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978-1-108-05470-6 - A Treatise on the Decorative Part of Civil Architecture: With Illustrations, Notes, and an Examination of Grecian Architecture: Volume 2

Edited by William Chambers and Joseph Gwilt

Excerpt

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A
TREATISE
ON THE
DECORATIVE PART
OF
CIVIL ARCHITECTURE,
BY
SIR WILLIAM CHAMBERS,
K.P.S. F.R.S. F.S.A. F.S.S.S.
WITH
ILLUSTRATIONS, NOTES,
AND
AN EXAMINATION
OF
GRECIAN ARCHITECTURE,
BY
JOSEPH GWILT, ARCHITECT, F.S.A.

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OF PEDESTALS.

Most writers consider the pedestal as a necessary part of the order, without which it is not esteemed complete. It is indeed a matter of small importance whether it be considered in that light, or as a distinct composition; nevertheless, seeing that in the particular description given by Vitruvius¹, of the Doric, Corinthian, and Tuscan orders, no notice is taken of any pedestal, and that in the Ionic order, he only mentions it as a necessary part in the construction of a temple, without signifying that it belongs to the order, or assigning any particular proportions for it, as he doth for the parts of the column and the entablature,—I have judged it more regular to treat of the pedestal as a separate body, having no more connection with the order than as an attic, a basement, or any other part with which it may, on some occasions, be accompanied.

¹ “Stylobata,” Pedestal, “Lib. iii. c. 3. *Uti quadræ, trunci, lysis, ad ipsum Stylobatam, qui erit sub columnæ spiris, conveniat.* Baldus: Plura in *Stereobata* de *Stylobata* diximus, quare hic pauca inculcavimus. *Stylobata* Græca vox, columnæ pedem, fulcimentumve denotat. Nostrates, *Piedistallo* dicunt. Andreas vero Palladius dum Græcam vult originem aliquatenus referre, *pedistillum* scripsit, ac si diceret, columnæ pedem—Hybrida vox. Ego *stallum* à *stylo* non puto factum, sed à *stando*; quo vocabulo, licet barbaro, utuntur Pontificiarum legum periti, dum dicunt, *Canonicis* deberi locum in *Capitulo*, *stallum* in *Choro*. *Piedistallum* igitur dicemus, *pedis* nempe *columnæ* *stallum*, id est *basis* *ipsius* *sedem*.” *Johan. de Laet de significatione vocabulorum quibus Vitruvius utitur.* The pedestal or *stylobata* was used in Grecian architecture, as on the west side of the Temple of Minerva Polias, and in the Choragic Monument of Lysicrates. In the Propylea we find the columns raised on insulated *stylobatæ*, but without a cornice, and with a plain plinth below them. [ED.]

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A pedestal, like a column or an entablature, is composed of three principal parts, which are the base, the dye, and the cornice. The dye is always nearly of the same figure, being constantly either a cube or a parallelo-piped; but the base and cornice are varied, and adorned with more or fewer mouldings, according to the simplicity or richness of the composition in which the pedestal is employed. Hence pedestals are, like columns, distinguished by the names of Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Composite, and Corinthian.

Some authors are very averse to pedestals, and compare a column raised on a pedestal to a man mounted on stilts, imagining that they were first introduced merely through necessity, and for want of columns of a sufficient length.

It is, indeed, true that the ancients often made use of artifices to lengthen their columns, as appears by some that are in the Baptistery of Constantine at Rome; the shafts of which being too short for the building, were lengthened and joined to their bases by an undulated sweep, adorned with acanthus leaves; and the same expedient has been made use of in some fragments which were discovered a few years ago at Nismes, contiguous to the temple of Diana. Nevertheless it doth not seem proper to comprehend pedestals in the number of these artifices, since there are many occasions on which they are evidently necessary, and some in which the order, were it not so raised, would lose much of its beautiful appearance. Thus within our churches, if the columns supporting the vault were placed immediately on the ground, the seats would hide their bases and a good part of their shafts; and in the theatres of the ancients, if the columns of the scene had been placed immediately on the stage, the actors

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would have hid a considerable part of them from the audience; for which reason it was usual to raise them on very high pedestals, as was likewise customary in their triumphal arches: and in most of their temples, the columns were placed on a basement or continued pedestal, that so the whole order might be exposed to view, notwithstanding the crowds of people with which these places were frequently surrounded. And the same reason will authorize the same practice in our churches, theatres, courts of justice, or other public buildings where crowds frequently assemble.

In interior decorations, where, generally speaking, grandeur of style is not to be aimed at, a pedestal diminishes the parts of the order which, otherwise, might appear too clumsy; and has the farther advantage of placing the columns in a more favorable view, by raising their base nearer to the level of the spectator's eye. And in a second order of arcades there is no avoiding pedestals, as without them it is impossible to give the arches any tolerable proportion.

