

*The language of freedom: democracy,  
humanity, and nationality in the  
architecture and art of the modern  
european national parliament*

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# **The language of freedom: democracy, humanity and nationality in the architecture and art of the modern European national parliament**

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This chapter draws on the work of Hans Kohn and Anthony D. Smith in order to re-examine two important, related, but relatively neglected aspects of modern nationalism: a) the ancient Greek and Hebrew sources of modern conceptions of liberty and nationality and b) the complex relationship between particularism and universalism, nationality and humanity, in the making of modern national identities and solidarities. After considering theoretically and historically these two aspects of modern nationalism, the chapter looks at their empirical manifestations in the parliament buildings of modern Europe. This it does by means of a small survey of the architectural style and artistic decorations of European parliament buildings, constructed between the late eighteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. In this survey, I examine, first, the visual vocabulary and symbols of democracy, as the rule of the people, turned into citizens, and, second, how images of the *demos* (the people) became intertwined with images of the nation.

## **Civic and ethnic nations – universalism and particularism in the making of modern nations**

Modern Europe owes much to ideas and ideologies. One such powerful ideology has been the ideology of nationalism. Anthony D. Smith defined nationalism as an ‘ideological movement aiming to attain or maintain autonomy, unity and identity for a social group which is deemed to constitute a nation’ (Smith 1991: 51). According to Smith, it was not until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that this ideology emerged. Elie Kedourie, focusing on the political dimension of nationalism, also

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emphasised the ‘modernity’ of the *doctrine* of national self-determination with the nation-state as its central aim and institutional means for securing it. As Kedourie noted in his classic book, *Nationalism*, first published in 1960, nationalism belongs to the ‘new style’ of ideological politics which ‘appears at the time of the French Revolution’ (Kedourie 1994:xiv; Breuilly 2000). Ideological politics is thus a ‘modern European phenomenon’ and one closely associated, albeit in complex ways, with the intellectual upheaval and social, cultural and political transformations advocated by the Enlightenment (Kedourie 1994: xiv; Breuilly, 1994; 2000). John Breuilly, agreeing with Kedourie, has similarly noted that it is ‘essential to take the intellectual history of nationalism seriously, precisely because without so doing one can have only an incomplete understanding of the political significance of nationalism’ (Breuilly 2000: 222).

The intellectual ‘awakenings’ of the eighteenth century, produced a variety of political doctrines. These doctrines, put into practice, would transform world politics into ideological politics. Kant’s pamphlet of 1790 on *Perpetual Peace*, was one expression of the desire, among European intellectuals, to infuse political life with ideological and moral precepts (Kedourie 1994: xiv).

The French ‘Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen’ adopted by the Assemblée Nationale in Paris on 26 August 1789, was one of the earliest attempts, in modern times, together with the American Declaration of Independence of 1776, on which it was based, to turn political theory into political practice. These declarations would shape the national constitutions of France and the USA.

The American and French declarations of who the true bearers of political power should be, were themselves based on new and comprehensive visions of what it is to be human. In the case of the French ‘Declaration’, it was posited, by the two men who drafted and proposed it to the Assemblée Nationale in July 1789, General de Lafayette and the then American Ambassador in Paris, Thomas Jefferson, who had also been the principal author of the American Declaration of Independence, that all men are born free and equal: ‘Les Hommes naissent et demeurent libres et égaux en droits’(Château La Fayette 2019). It was on the basis of this particular and universalistic view of mankind – ‘all human beings’ - as naturally free and equal that

the French 'Declaration' established the French people into a legal entity, the French nation, and as free and equal, by law. It also claimed them as no longer subjects to the monarch but as the new sovereign whose free will should determine the laws: 'The principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the Nation' (ibid, transl.). By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the idea that politics should express the free will of individuals both to associate with others into nations and to govern themselves, had become a global principle of state formation and state legitimacy: '...the years after 1914 saw the explicit incorporation into international law of a moral idea – namely the right to national self-determination' (Kedourie 1994: xiii).

However, there were complications. The modern *idea* of the nation would be defined in two different ways as it became the focus of two rival forces, two great intellectual currents that have shaped the culture of Europe, and those cultures touched by Europe: the Enlightenment and Romanticism, or, as Nietzsche called it - the Counter-Enlightenment (Berlin 1990; Anon 2019).

Powered by these two pan-European intellectual currents, the idea of the nation, in its Enlightenment and Romantic imaginings, would spread across Europe. As Hans Kohn remarked in 1944, in his classic book, *The Idea of Nationalism*, two visions of the nation came to prevail in the course of the nineteenth century and beyond. He termed them, the 'Western' and the 'non-Western' (Kohn 2005). The dividing line where the two visions would make the nations who espoused them clash was, as if by mystical and Romantic, natural determinism, the river Rhine. West of the Rhine, in France, the Netherlands, and England, as well as the USA, lay the earlier, 'Western' type of nation; east of the Rhine, and especially in Germany, was the home of the 'non-Western' type (Liebich 2006: 579).

We now refer to these two definitions and types of nation, as 'civic' (or civic-territorial) and 'ethnic' (or ethnic-genealogical) (Smith 1991: 81; Kuzio 2002). We also refer to them as 'political' and 'cultural'. In them were embodied two distinct visions of what it is to be human and of how human beings could be integrated into communities ('nations') where they could express themselves freely and find a sense of belonging. In *The Idea of Nationalism*, Kohn had described his dichotomy as follows: 'Two main concepts of nation and fatherland emerged in the intertwining of

influences and conditions...The one was basically a rational and universal concept of political liberty and the rights of man, looking towards the city of the future...It found its chief support in the political and economic strength of the educated middle classes and, with a shift of emphasis, in the social-democratically organized labor movements. The other was basically founded on history, on monuments and graveyards, even harking back to the mysteries of ancient times and of tribal solidarity. It stressed the past, the diversity and self-sufficiency of nations. It found its support, above all, among the aristocracy and the masses. These two concepts of nationalism are the poles around which the new age with its innumerable shadings and transitions will revolve... (Kohn 2005:574).

For Kohn, the rational and universalistic concept of the nation was embodied in the French Enlightenment and Republican notion of the ‘community of citizens’ – a voluntary association of free and equal men, who, settled in a given territory, and regardless of (or, indeed, stripped of) their ethnic or cultural background, are united for the purpose of protecting their freedom and equality and determining ‘the manner of their government’ (Kedourie 1994:51; Schnapper 1994).

The Romantic, Counter-Enlightenment concept of the nation was typically embodied in Germany. It idealised and attached itself to what Max Weber termed, the *Kulturgemeinschaft*. One of the most influential advocates of the idea of the nation as a cultural community was the eighteenth-century German philosopher and leading figure of the German Romantic *Sturm und Drang* literary movement, Johan Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803). Herder emphasised the importance of cultural diversity, and with it, the importance and diversity of human feeling, and opposed it to what he saw as the cold and culture-destroying belief in the existence of a universal, human reason, propagated by Enlightenment thinkers (Kedourie 1994:50).

For Herder, the world was a garden of cultures, each culture a different flower, a different set of values, created and cultivated by national communities. Nations were ‘natural’ forms of human association (like the tribe and the pre-‘civilised’ *folk*) – they were neither artificial nor coercive social entities (ibid; Berlin,1992). They should be free to govern themselves as Republics (Barnard 1965).

As Grosby has also stressed, culture was central to Herder's concept of the nation. Herder saw culture as the 'soul of a nation', and wrote about 'national culture', 'national character', *Nationalgeist* ('national spirit'), and 'national mentality' (Grosby 2001:121). For Herder, nations were collective individualities, each with its distinctive ethos or 'personality', each a real and quasi-organic social-psychological entity, whose unfolding is manifested in the literature, art, music, law, customs, and religion of that nation (ibid.; Barnard 2003:41; Leerssen 2006a, 2006b).

