

BOOK REVIEWS

PARALLEL OF THE CLASSICAL ORDERS OF ARCHITECTURE

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Compiled and Edited with an Introduction by Donald M. Rattner

Published by Acanthus Press
and the Institute for the Study of Classical Architecture

Review by Michael Lykoudis

The reprint of a good architectural book is always a welcome event and the recent revision and republication of the *Parallel of the Classical Orders* by Johann Matthaus von Mauch and Charles Pierre Joseph Normand is no exception. It has been re-compiled and edited by Donald M. Rattner and published by Acanthus Press and the Institute for the Study of Classical Architecture. The book's re-emergence is not an isolated event but tied to the recent changing attitudes in architecture that have brought about a renewal of classical and traditional thought and its application to the art of building. While it is difficult to determine precisely when this recent renewal began, what is clear is that in the past ten years, around the world and in particular the United States, a new generation of classical and traditional architects has become firmly a part of the contemporary architectural scene. Many of these architects see as their charge the task of fostering many of the humanistic and international values that have inspired socially conscious architects throughout the twentieth century. Believing themselves to be engaged in the continuity of history, this new generation of architects is facing the shortcomings of current attitudes towards architecture and city planning and are proposing a renewed perception of the way in which we build and live together.

From the exhibitions of *Rational Architecture* in the mid-eighties and the writing of treatises and essays by Demetri Porphyrios, Leon Krier, Robert Adam, Carroll William Westfall and others, much of the theoretical validation for what has come to be known as the New Classicism has been firmly established. What is still missing is an updated bibliography of the treatises and resource books that are required for a contemporary practice. The *Parallel of the Classical Orders of Architecture* offers us another step in recovering and updating this classical bibliography. Like Joseph Rykwert and Robert Tavernor's new translation of Leon Battista Alberti's

On the Art of Building in Ten Books, this publication breathes new life into a project begun in the early 1500's when the first idea for a parallel was published in a drawing by Cesare Cesariano. The book contributes the circumstantial issues of our time in dialogue with the continuity of the past. In this new edition, content, format and the introductory essay collaborate to present to the contemporary practitioner the new perception of the classical. The classical by definition is always reinvented, always a dialogue between the old and new, and in this volume, Donald Rattner's work reaffirms this tenet.

In addition to the familiar material that one would expect to find in Normand's and Mauch's *Parallel of the Classical Orders*, Rattner gives us several wonderful surprises. The most important is the introductory essay, which outlines, without laborious reassertion of the entire argument for classicism, a way of approaching the orders and the *Parallel* for the contemporary lay person and architect. Rattner challenges us to look beyond the line of the drawings and to see the plates not as objects but as parts of a greater whole. This whole he tells us is not only that the columns and beams are seen as parts of building but the language itself is about a balance

in the relationship between construction and architectural form, the pursuit of character and its relationship to the decorative aspect of craft. In addition, Rattner alludes to broader urban issues by asking us to examine each of the plates and to think about the issues of appropriateness as they relate to the status of the building in its physical and cultural contexts. He invites us to project our understanding about the physical world so that we may see the shadows and back-lighting, and to use our knowledge of form to both imagine what has been, and to interpolate what can be.

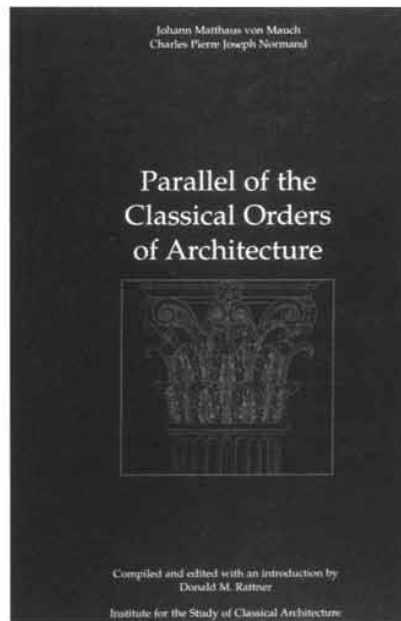
Another surprise is the addition of new plates by Dino Marcantonio and John Burge. While these drawings have a distinctively different quality

