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OPPOSITIONS READER

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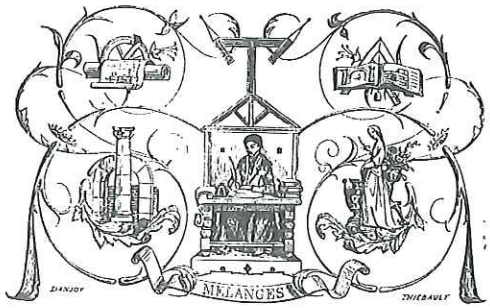
Type[1]

Quatremère de Quincy



Introduction by Anthony Vidler

It is a significant but little commented upon fact that the two most influential, complete, and homogeneous theoretical statements on architecture in the first half of the nineteenth century in France were issued not in the form of the philosophical essays or treatises common since the Renaissance, but in dictionary format: the great dictionaries of Quatremère de Quincy and Viollet-le-Duc. The potential for comprehensiveness, first recognized by Diderot and d'Alembert in their great *Encyclopedia* of the 1750's, and continuously projected by successive encyclopedic projects throughout the nineteenth century; the rational classification of the material universe, as accomplished in the natural and physical sciences; the need to clarify, define, and draw careful distinctions between meanings of words that had, over time, accrued multiple and ambiguous meanings and connotations—these reasons and others doubtless recommended the dictionary form to architectural theoreticians. But perhaps most persuasive was the ability, in the words of Quatremère de Quincy in the introduction to his first volume, to "satisfy all classes of readers by embracing the universality of knowledge comprised by the subject." That is, the dictionary, as opposed to the singly argued treatise, offered a didactic instrument for students, professionals, and the lay public that had all the semblance of completeness and all the apparent eclecticism of their needs. History, philosophy, and techniques could all be embraced; the dictionary might be issued in consecutive parts over time and easily added to in supplementary volumes: in other words, in an age of expanding readership and scholarly/academic professionalism, the dictionary was an easily produced and equally readily consumed object.

Although the dictionaries of Quatremère de Quincy and of Viollet-le-Duc were written to advance coherent and entirely opposite theories of architecture: Quatremère's three volume "Architecture," in the *Encyclopédie Méthodique*, appearing between 1788 and 1823, and Viollet's *Dictionnaire Raisonné*, published in 1875, were dedicated to the neo-Classic and the Gothic respectively: both were adamantly against the eclecticism of the 'styles', and both erected a vision of an ideal past in order to serve as a critical and positive instrument in the present. The one, it might be said, posited the Parthenon, the other the Gothic cathedral as the ideal type of its respective architecture; the one embodied a vision of classic order based on typological "imitation," the other a vision of social and cultural renewal based on a structural rationalism and a stylistic unity; the one was a product of the merging of the forms of classical antiquity and the republican Revolution, the other a product of the new nationalism of the Restoration and July Monarchy.

Both writers, then, are representative of that stage of modernity when the weight of tradition is invoked to ratify an uncertain present; neither, while appealing to the new professionals, had had any professional training in architecture themselves. In their youth, both were the representatives of radical and critical positions.

Quatremère de Quincy, while generally seen by historians as a theoretician of advanced, even reactionary, neo-Classicism in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, was in every respect an intellectual product of the pre-revolutionary period: trained as a sculptor, he spent most of the years between 1776 and 1784 travelling in Italy with his friends the sculptor, Canova, and the painter, Jacques Louis David. In 1785 he wrote his first memoir, on the origin and characteristics of Egyptian architecture, published in 1803, in which he demonstrated the superiority of Greek architecture, and two years later, after a brief stay in London to study Wren, he received the commission for the dictionnary from his friend Panckouke, the editor of the *Encyclopédie Méthodique*. The first volume, published in 1788, embraced A to COL and included an extraordinary forty-page dissertation on character, extended critiques of contemporary abuses (especially directed toward the *barrières* of Ledoux) and a long analysis of the genesis and form of the *cabane* or hut, type of the temple.