### **The intertwining of civic-universalist and ethnic-particularist models of the nation**

Kohn's typology has received many criticisms. According to Anthony D. Smith, *all* civic nations have been based on (ethno-)cultural communities: every modern nation involving both types, both graveyards and liberties (citizenship), albeit in varying degrees. I shall give here Smith's early definition of the nation, as having 'seven features': 'cultural differentiae', 'territorial contiguity with free mobility throughout', 'a relatively large scale (and population)', 'external political relations of conflict and alliance', 'considerable group sentiment and loyalty', 'direct membership with equal citizenship rights', and 'vertical economic integration around a common system of labour' (Smith 1983: 186). Here, Smith explicitly included citizenship, a core feature of Kohn's 'Western', civic concept of the nation. As Smith noted, this was part of the historical evolution of the term 'natio', from its original tribal-ethnic sense, to the modern sense of a community of citizens, a sense which it 'seems to have acquired first in the French Revolution' (ibid.:187). Later definitions would refer, more generally, to 'common laws' (e.g., Smith, 2008, ch.1).

For Smith, the usefulness of Kohn's dichotomy lies in establishing the *degree* to which a modern nation is more or less 'civic' or 'ethnic'. (Smith, 1990: 80-81). Consequently, for Smith, Kohn's philosophical distinction 'remains valid and useful' (ibid.).

Kohn himself recognised the intertwining of the two concepts: 'conflicting and fusing, they [the two concepts of nation and fatherland, liberty and nationality] became embodied in currents of thought in all nations and, to a varying degree, in entire

nations' (Kohn 2005: 574). However, their polarisation and antagonism would lead to the conflagration of the Second World War – a war which Kohn saw as a war between 'Western' and 'non-Western'/'Eastern' and specifically German concepts of the nation. It was the *outcome* of this war, in the midst of which he wrote *The Idea of Nationalism*, that Kohn thought would define the nation and nationalism for the future. As he wrote, the Second World War was 'a war which is a consequence and climax of the age of nationalism and which can be seen as a struggle for its meaning' (Kohn 2005: liv).

The historical record, from the American and French Revolutions, through the two World Wars and to the present day, has shown that 'Western', civic and 'non-Western', ethnic visions of the nation could be distinguished, in both theory and practice, and could clash, fatally, with one another. However, much of modern European history has been a history of the attempt to *combine* ethnic with civic principles. In order better to understand the possibility and even the desire if not necessity for a synthesis of civic with ethnic principles, we need to consider more deeply a dimension of the civic-universalist conception of the nation which is usually overlooked: its ancient Jewish and Greek sources. These two ancient cultural traditions, combined, would provide a powerful vision of a common human nature and cultural endeavour, and the matrix of ethno-cultural development.

Kohn had emphasised the Hebrew as well as Greek (and especially Athenian) sources of modern nationalism, in its initial, liberal and inclusive, 'Western' or 'civic' manifestation: 'From Hebrew and Greek ideas, the age of nationalism drew many of its initial and fundamental inspirations' (Kohn 2005: 576). However, Kohn had hoped that the 'eternal guiding stars' of Jerusalem and Athens would help overcome the age of nationalism 'pointing forward on the road to deeper liberty and to higher forms of integration' (*ibid.*).

In the second chapter of *The Idea of Nationalism*, entitled, 'Israel and Hellas: from tribalism to universalism', Kohn praised the Jews and the Greeks, and especially the Athenians, for transforming the natural group sentiment of tribalism into 'a new consciousness which gave every member of the group the knowledge of a special mission entrusted to it and distinguishing it from all other peoples. This



consciousness, shared by every individual, raised him to a new personal dignity, and prepared the spiritual foundations of democracy' (ibid: 27). The mission of the Jews and the Greeks was the diffusion of their national cultures which they regarded as having universal validity, defining not just how one could become Greek or Jew but, rather, how one could become human (ibid: 60). This sense of mission to mankind was expressed in the vision of the Jews as the messengers of God to all peoples and that of the Athenians as a school. Kohn used as evidence for this, Isocrates' *Panegyricus*, in which Isocrates praises Athens as a school whose 'pupils have become the teachers of the rest of the world,' teaching them its thought and speech (ibid: 36, 41, 58). However, the notion of 'the School of Athens,' had an even more illustrious precedent, in Pericles, in his famous 'Funeral Oration', as Thucydides has reported it.

Kohn had defined Greek and Jewish values as primarily liberal and democratic. At the same time, he had noted that Jews and Greeks developed 'different and even opposite national characters' (Kohn 2005:30). The ancient Greeks were the people of sight, while the Jews' organ was their ear – listening to God's call, becoming God's 'unflinching messenger' (ibid: 31). And yet, 'ancient Judaea and Hellas', 'those two small countries', were combined in Europe, shaping European civilisation: '[M]odern European civilisation has its roots, through Christianity and Roman tradition, in ancient Judaea and Hellas' (ibid: 27).

Smith had similarly emphasised the ancient Greek (and particularly classical Athenian), as well as Republican Roman, models of the modern European conception of the nation. Eighteenth-century interpretations of ancient Greek and Roman antiquity gave rise to the modern idea of the nation as a community of citizens. They found expression in the philosophical and artistic movement which sought to revive both the institutions and appearance of the democratic city of Athens and republican Rome (Smith 2016: 19): 'As the immediate antecedent of the culture and ideology of modern nations and nationalism, "neo-classicism", the classical revival of the eighteenth century, was to play a significant role in their genesis and character.' (ibid: 22) Smith would thus refer to 'the pivotal role of "neoclassicism" in the formation of modern nations' (ibid: 20; Smith 2013).

Smith, like Kohn, had also stressed the importance of Biblical ideals in shaping the ideology of the modern nation, as mediated by Christianity: 'it is to the two great ancient traditions of Graeco-Roman classicism and biblical Hebraism that we must look for much of the distinctive ideological content and character of modern nations and nationalism' (Smith 2016:21; Smith 2003). Smith did not focus, as Kohn did, on the Biblical tradition as a carrier, alongside the Hellenic and Republican Roman traditions, of universal liberal and democratic ideals; rather, he pointed to other, specifically Biblical and particularist concepts which, in his view, had, through the medium of Christianity, itself a world, i.e., universalist religion, shaped nationalist thought, as this was developed in the Western world: 'divine election, covenant, the promised land, universal love and holiness' (Smith 2003: 39).

The link between humanity, liberty and nationality, in its 'Western', Enlightenment affirmation, is emphatic in Kohn's thought. For him, nations, as communities of naturally and legally free individuals (communities of citizens), would realise the nature of humanity as this was defined by Israel and Hellas. The civic nation would bear to fruition the Jewish and Greek yearning for freedom, as an eternal gift to mankind. The acceptance of this gift would make mankind converge on a common, liberal path.

The selection and synthesis of particular Jewish (or Judaeo-Christian) and Greek values and their transformation into fundamental *human* values, i.e. values which defined what it is to be human and which appealed, for their realisation, to *all* men (and eventually women), as a human mission, was a nineteenth-century phenomenon. It was a distinct development in the history of reception of both Classical and Biblical/Christian values as well as the history of European Humanist thought.

The belief that Israel and Hellas were bearers of values that were enduring and for all mankind was clearly formulated, well before Kohn, by Matthew Arnold (1822-1888). We find it in Arnold's famous book, *Culture and Anarchy* of 1869 as 'Hebraism and Hellenism' (Arnold 1990; DeLaura 1969). Himself a follower of the German-Jewish poet and essayist Heinrich Heine (1797-1856), Arnold had advocated 'Hebraism and Hellenism' in the context of a new Humanism (Barnard, 1981). This was a reaction against ideas regarding the racial divisions of mankind, which had ravaged the Neo-

Classical Humanism of the Enlightenment. The new Humanism re-asserted, first, the unity of man, and, second, urged for a new Renaissance in European culture, one that would ‘reconcile’, as Walter Pater put it, in his book, *The Renaissance* (1873), and synthesise, in new ways, Hebraism and Hellenism (Leoussi 1998, 2015, 2016).

