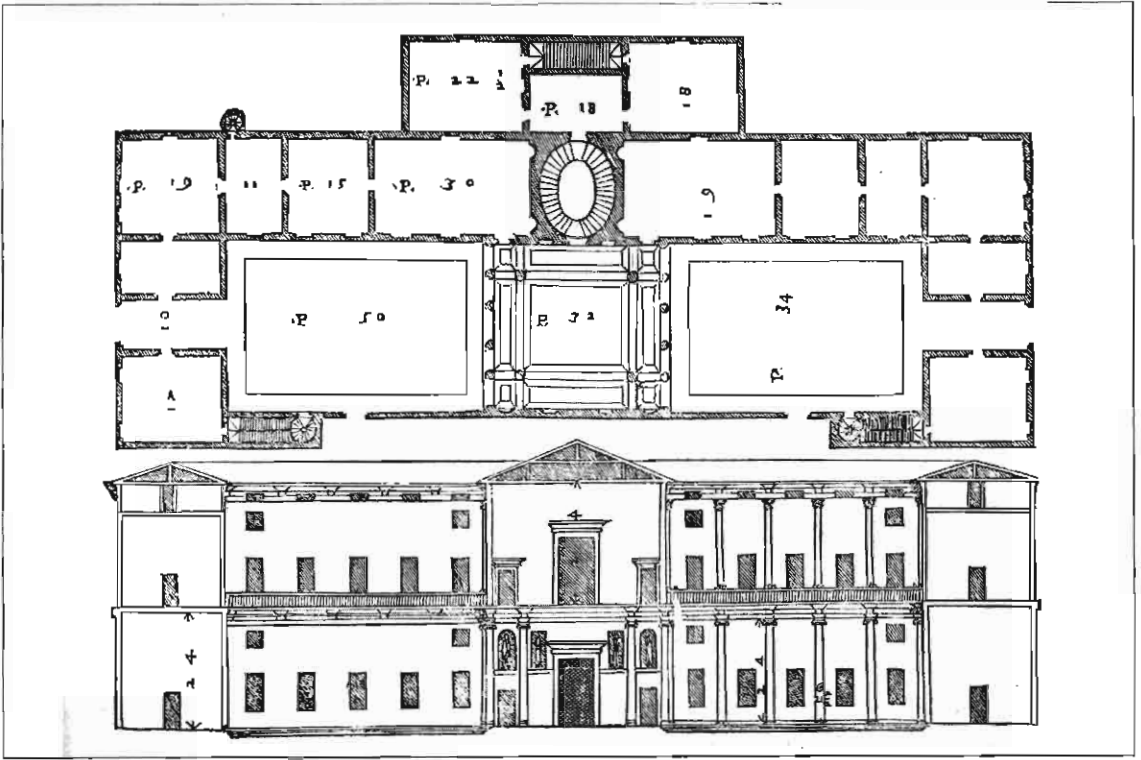


Fig. 18. Andrea Palladio, Palazzo della Torre in Verona. The palace has a lowered courtyard level.