In this latter article he introduced all the themes later found in the article on type reproduced here. The ideas of type and model—"it [the wooden hut] was indisputably the type of the Greeks, whence art found a model both solid and varied"—are already present, as is the concept of type as a more or less metaphysical entity. "This precious type," he wrote of the *cabane*, "is in some way an enchanted mirror in

The types of architectural progress. From J. A. Coussin, Du Génie de l'Architecture, *1822.*

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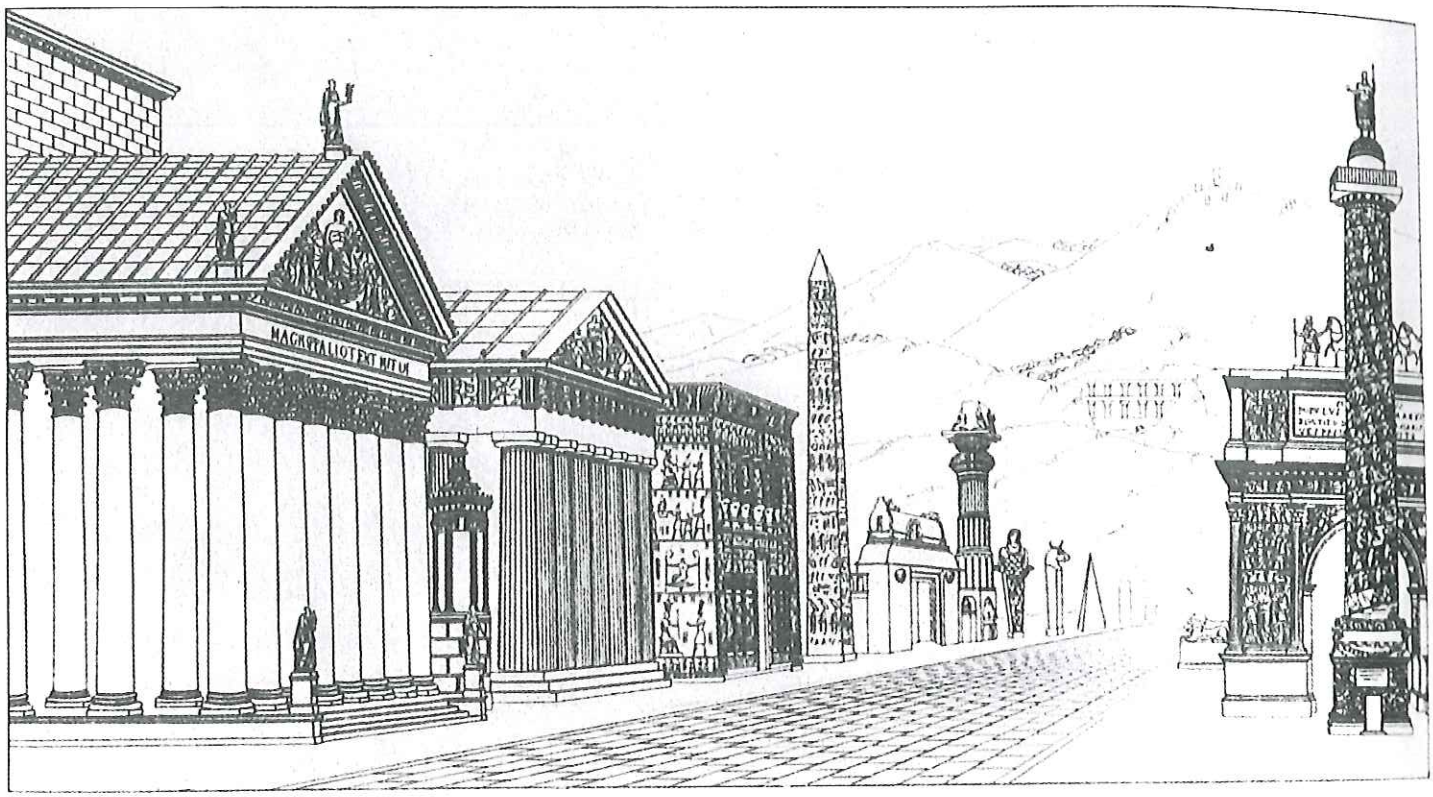


which a corrupted and perverted art cannot bear its aspect and which in itself recalls its origin, restoring it to its first virtue." Thus, the idea of type, as in Laugier, is adduced as a purifying agent—"an inflexible rule which will redress all vicious usages and errors." Architecture finds its certainty, after baroque, rococo, and "visionary" excesses, in the twin principles of the "positive imitation of types and the ideal imitation of nature," principles which, as we have seen (Anthony Vidler, "The Idea of Type," this issue) are almost synonymous for the late eighteenth century architect. Perhaps the only slight difference between the idea of type evinced in 1788 and that formally propounded twenty-seven years later resides in the lack of clear distinction made at first between model and type, later to become a pivotal aspect of the theory.