Believing them to represent the two sides of man, the moral (Hebraism) and the rational and sensual (Hellenism), Arnold advocated the combination of the Judaeo-Christian moral code (standards of right doing) with the Greek pursuit of ‘sweetness [physical beauty] and light [reason/free thought]’. The balanced cultivation of Hebraic and Hellenic values would bring unity to mankind and make men and women whole. As he said, ‘it [the world] ought to be, though it never is, evenly and happily balanced between them.’ (Arnold 1990: 130).

Karl Jaspers’ idea of the ‘axial age’, about which he wrote after the devastation of the Second World War and in his efforts to re-construct a humane Germany, would add weight to the importance of the Hebrew and Hellenic civilisations, by incorporating them in that pivotal moment in human cultural development, the period between c.800-300 BCE. During this period, a spiritual revolution in the Eurasian world oriented human consciousness away from exclusively mundane, short-term material ends and violent means, towards universality, mystery, morality and individual inwardness. This pivotal moment marked a new beginning, a ‘great transformation’, producing enduring, ‘classic’ values, of relevance to the modern world (Peet 2019; Bellah and Joas 2012; Grosby 2019).

Admittedly, there was variation as to the selection of the specific (‘axial’) values Israel and Hellas had stood for. Distilled into the principles of liberty, equality, fraternity, reason and moral conscience, ‘Hebraism and Hellenism’ would become enshrined in many national constitutions across the world, not just as the traits of man, but as the rights of man. They would also become, in 1948, the foundations of the new society of nations that replaced the League of Nations, the United Nations. The UN set out to make ‘Hebraism and Hellenism’ ‘the desire of all nations’ (Haggai 2:7). Through its Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the UN sought to bring all the nations of the world into a common orbit – a common endeavour to realise this specific, composite view of humanity that claims that: ‘All human beings are born

free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and shall act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood’ (UN Declaration of Human Rights [UNDHR]). Indeed, one of the architects of the UNDH was the French-Jewish jurist, René Cassin (1887-1967), who instilled in it both the Classical values of the French Republic and those of Judaism (Winter and Prost 2013).

The effect of these Greek and Jewish, *human* standards, has not been, as was intended in much of Enlightenment humanism, to eliminate national peculiarities, but, rather, to act as *filters* through which elements of particularistic, ethno-cultural tradition, both high/literate and aristocratic, and low, folkish/popular, could be a) selected and preserved, thereby maintaining national distinctiveness and a sense of belonging to delimited ancestral or genealogical communities, and b) combined with these fundamental, universal standards of conduct. Modern national identities are the product of the filtering and fusing of these Greek and Jewish visions of humanity with visions of nationality – of universality with particularity.

The filtering out of thus defined in-humane values would, and did transform the lives of many men and women, around the world, protecting them from, among other things, the excesses of Romantic ethno-nationalism. Romanticism, with its affirmation and revival of the old gods ran the risk, as Kedourie saw only too clearly, of reviving ‘the dark gods and their rites’ – the gods of inhumane and brutal ethnic customs of slavery, serfdom, inequality, female mutilation, arbitrary killings, the burning of widows, and many others, across the world (Kedourie 1971:92-3). Human rights, since their first formulation in 1789, have thus increased human happiness. As Christopher Coker has remarked, even though ‘[I]t is impossible to prove that human beings have rights...the West knows the appalling consequences of believing that they don’t’ (Coker 2019: 172).

In the following section I shall explore how Greek notions of democracy, which came to be seen as universal and exemplary, spread across Europe, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and their relationship with particularistic, ethno-cultural ideas and values. I shall do this, using as evidence visual material taken from the architectural style and interior decoration of a sample of European parliamentary buildings.

## **Democracy and Nationality in European parliamentary buildings**

In this section, I examine how democracy and cultural identity became intertwined in the art and architecture of European parliament buildings. I shall focus on the architectural style of parliaments and the interior decoration of the debating halls.

The desire to build democratic nations marked Europe from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Although parliamentary or representative democracy became a dominant aspiration, it would be challenged, first, and especially from 1848 onwards, by Socialist and Anarchist alternatives; and, second, during the first half of the twentieth century, by dictatorship and the political success of two new and totalitarian ideologies, Fascism and Communism. Dictatorship and Fascism would sever the bonds between civic and ethnic visions of the nation; Communism would set out to destroy both democracy and nationality.

Democracy did not strip its citizens of their folk, national dress. More often than not, the *demos* was a cultural nation with distinctive, cultural orientations and preoccupations as well as individual wills. As Shils has noted, the national culture plays an important role in binding modern liberal societies – it enables dining with the political opposition (Shils 1997). The link between democracy and nationality would doubly challenge multi-national states and empires, such as Austria and Great Britain, which tried to democratise without fragmenting along national lines.

As the European Middle Ages were marked by the building of the great cathedrals, the period from the eighteenth century onwards, was marked by another extraordinary phenomenon: the building of parliamentary buildings. These radically transformed the landscape of the new, national capitals of Europe. National unification and liberation from foreign rule (either through autonomous or independent status) tended to go hand in hand with the building of democracies – the building of *national* parliaments.

The history of the modern European parliament is the history of modern nationalism. The first modern view of the nation, as the civic, political nation, that was adopted by the USA (1776) and Revolutionary France (1789), was also the first modern

affirmation of the idea of mass democracy. The nation was a people united through their free will into a polity for the purpose of preserving their right to freedom - the right to govern themselves; to make laws according to their will and not that of monarchs and oligarchs. As the French 'Declaration of the Rights of Man', that was approved by the French National Assembly on 26 August 1789 put it: 'The aim of all political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.' (French Declaration 2019). This liberal view of the nation found its fullest expression in political institutions, and, most notably, in parliamentary democracy – in law-making assemblies of representatives of the people elected, eventually, by all the people, i.e., through universal adult suffrage. Consequently, parliament buildings became the centres of national life. As the Norwegian parliament's official website puts it, the national parliamentary building would be the 'ultimate expression of the sovereignty of the people' (Stortinget 2019).

However, ethno-cultural visions of the nation, primarily or initially focused on the 'cultivation of culture' (Leerssen 2006b)), also found political and specifically democratic expression. National sovereignty would be claimed not only through the creation of nation-states, that redrew state borders, but also through democratic forms of self-government.

The British Parliament, as an institution, is among the oldest parliaments in the world. It would be the US American, French and British parliaments that would provide the models for many modern parliamentary institutions as well as parliamentary buildings across Europe and the rest of the world. Modern parliament buildings emerge in the late eighteenth century with plans for the US Capitol (1792) following American independence and the birth of the American nation. They would spread rapidly across Europe in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, beginning with the French Assemblée Nationale (Neo-Classical façade completed in 1810) and the rebuilding, after a fire, of a new building for the British parliament (1835-60).

National parliament buildings also appeared inside the multi-national Empires of Europe, large and small. These national parliaments would be ways of expressing democratically the national will through political autonomy, rather than

independence. For example, the Hungarian and Icelandic *national* parliaments would be built prior to national independence, of Hungary from Austria, in 1918, and Iceland from Denmark, in 1944.

The presence of parliament buildings can be misleading. Not all parliament buildings that were built in the course of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, guaranteed the power of the people (e.g., the French Assemblée Nationale was powerless during Napoleon's Empire, or the Restoration of the Bourbons, in 1815); neither did they express independent statehood (e.g., the Hungarian Parliament, as noted above, was part of the Compromise, *Ausgleich*, of 1867. This granted autonomy to the Magyar domains of the Habsburg Empire, an autonomy which included their freedom to have their own constitution, parliament and bureaucracy, but maintained Austrian control of finances, foreign policy and defence [Merriman 2019: 690-91]). Consequently, the mere presence of parliament buildings cannot express the ebb and flow of the liberal tide. Furthermore, parliament buildings were not always expressions of *national* and individual freedom. For example, the Austrian parliament building (completed 1873) in Vienna was an imperial institution intended to represent, in a quasi-civic, supra-national form, the different nationalities of the Empire. However, it was a reluctant and limited concession of an *ancien régime* government to popular demands for self-determination (both individual and national-collective). Nevertheless, parliament buildings are important landmarks in the history of and struggle for democracy and national self-determination.