Sometimes too the situation makes it necessary to employ pedestals, an instance of which there is in the Luxembourg Palace at Paris¹; where the body of the building standing on higher ground than the wings, the architect was obliged to raise the first order of the wings on a pedestal, to bring it upon a level with that of the body, or

¹ Built from the designs of Jacques de Brosse, a French architect, who flourished during the regency of Mary of Medecis. This palace was begun in 1615, and completed in 1620, the gateway excepted, which was the work of De Boffrand.

De Brosse built the aqueduct of Arcueil, by which he acquired much reputation. He engaged occasionally in the Arts of Painting and Sculpture, but of his success therein much cannot be said. [ED.]

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corps de logis, of the building, which stands immediately upon the pavement.

These instances will sufficiently shew the necessity of admitting pedestals in decorations of architecture. With regard to the proportion which their height ought to bear to that of the columns they are to support, it is by no means fixed, the ancients, and moderns too, having in their works varied greatly in this respect, and adapted their proportions to the occasion, or to the respective purposes for which the pedestals were intended. Thus, in the amphitheatres of the ancients, the pedestals in the superior orders were generally low, because in the apertures of the arches, they served as rails to inclose the portico, and therefore were, for the conveniency of leaning over, made no higher than was necessary to prevent accidents; and the case is the same in most of our modern houses, where the height of the pedestals in the superior orders is generally determined by the cills of the windows. The ancients, in their theatres, made the pedestals in the first order of their scene, high, for the reason mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, but the pedestals in the superior orders were very low, their chief use being to raise the columns so as to prevent any part of them from being hid by the projection of the cornice below them; and thus, on different occasions, they used different proportions, being chiefly guided by necessity in their choice. The moderns have followed their example, as will appear to any one who examines the works of Palladio, of Vignola, of Michael Angelo, Scamozzi, and many other famous architects.

Nevertheless writers on architecture have always thought it incumbent upon them to fix a certain determi-

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nate proportion for the pedestal, as well for the parts of the order. It would be useless to enumerate in this place their different opinions, but I must beg leave to observe that Vignola's method is the only true one¹. His pedestals are, in all the orders, of the same height, being one-third of the column, and as their bulk increases or diminishes of course, in the same degree as the diameters of their respective columns do, the character of the order is always preserved, which, according to any other method, is impossible.

In the designs which I have given of arches with pedestals, the pedestals are all of the same height, each of them being three-tenths of the height of their respective columns; but it is not necessary to adhere always to this proportion, they may be higher or lower, as the occasion shall require. It is, however, to be observed, that when pedestals are profiled under each column, and the dye is much less than a square in height, the pedestal has a clumsy appearance; and when a pedestal of the same kind exceeds one-third of the height of the column, it has a lean, unsolid, tottering aspect. But if they are continued without any breaks, this need not be attended to; though indeed there are very few occasions in which pedestals higher than one-third of the column, ought to be suffered, as they lessen too much the parts of the order, and become themselves too principal in the composition.

With regard to the divisions of the pedestal, if the

¹ “Ancorchè nell' Ordine Toscano rare volte occorra di farvi il Piedestallo, nondimeno l' ho posto qui in disegno per seguire la disposizione; avvertendo che in tutti i cinque ordini (e ciò serva di regola generale) ho osservato, i piedestalli, con i suoi ornamenti, dover essere la terza parte della sua Colonna: colla base, e capitello,” &c. Vignola, Capitolo terzo. [ED.]

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whole height be divided into nine parts, one of them may be given to the height of the cornice, two to the base, and the remaining six to the dye; or if the pedestal is lower than ordinary, its height may be divided into eight parts only, of which one may be given to the cornice, two to the base, and five to the dye, as Palladio has done in his Corinthian order, and Perrault in all the orders ¹.

The plan of the dye is always made equal to that of the plinth of the column, the projection of the cornice may be equal to its height, and the base, being divided into three parts, two of them will be for the height of the plinth, and one for the mouldings, of which the projection must be somewhat less than the projection of the cornice, that so the whole base may be covered and sheltered by it,—a precaution which Scamozzi has observed

¹ Ordonnance des cinq Especies de Colonnes. 1 Partie, ch. 6. & 7.

The following table shews the height of pedestals in antique and modern works, in minutes, each = $\frac{1}{60}$ of the diameter of the shaft.