The underlying neo-platonism of Quatremère's theory was reflected in the initial categorization he developed for the material of the dictionary: words were selected on the criteria of their *historical, metaphysical, theoretical, elementary or didactic,* and *practical* reference. Of these five divisions Quatremère himself was principally interested in the metaphysical—the essence of architecture—and the theoretical—the principles of architecture. Didactic rules, practical prescriptions, and the historical developments of architecture were all in some way already embodied in traditional treatises; but essences and principles—the entire philosophy of the art, based on the highest philosophical model, the Greeks themselves—were yet to be established. In this lay the novelty of the dictionary for Quatremère. Certainly the large number of *concepts* discussed, and *qualities* defined, made this the first truly systematic work of theory and criticism, one which even Viollet-le-Duc had to acknowledge as a superb precedent for his own.

Type[1]

"Type" comes from the Greek word "typos," a word which expresses by general acceptance (and thus is applicable to many nuances or varieties of the same idea) what one means by model, matrix, imprint, mold, figure in relief or in bas-relief. . . .

The use of the word *type* in French is less often technical and more often metaphorical. This is not to say that it is not applied to certain mechanical arts as, for example, in the word "typography." It is also used synonymously with "model," although there is between the two a difference that is easy enough to understand. The word "type" presents less the image of a thing to copy or imitate completely than the idea of an element which ought itself to serve as a rule for the model. Thus, one should not say (or at least one would be wrong to say) that a statue, or the composition of a finished and rendered picture, has served as the type for the copy that one made. But when a fragment, a sketch, the thought of a master, a more or less vague description has given birth to a work of art in the imagination of an artist, one will say that the type has been furnished for him by such and such an idea, motif, or intention. The model, as understood in the practical execution of the art, is an object that should be repeated as it is; the type, on the contrary, is an object after which each [artist] can conceive works of art that may have no resemblance. All is precise and given in the model; all is more or less vague in the *type*. At the same time, we see that the imitation of types is nothing that feeling and intellect cannot recognize, and nothing that cannot be opposed by prejudice and ignorance.

This is what has occurred, for example, in architecture. In every country, the art of regular building is born of a pre-existing source. Everything must have an antecedent. Nothing, in any genre, comes from nothing, and this must apply to all of the inventions of man. Also we see that all things, in spite of subsequent changes, have conserved, always visibly, always in a way that is evident to feeling and reason, this elementary principle, which is like a sort of nucleus about which are collected, and to which are coordinated in time, the developments and variations of forms to which the object is susceptible. Thus we have achieved a thousand things in each genre, and one of the principal

occupations of science and philosophy, in order to understand the reasons for them, is to discover their origin and primitive cause. This is what must be called "type" in architecture, as in every other field of inventions and human institutions.

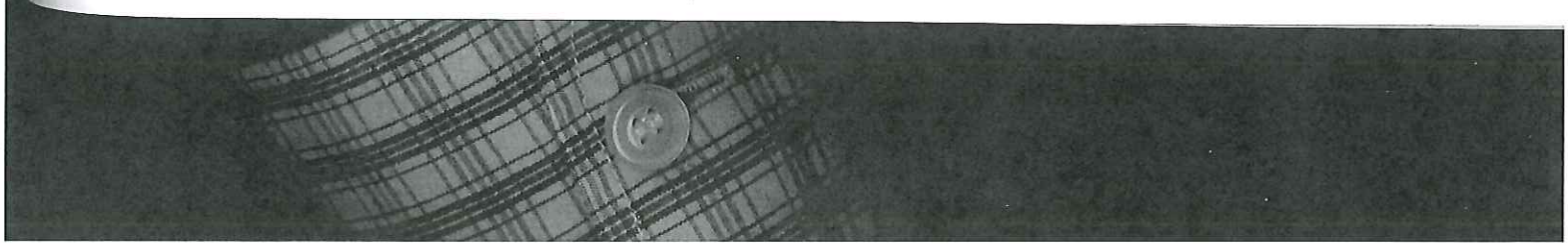
There is more than one route which leads to the original principle and to the type of the formation of architecture in different countries. The most important are rooted in the nature of each region, in historical notions, and in the monuments of the developed art themselves. Thus, when one goes back to the origins of societies, to the beginning of civilization, one sees that the art of building is born of causes and by means that are uniform enough everywhere. Cut stone never formed a part of any first buildings, and we see everywhere, except in Egypt and India, wood lending itself with much more appropriateness to the inexpensive needs of men or of families brought together under the same roof. The least knowledge of the narratives of travelers in countries peopled by savages makes this fact incontestable. Thus, that kind of combination to which the use of wood is susceptible, once adopted in each country, becomes, according to the need of constructions, a type, which, perpetuated by custom, perfected by taste, and accredited by immemorial usage, must inevitably pass into undertakings in stone. This is the antecedent that, in many articles of this *Dictionary*, we have given as the type of more than one genre of architecture, as the principle on which is modeled, over time, an art which is perfected in its rules and practices.