In the brief survey of European parliamentary buildings that follows, I shall show:

- a) the extent to which and ways in which parliament buildings engaged with Classical models of democracy
- b) the extent to which parliament buildings connected, through visual motifs and narratives, democracy with nationality.

### ***The dominance of the Classical parliament building***

European parliament buildings are important documents for understanding how European societies engaged and grappled with the ideals of human liberty and national individuality during the foundational period of most modern European nations, the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Most parliament buildings in Europe assumed Classical form, expressing adherence to the Greek, and specifically

Athenian model of democracy, either directly, or indirectly, e.g., by imitating the example of the Classicism of the building of the French national assembly, the Palais Bourbon.

Classical parliaments display the characteristic components of Classical architecture: columns and pedimented porticos. The choice of design for parliament buildings would usually be made by official, government-appointed committees and by means of national or international competitions.

Both conceptions of the nation, the civic-universal and the ethno-cultural, could find expression in the Classical parliament: both the French and German parliaments are Classical, despite the fact that the French Revolutionaries saw themselves as primarily a community of free and sovereign (citizens), whereas the Germans of the Wars of Liberation and Unification, as a community of culture whose political leaders were suspicious of democracy (Breuilly 1999)). At the same time, we often find the ethno-cultural nation break through the Classicism of citizenship, through the use of local and regional building materials, such as the use of regional granite for the Classical colonnaded façade of the Finnish parliament (see below).



Figure 1. US Capitol, Washington, DC (first designed in 1792 and subsequently modified many times), [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:US\\_Capitol\\_east\\_side](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:US_Capitol_east_side).  
JPG





Fig. 2. French Parliament (Palais Bourbon), in Paris (the new façade with the typically classical twelve columns was completed in 1810)

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Palais\\_Bourbon](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Palais_Bourbon)

The American and French parliament buildings show the universalization of Greek democracy in their emphatic Classicism. They show the transformation of Greek political freedom into American and French, and thus into a freedom to which all human beings were entitled.

Originally designed by William Thornton in 1792, the USA Capitol defined the new American nation in Classical terms: as a union of free men. It mirrored the democratic

city of Athens which inspired, in either its forms, or its substance, or both, many of the founders of the American nation (Valsania 2019). The US Capitol, as the central site of US government, would symbolize and promote the aims of American independence: to found the USA as a means of securing and protecting the life, liberty and happiness of free and equal human beings<sup>2</sup>. As the American Declaration of Independence (4 July 1776), stated:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed...(United States of America: Declaration of Independence 2019).

US liberalism thus made Classicism a symbol of its liberty. Similarly Classical was the style that was chosen for the French national parliament. This is not surprising, given the common ideological roots of the two young Republics and the close collaboration of the architects of their national independence (Jefferson and Lafayette). The French parliament building, like the US Capitol, affirmed the French nation as a union of free men – men who were as free as the citizens of Classical Athens.

Greek references abound not only in the style of the new façade, a neoclassical portico, designed by the architect Bernard Poyet and completed in 1810, but also in the design of the debating hall, ‘l’hémicycle’, which was inspired by the ancient Greek theatre: ‘l’Antiquité grecque, qui inventa la démocratie, nous a aussi légué le théâtre’ (Assemblée Nationale 2017). In the debating hall, a Gobelins tapestry, added later in the century, replicated Raphael’s famous fresco in the Vatican, ‘The School of Athens’. Here, in the case of the French parliament building, we find not only visual confirmation of Kohn’s view of the Athenian roots of civic nationalism, but also

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<sup>2</sup> However, it must be noted, following Eric Kaufmann, that these ‘Men’ who fought for independence and constituted the USAmerican nation, on the one hand appealed to freedom on the basis of their humanity and as an entitlement of all men, and on the other, saw themselves in ethno-cultural, Anglo-Saxon terms. We see here, the combination of both universalist and particularist, ethno-cultural principles in the making of USA as a modern nation (Kaufmann 2000).

explicit recognition, as Kohn had also remarked, of Athens as a school, teaching, in the context of the Assemblée, the French nation how to be citizens. Raphael's composition shows Plato and Aristotle in dialogue about the origins of knowledge. It is an image of peaceful and civil debate between persons holding opposite views. It is a lesson in democracy.

The Austrian Imperial parliamentary building, the Reichsrat in Vienna, completed in 1873, is particularly Athenian. Here, in the multi-national Austrian Empire, we have another example of the use of the Classical style to represent the universality and multi-national inclusiveness of the civic nation. We thus see the symbolic attempt to construct and affirm an idea of the Austrian nation as a civic nation - a united nation of citizens.

Built in 1874-83, the Austrian Imperial parliament was designed by the great Danish-born Austrian architect, Baron Theophil von Hansen. Its construction was part of a series of compromises between a crumbling Austro-Hungarian Empire and liberal-national forces. Hansen had spent many years in Athens studying ancient Greek architecture and had also taken part in excavation and reconstruction work on the Acropolis (Goodsell 1988: 291). After leaving Athens for Vienna in 1846, invited by the Greek-Austrian entrepreneur and banker, Georg Simon von Sina, to introduce elements of Greek style in various building projects, Hansen became 'probably the most significant architect of Vienna's Ringstraße era', which saw the construction of the monumental ring road decreed by Emperor Francis Joseph I in 1857 (Stiller 2013). The Austrian Parliament was one of those grand buildings lining the Ringstraße. Full popular participation in the legislative process through elected representatives of the people had to wait until the First Austrian Republic of 1919-1938, and then, after the Second World War.

The building 'reflects the views of ... Hansen, who saw the parliaments of his day and age as "new monuments" which should capture the attention of the peoples much in the same way as the temples of Antiquity and the cathedrals of the Middle Ages had done in the past.' (Austrian Parliament 2019). Although well-versed in a variety of historical styles, Hansen chose the Greek for the Austrian parliament to establish a link between his building and the origins of democracy (Stiller 2013). With its neo-classical pedimented portico, statues of Greek gods and historians, and its citations

from the Erechtheion, Austria's parliament has clear Athenian credentials. These are further reiterated in the monumental fountain that stands in front of the building, and has become the key landmark of the Austrian parliament. The fountain is dominated by the statue of Pallas Athena, the patron of Athens, and 'the Greek goddess of wisdom, strategy, war and peace'. The original idea had been to have a statue of Austria, but Athena was chosen, instead, as a more universal and unifying symbol, given the explosive character of the national movements pressing for autonomy if not independence from the Empire (Danyi 2012).



Fig. 3. Austrian Parliament in Vienna (1873),  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Pallas Athena statue, Vienna#/media/File:Atine statue and Austrian Parliament \(8441082485\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Pallas_Athena_statue,_Vienna#/media/File:Atine_statue_and_Austrian_Parliament_(8441082485).jpg)



Fig.4. German Parliament (the Reichstag, 1894),  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Berlin\\_Reichstag\\_BW\\_1.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Berlin_Reichstag_BW_1.jpg)

It was not until 1894 that the German National Assembly, the Reichstag, would acquire a building specifically designed for it. The Reichstag of the unified, German Empire, would assemble in other buildings, holding its first meeting on 21 March 1871 in Berlin, in the chamber of the Prussian Parliament (on German unification, see Breuilly, 1996). The new building of the German national parliament would combine a classical portico with a neo-Renaissance dome. It was designed by the Huguenot architect Paul Wallot. However, neither Bismarck nor Wilhelm I considered the Reichstag to be important (Cullen 2004: 46).

### *The nationalisation of the Classical parliament*

Variations in the use of Classical architectural styles and motifs show the intertwining of Classical formulations of liberty, with the need to define and express local, cultural-national identities and histories and thereby make parliamentary buildings also vehicles of particular, *national* experiences, values and aspirations. These particularistic, national references, are often centred on a dominant nation (as in the Hungarian parliament building) (Kaufmann and Zimmer 2004).