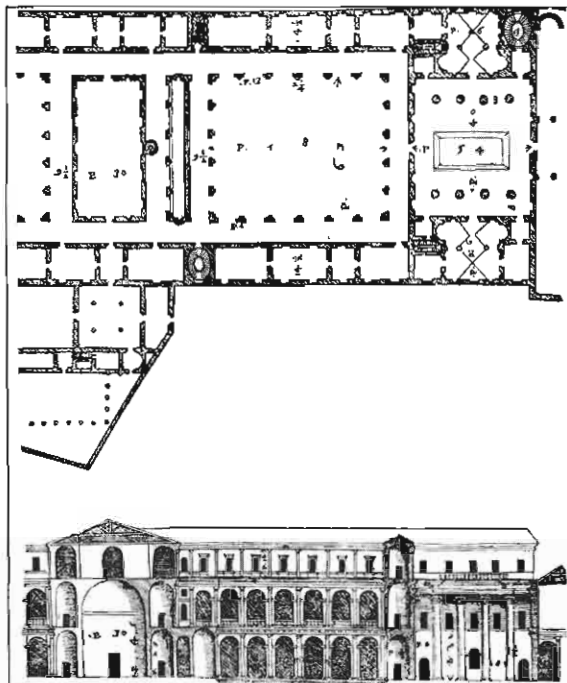
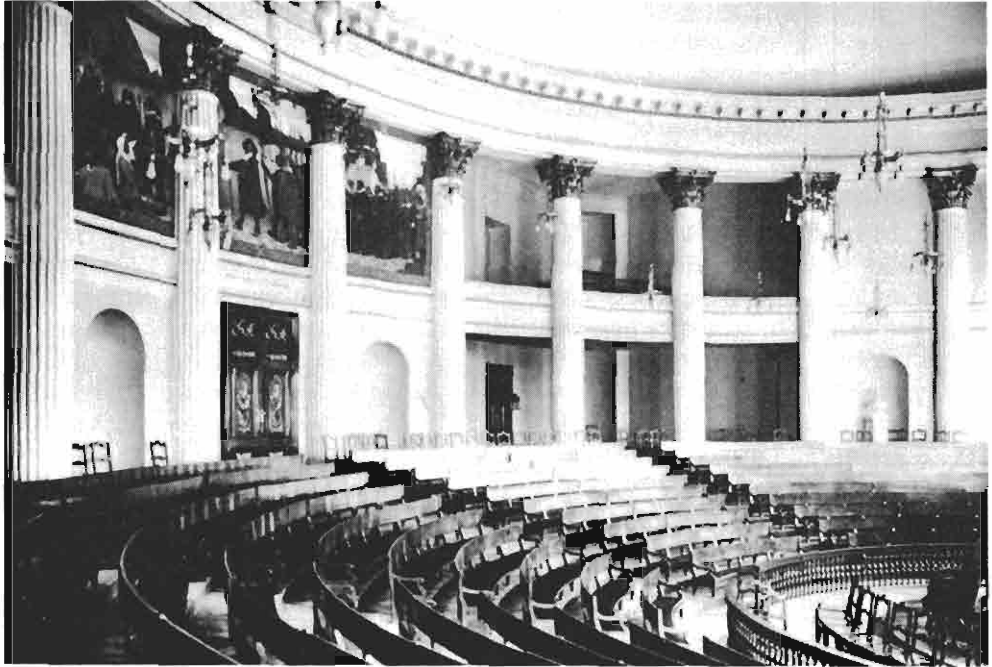
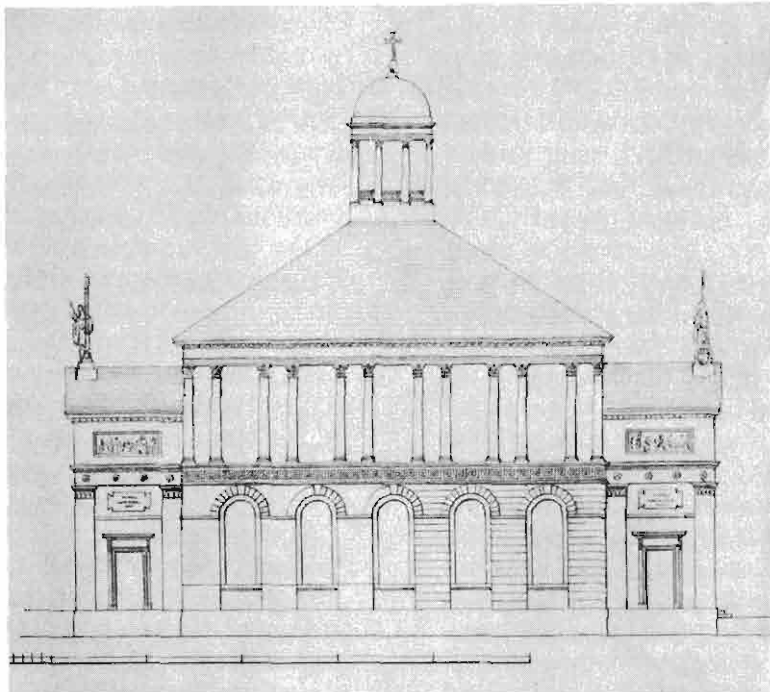


