



THE MONUMENT

National Architectures in Europe

Fabienne CHEVALLIER

ABSTRACT

The concept of a national architecture was born in the eighteenth century in England, where the Neo-Gothic emerged as a symbol of the kingdom's influence and would soon been reoriented by the Arts and Crafts movement towards the vernacular. In Germany, the completion of Cologne Cathedral gave the movement an ultra-romantic appearance, which competed with the *Rundbogenstil*. In France, the Neo-Gothic, which was theorized by rationalist architects close to Viollet-le-Duc, competed with the more regionalist Neo-Romanesque movement. National architectures then proliferated in Europe from 1880 to 1920. The primary ingredients of this architectural recycling of the past included popular culture (Hungary), the mythical roots of territories (Finland, Catalonia), and the natural beauty of local materials (Sweden).



Stockholm's city hall, facade on the lake Mälaren. Arch. Ragnar ÖSTBERG (1911-1923). J. ROOSVAL dir., Stockholms Stadshus, Stockholm, Gunnar Tisells tekniska förlag, 1923. Paris, Bib. Nordique.

The movement of national architectures, whose matrix was the Neo-Gothic, was born during the eighteenth century in England, and spread to Germany, France, and later to numerous centres in Europe. It ended during the 1920s.

The picturesque English world—the melancholy of ruins, the sublime, Christian piety, idealization of the Middle Ages—prepared the way for romanticism, which was consubstantial with national architectures. From the early eighteenth century, the Gothic—which was used during the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603) in an approach explicitly linked to strengthening the kingdom and English identity—became the style of the picturesque movement. It was equally appreciated by Tories, for whom it represented tradition, and by Whigs, who pointed out that it was used during the time of the *Magna Carta* in the thirteenth century (a Charter wrested from King John by English barons in 1215, which limited arbitrary royal powers). At the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the publications of the antiquarian and publisher John Britton (1771-1857), notably *Cathedral Antiquities of England* (14 vol., 1814-1835), emphasized the national characteristics of religious buildings. Fonthill Abbey, built by James Wyatt (1746-1813), became a European icon of the English Neo-Gothic. However, the extravagance of the new style was soon criticized by Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin (1812-1852), who called for a soberer use of the Neo-Gothic. He played a major role in the construction of the Houses of Parliament in London (1836-1867, arch. Charles Barry), a Neo-Gothic jewel which included modern amenities (heating). Prince Albert (1819-1861) supervised a program of wall decorations within the palace that staged the history of the kingdom and English identity. The Neo-Gothic style was adopted until the late nineteenth century for numerous programs (Manchester Town Hall, 1868-1877, arch. Alfred Waterhouse), however from the 1850s onwards, it had to compete with the Arts and Crafts movement. The latter contained a number of identity qualities. Charles Francis Annesley Voysey (1857-1941) created exalted English homes, which were seen as emblems of national culture. Brilliantly illustrated by William Richard Lethaby (1857-1931), the search for vernacular building traditions and local materials became an essential element of a national identity which was profoundly connected to its local roots (All Saints, Brockhampton, Herefordshire, 1901-1902, “the most striking of all churches built between historicism and the modern movement,” according to Nikolaus Pevsner).

In Germany, the *Sturm und Drang* glorified national architecture when in 1772 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) published a text in Frankfurt entitled *German Architecture*. Behind this general subject, the essay was a hymn to Strasbourg Cathedral, the fruit of German genius: “distinctive art is the only true kind.” Even if Goethe later turned away from it in favour of classicism, his text opened the way for the rediscovery of the Gothic, which was seen as a national style. The Napoleonic wars amplified this movement by creating a patriotic confrontation. It was in this context that in 1823 Sulpiz Boisserée (1783-1854) published a *History and description of Cologne Cathedral*, a work aiming to provide all of the archaeological knowledge needed to complete this German architectural masterpiece: construction work was reinitiated in 1840 by Ernst Friedrich Zwirner (1802-1861) and completed in 1880 after his death. Boisserée completed his support by becoming the primary advocate of the Gothic revival in Germany. The National Monument for the Liberation Wars (1818-1821) by Karl Friedrich Schinkel (1781-1841), with its dramatization of the gothic spires, shows an ultra-romantic side of the movement. Friedrichswedersche church (Berlin, 1824-1830, today the Schinkel museum), also by Schinkel, presents a sober version, with a volumetric clarity inspired by classicism. While Neo-Gothic was a national style, it did not become the official German style despite its patriotic basis. To build new public buildings in Berlin, Munich and other Germanic capitals, the authorities turned towards the language of classicism. Moreover, under the influence of the theorist Heinrich Hübsch (1795-1863), an alternative to the Neo-Gothic emerged in the late 1820s, the *Rundbogenstil*. This style aimed to combine the simplicity of Romanesque architectural motifs with Byzantine and even Renaissance models, while giving prominence to materials. The political objective of this style—to which the Patriotic Society building in Hamburg corresponded perfectly (1844-1845, arch. Theodor Bülow)—was to create visual associations between buildings and the political values of the apex of German culture in the twelfth century, and to free oneself from the Catholic essence pervading the Neo-Gothic.