Classical parliament buildings are, therefore, not uniform – they are not like the eggs of Fabergé: ‘you’ve seen one, you’ve seen them all’. A close study of Classical or Classicising parliament buildings shows a diversification of the Classical mould in both its forms and contents. This diversification follows national lines, and, in this sense, we can talk about both internationalisation/diffusion and nationalisation of the Classical style. We also find an elaboration and modernisation of the Classical tradition itself, as in the Finnish parliament (below), or the unrealised, but much celebrated design of the Slovenian parliament, not discussed here (Slovenian parliament 2019).

The nationalisation of parliamentary buildings would take many forms. The German parliament building would make it clear in an inscription on the great pediment of the façade, that this is the parliament of the German people in the ethnic sense of the folk: ‘*Dem Deutsche Volke*’ (‘to the German people’). Kaiser Wilhelm I viewed the inscription, which became the most recognizable element of the Reichstag building, as distastefully populist, and it was only added in 1916 as a Patriotic Symbol during World War I, and a ‘Christmas present for the German people’ (Cullen 2004: 44-5; Vick 2003; Reichstag 2019) . Although inclusive of the German nation, regardless of class, the Germanisation of the Classical Parliamentary building distinguishes it from the declared universalism (and assimilationism) of the French National Assembly, which opened France to the world, as a universal nation and a *pays d’asile*.

Interestingly, at around 1900, there was even a search, in Germany, for an *indigenous* and austere, *German* Classicism. It would prefigure the appropriation of Greece by the Nazi myth of the Germans as the Aryan race, genealogical inheritors of the athletic beauty of the ancient Greeks.



Figs. 5 and 6. Finnish parliament

The Finnish Parliament building, the Eduskunta Building, is another example of, on the one hand, attachment to Classicism in the design of a parliament building, and, on the other, the development of national and regional adaptations of the Classical canon. It is also an example of attempts to modernise the Classical style. It is inspired by Scandinavian Art Deco Classicism of the 1920s (Lindgren 2011; Hakala-Zilliacus 2002: 485). Furthermore, the Eduskunta is an example of the combination of Classical with ethno-cultural symbols, including religious, Christian symbols.

As an institution, the Finnish national Parliament was created on 29 May 1906 by ‘A new Parliament Act and a State Electoral Law’. At that time, Finland was still under Tsarist rule as the Grand Duchy of Finland (1809-1917). The new Parliament would replace the old ‘Assembly of the representatives of the estates’. The new electoral law of Finland, called ‘the Parliament Act of the Grand Duchy of Finland’, would guarantee ‘a universal and equal unrestricted right to vote’ to both Finnish men and women. It was confirmed by Russian Tsar Nicholas II on July 20<sup>th</sup> 1906 (Tiina 2015). This law would make the Finnish Parliament the first parliament in the world that would grant political rights to women.

Following Finnish independence from the Russian Empire, in 1917/1918, ‘Parliament House’ was intended as ‘a monument to independence and democracy’ (Hakala-Zilliacus 2002; Lindgren 2011:11). It was designed by the architectural firm of Borg-Sirén-Åberg who won at the (second) architectural competition of 1924 for the design of the parliament. The name of the proposal, *Oratoribus* (‘For the Orators’), claimed continuity with Classical, both Athenian and Roman, political traditions.

Significantly, the Plenary Hall (debating chamber) also shows influences from the Pantheon in Rome. The Classical references of the Finnish parliament have an additional significance: they are attempts to integrate the Finns into the West European world and thereby ‘ennoble’ them. For the Finns had been regarded by West Europeans as an Oriental people and as belonging to a non-European ‘race’, the Finno-Ugric race (Manias 2009). As Liisa-Maria Hakala-Zilliacus has noted,

‘[T]he Eduskunta Building acquired nationalistic features also through its “Greekness”; it reinforced the myth of Finland as the Hellas of the North. It accentuated the authority of the Eduskunta as an organ of state and was “suitable” as an interpreter of the patriotic and idealistic aspirations of the era, as an ennobler of Finnishness’ (Hakala-Zilliacus, 2002: 488).

Johan Sigfrid Sirén (1889-1961) was mainly responsible for preparing the proposal for the competition. Construction began in 1926 and the building was completed on Arkadianmäki (Arcadia Hill) in 1931. The façade is lined by 14 columns with Corinthian capitals. Here, we see a new and modern form of Classicism, Art Deco Classicism, radically simplified and stripped of decorative details and absence of the quintessentially Classical pediment. As Liisa Lindgren has noted, ‘the stripped



architecture and strict simplification [were seen as being] related to the era of democracy' (Lindgren 2017:127).

The Eduskunta's modern Classicism is combined with national materials and motifs. Apart from granite, there is marble from Lohja in western Uusimaa and stone from Kuusamo in the north of Finland. These add to the national distinctiveness of the Finnish parliament. As Hakala-Zilliacus observes, the debating hall shows French influence combined with unique, national characteristics:

'Its Classicistic exterior and the hemicyclic parliamentary seating arrangement associated it with the "French" tradition of parliament building architecture. However, the exceptional full-circle shape of the Chamber emphasised the Eduskunta's radical status as Europe's first democratically elected unicameral parliament' (Hakala-Zilliacus 2002: 485)

National characteristics are further expressed inside the building, in the Plenary Hall, through personifications of Finnish values centred on 'the trinity of the home, religion and fatherland' (Lindgren 2017:135). They also project the values of labour and of the common folk (ibid.). These values are presented in a series of five gilded plaster nudes, designed by Wäinö Aaltonen (1894–1966). Aaltonen was a leading artist of the time who won the 1930 competition for the decoration of the Plenary Hall. The five nudes that Aaltonen completed in 1932 were cast in bronze after his death. The male figures, known as the 'Settler' (personifying 'the notion of an independent people who guard its borders' [ibid.: 130]), 'Intellectual Work', 'Faith' and 'Harvester', represent men's work in society. The figures, inspired in their '[M]odern stripped classicism' by Greek statues of athletes and heroes, 'elevate the themes of the series beyond local patriotism' aligning them with 'the long tradition of European art' (ibid.: 130-1). A female nude figure, known as 'Future', stands with her back to the hall carrying the future in her arms, in the shape of a small boy. She is a Classical Greek Madonna who also symbolises 'the mother of the republic' (ibid. :133). It is interesting that although Finnish women had received full political rights over 25 years earlier, in 1906, this female figure affirms the basic values of a patriarchal agrarian society (Eduskunta 2018).

The presence of ethno-cultural, including religious symbols, such as the figure of 'Faith' (Lutheranism) in the Plenary Hall is important. Its role is to focus the

attention of the representatives of the people on specifically national values and concerns, thereby specifying, if not limiting, the horizon of debate (Hakala-Zilliacus 2002: 486-91). It also establishes a higher, divine authority, above the will of the people.



Fig. 7 The old Greek Parliament in Athens

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?sort=relevance&search=old+greek+parliament&title=Special%3ASearch&profile=advanced&fulltext=1&advancedSearch-current=%7B%7D&ns0=1&ns6=1&ns12=1&ns14=1&ns100=1&ns106=1#/media/File:Old\\_Greek\\_Parliament\\_Athens.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?sort=relevance&search=old+greek+parliament&title=Special%3ASearch&profile=advanced&fulltext=1&advancedSearch-current=%7B%7D&ns0=1&ns6=1&ns12=1&ns14=1&ns100=1&ns106=1#/media/File:Old_Greek_Parliament_Athens.jpg)



Fig. 8. The new Greek Parliament in Athens

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?search=greek+parliament&title=Special%3ASearch&go=Go&ns0=1&ns6=1&ns12=1&ns14=1&ns100=1&ns106=1#/media/File:Hellenic-Parliament3.JPG>

The case of the Vouli (meaning the will – of the people), the parliament of the modern Greek nation, a nation associated with the very invention of democracy, reiterates and confirms the Classical and Classicizing pattern of modern European parliament building. However, this Classicism was imported from Western Europe in the long process of Hellenisation of modern Greece, after four hundred years of Ottoman rule.