Fig. 19. Andrea Palladio, The Caritas monastery in Venice.



*Fig. 20. The Great Hall of the main building of the University. After Pöykkö.*



*Fig. 21. Carl Ludvig Engel, design for the church in Hamina from 1830. The first alternative. After Klemetti.*

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Greece, where the architecture was based precisely on pillars or columns and straight joists. This solution also reinforced the Greek style he was aiming at.

But let us go into the vestibule (Fig. 15).<sup>22</sup> We notice immediately that the vault is not visible (Fig. 16), that contrary to tradition the stairway has been transferred to the sides of the central space, and that the floor level of the vestibule has been dropped (Fig. 17), so that when we proceed to the Great Hall there are three steps up. Around the entrance-hall is a Doric colonnade two storeys high, culminating in a geison and a balustrade. The central space is also surrounded by a corridor structured by pilasters. The hall vestibule thus has several very characteristic and exceptional features. It is not a traditional baroque hall like that one Engel used in the Senate Palace (Fig. 13), but an illusionistic, open courtyard. And not just any open courtyard, either, but an image of a certain specific court, the two-storey Greek peristyle. We should, however, note that Engel did not have archaeological knowledge for this court but took his idea from Palladio's book. Palladio sometimes used a two-storey peristyle courtyard in his palaces, which also had a lowered floor-level (Fig. 18). In his texts Palladio does not describe these courts as being specifically Greek peristyles, but he does so when he uses the same courtyard type in his reconstruction of the ancient house and in the Caritas monastery in Venice (Fig. 19). Engel thus adopted Palladio's historical view of the Greek peristyle courtyard, which explains the unusual form of the vestibule. The Greek effect is further enhanced by the use of the Doric order. It would take too long to explain why the Ionic order used in the façades is not repeated in the vestibule, but the reason has to do with certain other conventions concerning the use of the classical orders. And so when we finally enter the central space of the university, the Great Hall (Fig. 20), we enter a Greek theatre. In

this way the main elements of the university's architecture create strong associations with Greece, the cradle of knowledge. The building is dominated by a Greek temple gable, a Greek peristyle courtyard, and a Greek theatre. If we now recall the clearly Roman effect of the Senate Palace we realize how Engel really was able to distinguish the fundamental nature of ancient Greek and ancient Roman architecture, and exploit this to the full as he sought to express the function of the buildings in his design. He certainly did create "Architektur als abbildende Kunst". It is difficult to determine the extent to which the general Greek effect of the university building was also related to the Greek War of Independence, which aroused considerable interest in Finland.<sup>24</sup>

Engel's other works in the spirit of the Greek revival include his stage sets<sup>25</sup> and some churches. One of these, that of Lieksa, continues the Doric gable tradition of the earlier period. Another example is the church of Hamina.<sup>26</sup> In 1838 Engel made two alternative plans for a church to be built in Hamina. One of them (Fig. 21) is clearly based on the Halicarnassus mausoleum. This plan was not realized, however, and the simpler alternative was chosen. This derives from the basic form of the Greek temple: a rectangular building with a saddle roof, representing a new shape in our church architecture. For financial reasons Engel did not surround the temple with a colonnade, but concentrated the colonnade on the entrance hall which was necessary because of the climate. The same simple temple type also occurs elsewhere, as at Simo and Koski.