		Plinth.	Mouldings above Plinth.	Dye.	Cornice.	Total Height.
		MIN.	MIN.	MIN.	MIN.	MIN.
DORIC	{ Palladio	26	14	80	20	140
	{ Scamozzi	30	15	68 $\frac{4}{7}$	22 $\frac{1}{2}$	136 $\frac{1}{4}$
IONIC	{ Temple of Fortuna Virilis	44	19 $\frac{3}{4}$	93 $\frac{3}{4}$	23 $\frac{1}{4}$	180 $\frac{3}{4}$
	{ Coliseum	33 $\frac{1}{4}$	9 $\frac{1}{2}$	81 $\frac{5}{6}$	17	141 $\frac{1}{2}$
	{ Palladio	28 $\frac{2}{3}$	14 $\frac{1}{3}$	97 $\frac{3}{4}$	21 $\frac{1}{2}$	162 $\frac{1}{4}$
CORINTHIAN	{ Scamozzi	30	15	82 $\frac{1}{2}$	22 $\frac{1}{2}$	150
	{ Arch of Constantine . . .	17 $\frac{1}{2}$	29	153	29 $\frac{1}{2}$	228
	{ Coliseum	23	11 $\frac{1}{2}$	78	19 $\frac{1}{4}$	131 $\frac{3}{4}$
	{ Palladio	23 $\frac{1}{2}$	14 $\frac{1}{2}$	93	19	150
COMPOSITE	{ Scamozzi	30	15	132 $\frac{1}{2}$	22 $\frac{1}{2}$	200
	{ Arch of Titus	55	30	141	29	255
	{ Arch of the Goldsmiths	46	25 $\frac{1}{4}$	144 $\frac{1}{2}$	25 $\frac{1}{4}$	241
	{ Palladio	33	17	133	17	200
	{ Scamozzi	30	15	112 $\frac{1}{2}$	22 $\frac{1}{2}$	180
	{ Arch of Sept. Severus . .	30	30 $\frac{5}{6}$	140 $\frac{1}{2}$	29 $\frac{5}{6}$	182 $\frac{1}{6}$

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in all his designs, though Palladio has neglected it in the greatest part of his, the palace of the Porti, and one or two other buildings in the Vicentine, excepted.

These measures are common to all pedestals, and in the annexed plate there are designs of proper ones for each order, in which the forms and dimensions of the minuter parts are accurately drawn and figured.

It is sometimes customary to adorn dyes of pedestals with projecting tablets, or with pannels sunk in, and surrounded with mouldings. The former of these practices ought seldom to be admitted, as these tablets alter the general figure of the pedestal, and when they project much, give it a heavy appearance; and the latter should be reserved for very large pedestals only, of such kinds as those supporting the Trajan and Antonine columns at Rome, and the Monument in London, where they may be filled with inscriptions, or adorned with bas-reliefs, analogous to the occasion on which the column was erected. Even in the largest buildings, pedestals are commonly too small to admit of such ornaments, which only serve to give them an unsolid trifling appearance, and contribute to complicate, without improving, the composition.

With regard to the application of pedestals, it must be observed that when columns are entirely detached and at a considerable distance from the wall, as when they are employed to form porches, peristyles, or porticos, they should never be placed on detached pedestals, as they are in some of Scamozzi's designs, in the temple of Scisi¹, mentioned by Palladio, and at Lord Archer's House, now Lowe's Hotel, in Covent Garden; for then they may in-

¹ See note, page 220.

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deed be compared to men mounted on stilts, as they have a very weak and tottering appearance. In compositions of this kind, it is generally best to place the columns immediately upon the pavement, which may either be raised on a continued solid basement, or be ascended to by a flight of fronting steps, as at St. Paul's, and at St. George's, Bloomsbury¹; but if it be absolutely necessary to have a fence in the intercolumniations, as in the case of bridges and other buildings on the water, or in a second order, the columns may then, in very large buildings, be raised on a continued plinth, as in the upper order of the western porch of St. Paul's, which, in such case will be sufficiently high: and in smaller buildings, wherever it may not be convenient nor proper to place the ballustrade between the shafts, the columns may be raised on a continued pedestal; as they are in Palladio's design for Signor Cornaro's house at Piombino, and at the Villa Arsieri, near Vicenza; another beautiful building of the same master.

The base and cornice of these pedestals must run in a

¹ " 'Twill be impossible to pass by the new church of St. George, Bloomsbury, without giving it a very particular survey; 'tis built all of stone, is adorned with a pompous portico, can boast many other decorations, has been stinted in no expense, and yet, upon the whole, is ridiculous and absurd, even to a proverb. The reason is this, the builder mistook whim for genius, and ornament for taste. He has even erred so much that the very portico does not seem to be in the middle of the church, and as to the steeple it is stuck on like a wen to the rest of the building; then the execrable conceit of setting up the king on the top of it, excites nothing but laughter in the ignorant, and contempt in the judge. In short 'tis a lasting reflection on the fame of the architect, and the understanding of those who employed him." *Critical Review of the Buildings in London*, 8vo. 1734. Ralph is, not without reason, severe on the steeple in the above critique, but there is, nevertheless, much to admire in the detail of this church, which was built by Nicholas Hawksmoor, a pupil of Sir Christopher Wren. [ED.]