Classical would thus be the architecture of the first purpose-built modern Greek Parliament building in Athens. This was founded following Greek liberal uprising on 3 September 1843, that demanded a constitution from the absolute monarchy of the Bavarian King Otto. Otto von Wittelsbach was the second son of King Louis I of Bavaria. He was chosen King of Greece in 1832, by the great powers, who had significantly contributed to Greek victory during the Greek War of Independence from the Ottoman Empire and the foundation of the modern Greek state, in 1830.

The seat of the first Greek parliament was a private mansion that had belonged to the Kontostavlos family. The mansion had been built in 1833 in a large garden in the area of today's Kolokotronis square. The big octagonal banquet hall of the mansion was used for over a decade (1843-1854) as a meeting hall for Parliament and Senate. In 1854 this first House of Parliament was destroyed by fire. A new building was constructed based on a Classical design by French architect François Boulanger. Boulanger had been selected by Queen Amalia, Duchess of Oldenburg, wife of King Otto. It was completed in 1875 with modifications following the abolition of the Senate (National [Greek] History Museum, 2019). The current seat of the Greek parliament is the so-called 'Old Palace'. This was also a Classical building. However, the classicism of this compact building is austere and functional. It was built for King Otto and Queen Amalia, who took up residence there on July 25th 1843. It was designed by the director of the Munich Academy of Arts and official architect of the Bavarian court, Friedrich von Gaertner (1791-1847) (Greek Parliament 2019).

### ***Paradoxes of Classical parliament buildings***

A major paradox of Classical parliamentary buildings is that they could be deceptive regarding their democratic origins. As already noted, we find a large number of purpose-built parliament buildings in Europe which are Classical or Classicising. However, in some cases, these buildings had been the seats of *ancien régime* rulers. This raises two important issues: first, that Classical architecture and motifs did not always express democratic values; and, second, that parliament buildings were not all built as such. The Belgian, Danish and other European parliament buildings were cases of conversion of seats of *anciens régimes* (including Imperial powers, as is the case of the Irish parliament building) to seats of democracies. I shall here examine the Danish case.

The current building of the Danish Parliament, the *Folketing*, is located in the Christiansborg Palace on the Castle Islet, 'Slotsholmen', a small island in Copenhagen harbour, in the heart of the capital (Danish Parliament, 2017).

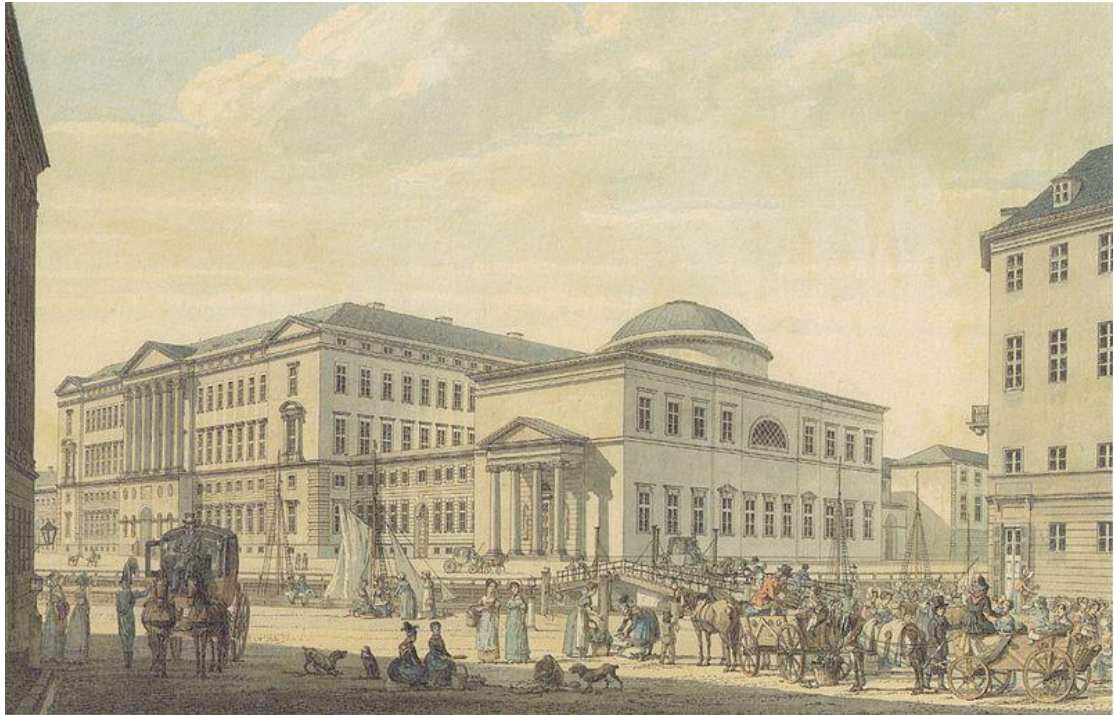


Fig.9. The Second Christiansborg (1803-33). Seat of the first Danish Parliament.

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:HGF\\_Holm\\_-\\_Second\\_Christiansborg\\_-\\_1827.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:HGF_Holm_-_Second_Christiansborg_-_1827.jpg)



Fig. 10. The third (current) Christiansborg Slot (Christiansborg Palace) seat of the Folketing, the Danish Parliament (1907-28),

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Christiansborg\\_Slot\\_Copenhagen\\_2014\\_01.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Christiansborg_Slot_Copenhagen_2014_01.jpg)

Like the British parliament (see below), the Danish parliamentary buildings show in their structure and decorations the intertwining of monarchical with national-democratic ideas, both states being constitutional monarchies (the Danish from 1849, onwards). But unlike the modern British parliament, the building which housed the first Danish parliament in modern times was originally a royal palace, known as the second Christiansborg Palace. It was built after the first Christiansborg Palace (built between 1731 and 1745), a Baroque building, burned down in 1794. The second Christiansborg Palace was built between 1803 and 1833 in the neo-classical style, by the great Danish neo-classical architect, Christian Frederik Hansen (1756 – 1845). Hansen took part in the huge work of reconstruction after the great fire of 1795.

Hansen's neo-classical style for the second Christiansborg Palace had no democratic connotations. It was inspired by the French Empire variety of neo-classicism. Indeed, the Museum that was dedicated to the great neo-classical and liberal Danish sculptor, Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770-1844), Thorvaldsens Museum, the first museum building in Denmark, which was opened in September 1848, would stand in close proximity to but in defiance of Christiansborg Palace, at that time, the symbol of absolute monarchy (Schindler, 2017; Thorvaldsens Museum 2017). However, the year 1848, the year during which democratic and national revolutions swept across much of Europe, also had an impact on Danish politics. It transformed, in 1849, the government of Denmark into a constitutional monarchy and, with it, the function of Christiansborg Palace. With the transition to a constitutional monarchy, King Frederik VII decided to hand over part of the palace to the Parliament. In this context, the neo-classical style became congruent with its typically democratic associations. The second Christiansborg Palace was also burned down in 1884. It was not until 1907, that King Frederik VIII laid the foundation stone for the third and present-day

Christiansborg Palace, which was completed in 1928 and inaugurated by King Christian X. It was built in the neo-baroque style, with different coloured marbles on its facade, representing the different regions of Denmark. As the official website of the Danish Parliament states, ‘The ponderous, robust expression was intended to emphasise the role of the building as the country’s political heart.’ It brings together both the royal and the democratic institutions of Denmark:

‘...Christiansborg is not only a workplace for politicians and parliamentary employees. The Royal Reception Rooms, which are located on the first floor in the north wing, are at the disposal of the Royal Family, and the Queen performs many of her official duties there. The Prime Minister's Office is located above the Royal Reception Rooms, and the Supreme Court, the highest court in Denmark, next to them. Thus, the country’s most important and powerful institutions are all at Christiansborg’ (Danish Parliament 2017).