With these few examples I have sought to characterize the Greek revival in Finnish architecture around the year 1800. It seems to have been a distinct trend in the architecture of the period, a trend which was clearly quite conscious, based on the deliberate choice of the designers. We have seen how the development took place in two stages, the first being domi-



nated by the Doric style inspired by the temples in Paestum, and having primarily an aesthetic and historical character, and the second being characterized by wider

and more complex associations as classical learning expanded and sometimes by the use of ancient architectural forms to express the function of the building.

### Abbreviations

FM	= Finskt Museum
HSVK	= Helsinki-Seura, Vuosikirja
SM	= Suomen Museo
SMYA	= Suomen Muinaismuistoyhdistyksen aikakauskirja
THT	= Taidehistoriallisia tutkimuksia
WJb/Kg	= Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte

### Notes

1 Cf. e.g. T. Hamlin, *Greek Revival Architecture in America* (New York 1944).

2 N. G. Wollin, *Desprez i Sverige* (Stockholm 1936) 87–93.

3 H. Lilius, "Thure Wannberg och Stora Torget i Helsingfors", *HSVK* 1968, 24–31.

4 H. Lilius, "L.J. Desprez'n Hämeenlinnan kirkko", *SM* 1961, 79–94.

5 Wollin, op.cit., 138–140.

6 L. Pettersson, "Kyrkor och klockstaplar i svenska Österbotten", *Svenska Österbottens historia* (Vasa 1985) 330–347.

7 R. Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* (New York 1965) 47–53, H. Lorenz, "Zur Architektur L.B. Albertis: Die Kirchenfassaden", *WJb/Kg* XXIX (1976) 86–90.

8 Pettersson, op.cit., 341–342.

9 T. Riska, *Suomen kirkot*, Turun arkikihiippakunta IV, Perniön rovastikunta II (Helsinki 1966) 136–137.

10 Wollin, op.cit., 163–164.

11 Pettersson, op.cit., 361–364.

12 H. Klemetti, *Suomalaisia kirkonrakentajia 1600- ja 1700-luvuilla* (Porvoo 1927) 301, Pettersson, op.cit., 344.

13 Klemetti, op.cit., 205, Pettersson, op.cit., 342–344.

14 For Helsinki in general cf. e.g. Y. Blomstedt, *Johan Albrecht Ehrenström. Kustavilainen ja kaupunginrakentaja* (Helsinki 1963) 258–354.

15 Cf. e.g. S. Sinus, "Die Gründung der neuen Stadt Athen", *Architectura* 1974, 41–52.

16 K. Pöykkö, "Das Hauptgebäude der kaiserlichen Alexander-Universität von Finnland", *SMYA* 74 (1972) 94, 103–104, 122.

17 H. Lilius, "Stortorget i Helsingfors norra fasad. Kring några Carl Ludvig Engels ritningar", *FM* 1972, 31–38.

18 H. Lilius, "Kaupunkirakentaminen 1617–1856", *Suomen kaupunkilaitoksen historia I* (Vantaa 1981) 376–377.

19 Pöykkö, *SMYA* 74 (1972) 177–178, H. Lilius, "Arkitekturikonografiska problem i finsk nyklassicism", *THT* 7 (1984) 46–50.

20 For the interpretation of the main building of the university as a temple for Apollo cf. Pöykkö, *SMYA* 74 (1972) 185–192.

21 Pöykkö, *SMYA* 74 (1972) 150.

22 For the interpretation of the vestibule cf. Lilius, *THT* 7 (1984) 51–56.

23 Lilius, *THT* 7 (1984) 54–55.

24 Pöykkö, *SMYA* 74 (1972) 192–193.

25 K. Pöykkö, Tripodi-aiheesta uusklassisen ajan maalaustaiteessa, esineistössä ja arkkitehtuurissa, *THT* 2 (1972) 72.

26 H. Klemetti, *Suomalaisia kirkonrakentajia 1800-luvulla* (Porvoo 1936) 113.