In France, the call for the Gothic, which was implicitly national, was launched by François-René de Chateaubriand (1768-1848) in his *Génie du christianisme* (1802). Beginning with the July Monarchy, restoration projects for cathedrals and other religious buildings (Chartres, the Sainte-Chapelle, Notre-Dame de Paris) served as

laboratories for architects, who were sometimes restorers and sometimes builders. Beginning in the late 1830s, the search for a national architecture, which concentrated on religious buildings, simultaneously became involved with both the Neo-Gothic style (Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Belleville, Paris, 1854-1859, arch. Jean-Baptiste Lassus) and the Neo-Romanesque (Saint-Paul de Nîmes, 1835-1849, arch. Charles Questel). The latter style, which was less disembodied than the Neo-Gothic, looked for sources in the various regional Romanesque schools, notably those from the South of France. The publication of the *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du x^e au xvi^e siècle* (1854-1868), by Eugène Viollet-le-Duc (1814-1879), provided France with the theoretical tool it needed to be on a par with England.

During a very concentrated period (1880-1925), national architectures then proliferated in other countries and regions of Europe, by addressing new considerations, such as the affirmation of identities within the Austro-Hungarian or Russian Empires, or in Barcelona. In Hungary, it was based on an ethnographic foundation that provided ornamental models for the decorative arts and architecture. Ödön Lechner (1845-1914), the creator of the Budapest Decorative Arts Museum (1896), fell in this vein, but did so while idealizing popular culture, the corollary of ethnographic passion. He also assiduously visited South Kensington in London. Károly Kós (1883-1977), who belonged to the following generation, took inspiration from the medieval churches of Kalotaszeg in Transylvania, which was elevated to the rank of mythical Hungarian territory, as were Karelia for the Finns and Zakopane for the Polish, with Catalan monasteries playing this mythical role for the architects of Barcelona. Identity-based aims and ethnographic references were also essential in Latvia (Niedre House, Riga, 1908, arch. Eižens Laube). In Sweden, architects firstly sought to free themselves from the ancient styles taught at the Royal Academy of Stockholm. In 1886, Ferdinand Boberg (1860-1946) defended the idea of creating a national architecture by taking advantage of the expressive beauty of natural Swedish materials. In the Gävle fire station (1889-1891), which is free of all symmetry, he played on the plastic beauty of volumes which offer Romanesque details (the vaulted ceiling with arched bays). This national architecture, which integrated technological modernity, spread to other Scandinavian countries. It sought its sources both in the vernacular tradition as well as medieval castles and Renaissance buildings, without excluding the Swedish corpus of classical architecture. Its apex is Stockholm City Hall (1904-1923, arch. Ragnar Östberg), a genuine architectural illusion of the past.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ANDRIEUX, Jean-Yves, CHEVALLIER, Fabienne, KERVANTO NEVANLINNA, Anja, eds., *Idée nationale et architecture en Europe 1860-1919, Finlande, Hongrie, Roumanie, Catalogne* (Rennes : PUR, 2006).

CHEVALLIER, Fabienne, *L'œuvre d'Elie Saarinen en Finlande et la question de l'architecture nationale de 1898 à 1909* (Paris : Publications de la Sorbonne, 2001).

LEWIS, Michael J, *The Gothic Revival* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002).

MORAVÁNSZKY, Ákos, *Competing Visions : Aesthetic Invention and Social Imagination in Central European Architecture, 1867-1918* (Cambridge/London; The MIT Press, 1998).

POURCHIER-PASSERAUD, Suzanne, *Les arts de la nation. Construction nationale et arts visuels en Lettonie 1905-1934* (Rennes : PUR, 2013).

WALTON, Ann Thorson, *Ferdinand Boberg, Architect* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1994).