Important political documents are kept in the Lobby, such as the first democratic Constitutional Act of 1849, ‘where the King handed over power to the people’. These trace the long historical evolution of national sovereignty in Denmark, and include the 1915 Act, which ‘gave the majority of the Danish population their democratic rights’ (Ibid.).

### **Opting out of Classicism and Classical notions of the citizen nation**

Not all parliamentary buildings were Classical – had pediments and columns. This is an important variation which shows that the Classicism of parliamentary buildings should not be taken for granted, nor was it just a fashion, but, rather, a conscious choice, expressive of specific visions of the nation and democracy. Consequently,

although Classicism was open to all, as a universal or international style, it was not universally adopted. As I shall show, one reason for the rejection of Classicism was the existence and power of other, *indigenous* democratic and liberal traditions.

Modern nations who did not adhere to classically-inspired architectural forms for their national parliaments in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries included:

- a) the British and the Hungarians who opted for the Neo-Gothic style, and
- b) the Norwegians and Icelanders.



Fig. 11. Westminster Palace (British Houses of Parliament, 1835-60), [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Houses\\_of\\_Parliament\\_-\\_panoramio\\_\(4\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Houses_of_Parliament_-_panoramio_(4).jpg)

Rebuilt between 1835 and 1860, after a fire, in 1834, the modern Palace of Westminster replaced an earlier, mediaeval structure (Cannadine 2000).



Consequently, it was not a new type of building or institution. Indeed, the modern British Parliament is one of the oldest continuous representative assemblies in the world (UK Parliament: Birth of Parliament 2019). The English were proud of their own, national liberal tradition that went back to Anglo-Saxon traditions and the Magna Carta of 1215 (UK Parliament 2019). A Royal Commission was appointed in 1835, to decide about the style of the new Palace and to organise a public competition for its design. The Commission decided that the style should be either Gothic or Elizabethan, in order, first, to avoid the revolutionary and republican associations of the classical revival style in the USA and France and, second, to assert conservative values (UK Parliament 2019). The winning design was by Charles Barry, a Classical architect, who enlisted the Gothic revivalist Augustus Welby Pugin to aid him.

Barry and Pugin proposed the perpendicular Gothic style, an English style, that was developed in England, in the fifteenth century. Barry's plan was essentially Classical. This caused Pugin to complain to an acquaintance, 'All Grecian, sir; Tudor details on a classic body' (UK Parliament: The Architects 2019). Barry placed the location of the Sovereign's throne, the Lords Chamber and the Commons Chamber in a straight line, thus linking the three elements of Parliament in continuous form (UK Parliament: A New Gothic Vision 2019).

Barry relied heavily on Pugin for the design of the sumptuous Gothic interiors of the Palace (the various carvings, gilt work, panelling and furniture in the rooms, etc.). The interior of the Chamber of the Commons, designed by Barry, was less ornate as well as smaller than the Lords Chamber. It maintained its austere character even after it was re-built, following the 1941 Blitz.

Characteristic features of Barry's original Chamber of Commons were, its Gothic style wall panelling (now plain oak), stained glass windows (now plain glass). We can still see in the re-built Chamber, the green colour of the benches and other furnishings, a custom which goes back 300 years, and the adversarial layout - with benches facing each other. As the website of the UK Parliament indicates, this layout is in fact 'a relic of the original use of the first permanent Commons Chamber on the site, St Stephen's Chapel.' (UK Parliament, Palace's interiors 2019)

While the Commons Chamber is relatively plain, the rest of the Palace of Westminster is richly decorated with paintings and sculptures. In 1841, a Commission was set up

under Prince Albert to encourage contemporary artists to submit designs to decorate the building. The designs were required to be on national subjects, and especially on national history. This meant, in the first instance, English history, ‘covering the whole field of English history’. Some three hundred statues were also commissioned to decorate the main facades of the building, representing saints and sovereigns from the Norman Conquest to Queen Victoria. Consequently, the Palace of Westminster was designed not just to be a working building for the Lords and Commons but also to project the identity and history of the people on behalf of whom it enacted its laws. Overall, this decorative programme affirmed the diversity and long history of the British people as well as its monarchs. The multi-national character of Britain is affirmed, in Charles Barry’s Lobby, where the patron saints of the four constituent nations of the United Kingdom, England, Wales, Scotland and (now Northern) Ireland, appear on large mosaic panels, installed between 1870 and the early 1920s. Paintings by William Dyce illustrate the British chivalric virtues of hospitality, generosity, mercy, religion and courtesy, as represented through scenes from the legend of King Arthur and his court. While the walls of the Royal Gallery are decorated by two enormous paintings by Daniel Maclise ‘recording significant moments from the Napoleonic wars. One of them depicts 'The Meeting of Wellington and Blucher' and portrays the meeting of the Duke of Wellington and the Prussian Field Marshall Blucher at the La Belle Alliance inn before defeating Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815’ (UK Parliament: Works of Art in the Palace 2019). We thus also find images of national resistance, to foreign rule.

Gothic was also chosen for the Hungarian Parliament (1885-1902), the ‘House of the Nation’, to associate Hungarian with British liberal institutions and to offer a contrast to the Austrian Parliament by symbolically affirming Hungary’s distinct ethno-historical identity and claim to self-rule (Hungarian Parliament 2019). Count Gyulas

Andrassy, a Hungarian nationalist who had taken part in the Revolution of 1848 eventually becoming, in 1867, the first Hungarian Prime Minister was a great admirer of British liberalism and supported Imre Steindhal's Gothic Revival design, which was inspired by the British example (ibid.). Andrassy saw the Palace of Westminster as the mother of Parliaments, preferring the English to the French conception of freedom (Hungarian Parliament: Architectural History 2019). As Endre Danyi has noted, while 'the classical Austrian parliament building was meant to be the manifestation of universal values and ideas, its Hungarian counterpart was supposed to emphasize the uniqueness of the Hungarian people and their thousand-year-old state. This is the reason why the late 19th [sic] century building is full of historical references to medieval princes, kings, and queens...' (Danyi 2012). These include Arpad and St Stephen. Both the British and Hungarian parliaments, therefore, distanced themselves from Greek models of democracy. The Hungarian parliament building, in particular, illustrates the use of Gothic and ethnic-historical motifs to express the vision of a separatist, ethnic and emphatically Christian nation. St Stephen has been central in Hungarian nation- and state-building. He was the King who converted the Magyars to Christianity in 1000 AD. St Stephen's centrality in the Hungarian vision of themselves as Christians, is evident in the rituals that were developed, in the late nineteenth century, with the national parliament at their centre. As Laszlo Peter has remarked, what is believed to have been St Stephen's crown, 'the Holy Crown of Hungary' was taken to the Hungarian parliament on 9 June 1896 for the millennial celebration of Hungary's conquest. Following the collapse of Communism, St Stephen's Crown was moved back to a permanent site in parliament on 1 January 2000 (Peter 2003: 510).

Norway and Iceland are also interesting cases of resistance to columns and pediments and Greek or non-indigenous origins of modern democratic assemblies. At the same time, we find an antagonism towards the dominance of America and France as the great emancipators of the modern world.



Fig. 12. Norwegian Parliament

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Stortinget#/media/File:Stortinget,\\_Oslo,\\_Norway.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Stortinget#/media/File:Stortinget,_Oslo,_Norway.jpg)

Norway became independent in 1905, after a period of internal autonomy in the context of union with Sweden (1814-1905). The union with Sweden had been preceded by Danish domination of 400 years. Iceland became independent of Denmark in 1918, sharing a king and foreign policy with Denmark until 1940. Nevertheless, both Norway and Iceland, had been developing their modern national and liberal institutions before finally achieving independence.