to them than the original plates, they illustrate the usefulness of the computer as a storage and retrieval system for the complex forms of columns, entablatures and ornaments and that must be repeated and revised during the course of a project. The convention of crediting the delineators at the bottom of the plate also has a new aspect to it. The delineator's name is followed by the brand of the software which in this case is *Auto CAD*. One is left to ponder the meaning of how technology enters into the creative process and how authorship no longer rests solely in the delineator's hand and mind, but must now be augmented with the latest corporate technological signature.

Other aspects of the book that depart from the previous edition are the inclusions of photographs of contemporary buildings that use the orders. If anyone has any doubts that classical architecture cannot be built today, these doubts can be laid to rest with a series of buildings that span a broad spectrum, from expensive traditional homes on country estates, to more humble and utilitarian structures. The cognoscenti will also notice several corrected archaeological references in some of the plates. The quality of the publication is exemplary. The handsome white and red outline drawing and letters on

black background of the cover give a timeless and elegant wrapping to the book, while the line quality of the plates, the paper and the stitched binding ensure a consistency with the Vitruvian ideal of *Firmitas, Utilitas and Venustas*.

The book is an essential reference for the contemporary classical architect and useful to all persons who believe that knowledge and art are inseparable. Rattner's revisions to Mauch's commentary on each plate read like a Pausanian travelogue of architectural elements. Each caption relates the plate to a larger context when appropriate, to inform the reader of the proximity of the other elements of the building. Orders are cross-referenced when superimposed with each other so that each trabeation is not seen only as a beautiful free standing object. Aside from the collections of columns and their entablatures, there are technical drawings as well. Sectional drawings illustrate how stone columns drums are connected to capitals, capitals to architraves and how the moldings mediate between the character of the building and its construction. The plates follow a consistent layout. But the pattern is occasionally broken to call attention to specific elements of a building and how to draw them, such as the volute of an ionic capital.



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Other plates show the relationships between the parts of an entire building such as the Tholos at Epidauros which is drawn fully in plans, sections and elevations to examine the various layers of the building. Doors and pediments and other architectural elements are covered as well and by the end of the plates, the astute reader should receive a comprehensive course in the design of the classical orders and their relationship to building.

Above all the *Parallel of the Classical Orders* is a textbook that makes demands of the creative powers of the reader. Rattner gives a scathing critique of those who simply produce the servile copies of classical forms and illustrates how the ancients used canon and invention to produce their finest buildings. He reminds us that many of the most exemplary buildings of antiquity actually depart considerably from the theoretical constructs that they were derived from, even though these constructs are still visible within the final composition. He illustrates the point with examples of designs produced according to canon alongside the adjusted executed work. On a pragmatic level, this new edition of the *Parallel* also comes with instructions as to how to use it. A brief but clear description of the proportioning system of the orders is linked to the graphic scale of modules and parts at the bottom of each plate. Rattner gives us a link to the both the theoretical process of design of the classical elements as well as an explanation of how to construct them.

This book will be useful for those lay persons and architects alike who wish to gain both a qualitative and a quantitative understanding of classical architecture. Undoubtedly the growing number of students at schools of architecture around the country that are interested in classicism and traditional architecture should make this part of their library. While it is essential for offices engaging in classical architecture, the modernistic practitioner will find relevance in the approach that Rattner gives as to the instrumentality of the book, and the realization that knowledge gives authority to art. As architecture is a civic art, its meaning has authority with the public when it too embodies knowledge that comes from scholarship and understanding of the past. The *Parallel of the Classical Orders* provides an excellent contribution to the knowledge of the architect so that he or she can build in the present to ensure a better future.