Nevertheless, this theory, which is based on the nature of things, on historical notions, on the most ancient opinions, on the most constant facts, and on the evident testimony of each architecture has often had two kinds of adversaries pitted against it.

There are those who, because architecture does not know how to be, nor to provide the image of, any of the creations of physical or material nature, conceive only of another kind of imitation than that which is related to sensible objects, and pretend that, in this art, everything is, and ought to be, submitted to caprice and chance. Imagining no other imitation than that which can exhibit its model to the eyes, they overlook all the degrees of moral imitation, imitation by analogy, by intellectual relationships, by application of principles, by appropriation of manners (styles), combinations, reasons, systems, etc. From thence they deny, in architecture, everything that is based on metaphorical imitation; they deny it because this imitation is not materially necessary. They confound the idea of *type* (the original reason of the thing), which can neither command nor furnish the motif or the means of an exact likeness, with the idea of the *model* (the complete thing), which is bound to a formal resemblance. Because the type is not susceptible to that precision demonstrable by measure, they reject it as a chimerical speculation. Thus, abandoning architecture, without a standard, to the vagueness of all the fantasies by which forms and lines can be influenced, they reduce it to a game where each is the master of regulating the conditions. From this follows the most complete anarchy in both the totality and the details of every composition.

There are other opponents whose short sight and narrow mind can only understand, in the realm of imitation, that which is positive. They admit, if you wish, the idea of *type*, but only understand it under the form and with the obligatory condition of the imperative *model*. Columns have to continue to look like trees, and capitals like the branches of the tree. The tympanum of the facade has to be suppressed. All the parts of the roof have to be servilely copied in detail. No convention can be admitted between wood construction and its translation into stone.

They recognize that a system of construction in wood, in a tradition of constantly modified and ameliorated assimilations, finally has to be transposed to construction in stone. But because this last only conserves the principle motifs—that is to say, those which in causing the mind to return to the origin of things in order to give it the pleasure of a semblance of imitation will have saved the art from the scope of chance and fantasy—they conclude that no deviation from any of the details of the model is allowed, and thus they wish to give an inflexible reality to the world after it has been made. According to them columns must continue to look like trees, and no convention should be admitted between wood construction and its translation into stone.



Thus, in confounding the idea of type—the imaginative model—with the more material idea of the positive model, which deprives the type of all its value, both adversants are agreed, by two opposing routes, in denaturing the whole of architecture; the former, by leaving it absolutely void of every imitative system and freeing it from every rule and all constraints; the latter, by fettering the art and constraining it in the shackles of an imitative servility, which would destroy the feeling and the spirit of imitation.

We have opened this discussion in order to understand better the value of the word "type" as used metaphorically in a number of works, and the error of those who either ignore it because it is not a model or misinterpret it by imposing on it the rigor of a model which seeks to be an identical copy.

One further applies the word "type" in architecture to certain general and characteristic forms of the building which receives them. This application fits perfectly with the intentions and spirit of the preceding theory. For the rest, one can also, if one wishes, authorize many usages proper for certain mechanical arts, which can serve as examples. No one ignores the fact that a great number of pieces of furniture, utensils, seats, and clothes have their necessary type in the uses one makes of them, and the natural habits for which one intends them. Each of these things has truly not its model, but its type in needs and in nature. In spite of what the bizarrely industrial mind tries to change in these objects, contrary to the simplest instinct, who does not prefer in a vase the circular form to the polygonal? Who does not believe that the form of man's back ought to be the type of a chair back? That the rounded form should not be the sole reasonable type of hair style?

The same is true of a large number of buildings in architecture. One cannot deny that many have owed their constantly characteristic form to the primitive type which gave birth to them. We have superabundantly proved this of tombs and sepulchers, under the words "PYRAMID" and "TUMULUS." We also refer the reader to the article "CHARACTER," where we have demonstrated extensively enough that each of the principal buildings should find, in its fundamental purpose in the uses to which it is given over, a type which is suitable for it; that the architect should try to conform to this as closely as possible if he wishes to give to each building a particular physiognomy; and that from the confusion of these types is born an all too common disorder, which consists in using indistinguishably the same orders, dispositions, and exterior forms in monuments applied to the most contrary uses (see CHARACTER).

Note

1. Essay from the *Encyclopédie Méthodique*, Architecture, vol. 3, pt. II (Paris, 1825).