Contemporary official parliamentary publications and websites of the two nations affirm the native, Nordic or Scandinavian origins of their modern national assemblies. In these documents, we find the claim that modern representative institutions against absolute monarchies had emerged in Norway ‘800 years before such ideas came into play in the USA and France’. Thus, the Norwegian parliament roots itself in the mediaeval rural regional assemblies, known as the ‘altings’. I quote: ‘Even before recorded history began in Scandinavia (around 800 AD), free men met in alltings (common assemblies) in the various districts scattered around the country.’ (Stortinget 2015:6). These assemblies were revived in the modern era and combined, in developing their modern Constitutions with American and French models. As an official publication of the Norwegian parliament states, regarding ‘The Constitution of 17 May 1814’ (the basis for the subsequent evolution of Norway into a fully democratic, constitutional monarchy): ‘The main principles of the Constitution were founded, for the most part, on the same ideals expressed in the American Declaration of Independence (1776) and Constitution (1787) and the constitutions of the French Republic (1791, 1793 and 1795): sovereignty of the people, separation of powers and

civil rights.’ However, the constitution of 1814, as indeed the current one, also declared, in article 2, Norwegian commitment to both a humanist and Christian [and specifically Lutheran-Evangelical] cultural heritage: ‘Our values will remain our Christian and humanist heritage’ (Constitution of the Kingdom of Norway 1814).

The Norwegian parliament, the Stortinget, was built in Oslo, and completed in 1866 to designs by a young Swedish architect, whose family was originally French, Emil Victor Langlet, who had won the competition for it. It is designed in a symmetrical H shape, with two semi-circles on the cross axis. Langlet wrote that he had used the two wings that extend out on each side to “resemble outstretched arms to welcome the representatives of the people, or with them the entire nation” (Torkjelsson 2015:8).

The Stortinget has neither columns nor pediments. It combines a mixture of European architectural styles, largely French and Italian, as well as Byzantine, with architectural elements and ground plans taken from both civic and ecclesiastical architecture. The Stortinget was meant to be different from all other parliament buildings – it was therefore neither neo-Classical nor neo-Gothic (with high towers, arches and spires). One of its characteristics is its semi-circular debating hall (the ‘Storting Chamber’) which is directly visible from the exterior, instead of being ‘hidden’ inside the building. Pierced by several doors and large, Romanesque, round-arched windows, it was intended, by Langlet, to make the workings of parliament visible and accessible to the public (Torkjelsson, 2015: 8).



Fig. 13. Iceland's Thingvellir

Iceland's parliament as an institution is one of the oldest in the world. It is known as *Althingi*. As the nation's oldest institution, the *Althingi*, the assembly of the leading chieftains, was founded at Thingvellir (Parliament Plains) – a magnificent open space, now a national park - in 930 AD. For modern Icelanders, the creation of *Althingi* marks the birth of the Icelandic nation. For them, the *Althingi* was a Representative democracy: 'In hindsight, we can see that what these early Icelanders did was create a crude version of a modern-day representative parliament in response to absolute monarchy, about 800 years before such ideas came into play in the USA and France' (Icelandic Parliament 2019).

The modern Icelandic parliament building, 'Parliament House', was designed by the Danish architect Ferdinand Meldahl (1827–1908), director of the Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen. Inaugurated in 1881, it was built in Reykjavík with Icelandic stone (hewn basalt from Skólavörðuholt hill) as a simple two-storey edifice. Interestingly, the façade, displaying neither pediment nor columns, affirms, symbolically, the ethno-cultural identity of the *demos*, by means of motifs from the pre-Christian national past: 'Over four of the second-floor windows Iceland's

guardian spirits are depicted in low relief: a giant, a great bird, a bull and a dragon' (Icelandic Parliament 2019).

The modern Icelandic parliament building had further ethno-national and historical meanings and associations. It was constructed in order to mark the millennium of the settlement in 874 AD of Iceland by Norsemen, and specifically by the first settler, Ingólfur Arnarson (Icelandic Parliament 2019). Nevertheless, Icelanders would continue to celebrate major national occasions at Thingvellir, well into the twenty-first century, such as the millennium of the introduction of Christianity, in 2000. With its very name, *Althingi*, the building evoked the mediaeval and indigenous origins of the institution which had survived, in various forms, during Iceland's complex history of civil wars, alliances, and, eventually, domination by Denmark, continuing to meet at Thingvellir until 1798. In the course of the nineteenth century, the growth of Icelandic national self-consciousness led to the re-establishment of the institution of *Althingi* by a Danish royal decree of 8 March 1843. This was followed by the first elections in 1844, and the revived *Althingi* convened for the first time on 1 July 1845. Iceland became a sovereign state on 1 December 1918, sharing a king and foreign

policy with Denmark until 1940 (Icelandic Parliament 2019).



Fig. 14. Icelandic national parliament, *Althingi*

## Conclusion

I explored in this chapter the classic distinction between two types of nation, the civic and the ethnic, as these emerged, in Europe, in the eighteenth century, shaping collective identities and politics to the present day. I examined these two visions of the nation by reference to the writings of two scholars who have played leading roles in defining the nation and nationalism - Hans Kohn and Anthony D. Smith. Both Kohn and Smith emphasised the Biblical and Classical influences on modern conceptions of the nation, both civic and ethnic. They showed how ancient Israel and Hellas, who had developed a vision of a common humanity, transcending tribal bonds, had inspired both modern ethnic particularisms and modern universalist affirmations of human reason, freedom and a common cultural mission for all nations.



Both Kohn and Smith had observed, in many modern European and non-European national movements, the desire to combine the civic-universal with the ethno-cultural conception of the nation; while other nations would choose one or the other. Such choices would bring nations into conflict – conflict over the definition of the nation and desire to impose one’s own definition of the nation on another’s. Both the Napoleonic Wars and the Second World War would show the disastrous consequences of such absolutist visions of the nation. Combining liberal and humanitarian values with ethno-cultural, particularist traditions, has not been a conflict-free task, either. It has made political and cultural innovators clash with traditionalists and cultural revivalists (Hutchinson 2005). Nevertheless, one of the effects of such intertwinings has been the cleansing of ethno-cultural identities and communities of their ‘dark gods’.

The tension between civic and ethnic visions of the nation, between liberty and ethno-cultural identity, and the desire to combine them, is most graphically expressed in the architecture and art of modern European Parliament buildings. Modern Parliament buildings show in visual form the many ways in which European nations defined and pursued both liberty and nationality. I examined a number of European Parliament buildings that were constructed during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a period that affirmed or re-affirmed the value of both nationalism and democracy.

Parliament buildings emerge and expand on a large scale during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Parliament buildings were, in most cases, an entirely new kind of public building that was designed to house an entirely new institution that would spread across Europe and the rest of the world – parliamentary or representative mass

democracy. Through study of the architecture and art of a number of modern Parliament buildings, I explored the Kohn-Smith hypothesis of the Classical Athenian sources of modern nations by focusing on one of the central institutions of the modern civic nation, the national legislative assembly. I showed that although the Classical architectural vocabulary of pediments and columns became dominant, being regarded as a universal language of human freedom and democracy, it was not universally adopted. Other architectural styles, e.g. the Gothic style, were also used, e.g., in Britain, to express democratic ideals, and, more importantly, to affirm other, e.g., indigenous sources of democracy, e.g., English or Icelandic. I also showed how parliament buildings could, on the one hand, declare the universal value of political freedom, both national and personal, and on the other, affirm the national remit of their assemblies and the cultural and historical particularities of their national or multi-national *demos/demoi*. Such particularities would be expressed, not only in the choice of architectural style and building materials, but also in visual representations, in paintings and sculptures, decorating the buildings. These paintings and sculptures would project the history and identity of the specific, dominant nations whose will was represented in the debating halls of parliament buildings. They would define the *demos* as a specific cultural-national community. Visual definitions of the culture of the *demos* would seek to a) create, among the deputies, a sense of unity and common destiny, based on a conception of the common culture; and b) define the horizon of debate, e.g., along national, including religious lines, as in the cases of the Hungarian or Finnish parliaments. In this way, national parliaments would become sites and symbols of both liberty and nationality. Through debate, these symbols of liberty and nationality would constantly be re-interpreted and negotiated.

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