

The prestigious interior

The Stairs

The Principal Entrance gives on to a central corridor which has five bays topped by saucer domes and at its end leads to two flights of stairs right and left (Fig. 30). On either side a few steps lead up to raised platforms which lend additional significance to the stairs that rise from them. Surprisingly, the two stairs differ in design. Apparently the architect intended to distinguish them both functionally and typologically.

ACADEMY
BUILDING,
STAIRCASE
LANDING
(FIG. 30)



The right-hand flight of stairs, on the side of Sonnenfelsgasse, passes in three sections with two landings around six slender piers up to the first and second floors. It has heavy stone balustrades and is topped by a sequence of shallow saucer domes (Fig. 31). Strikingly, the staircase arcades are not aligned with the window openings. The fact that the arcades do not correspond to the windows in the façade facing Sonnenfelsgasse can hardly be assumed to have been intended by as high-calibre an architect as Jean Nicolas de Jadot. Much rather, the faulty alignment is likely to be due to the fact that the execution of the stairs did not follow the original plan. The other stairway – the one on the south side along Bäckerstrasse – is neatly fitted into the basic structure of the building and is comparatively sumptuous in aspect (Fig. 32). It also features three sections and has a well extending over the entire height of the first upper floor. Its alignment with the window openings ensures that the splendid white stairway is steeped in light, which enhances the impression of openness and serenity. Both stairs lead up to a three-bay foyer (Fig. 33) in front of the Great Hall, from which it is separated by three arches.

The typological distinction between “stairway” and “staircase” corresponds to a hierarchical one, which in turn reflects a functional difference. The more elaborate



ACADEMY BUILDING, SOUTHERN STAIRCASE, LEFT SIDE (FIG. 32)

“stairway” was intended for solemn events in the Great Hall, while the more modest staircase up to the second floor served humbler purposes such as everyday activities of the university and gave access to the lecture halls at all three levels in the part of the building facing the square.

There is yet a third, inconspicuous staircase serving, for the most part, practical purposes. It branches off the western part of the central corridor, has two steep sections separated by corbelled landings and gives access to the lecture halls at the three levels of the rear part of the building.

ACADEMY BUILDING, NORTHERN STAIRCASE (FIG. 31)





ACADEMY BUILDING, FOYER ON
MAIN STOREY (FIG. 33)

The ground-floor Aula

The space between the stairs that branch off from the central corridor and the rear part of the building gives access to a splendid colonnaded hall consisting of five aisles of three bays each (see Fig. 10). Set off against the longitudinal axis, it forms a transverse element reflected on the exterior in the central projections with their three large entrances that divide the street fronts of the building. The entrances originally

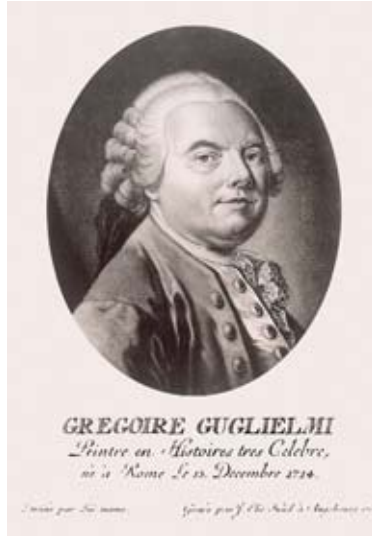




PERFORMANCE OF JOSEPH HAYDN'S "THE CREATION", WATERCOLOUR BY B. WIGAND (1808) (FIG. 34)

PORTRAIT OF
 GREGORIO
 GUGLIELMI,
 MEZZOTINT BY J.
 E. HAID AFTER
 ARTIST'S OWN
 DRAWING
 (FIG. 35)

served to admit, and provide exits for, carriages, as the small proportions of the building site prevented the construction of a courtyard. Without any doubt, the generous dimensions of the hall are at least in part due to the need for this dual function as a prestigious aula and carriage house.



Coupled Doric columns support fifteen flat domes the longitudinal orientation of which is enhanced by oval plaster frames. The central bay at the intersection of the building's main axis and the middle one of the three transverse axes is widened and enclosed at the corners by four groups of three columns placed at right angles. This wide central bay forms the geometric middle not only of the colonnaded hall but of the entire building. Exactly above it, in the Great Hall on the principal floor, is the centre of the ceiling fresco.

The Great Hall

As long as the building accommodated the university, the Great Hall was used for the election of the University Chancellor as well as for disputations and other solemn functions (see Fig. 11). On 27 March 1808 it saw the first performance of Joseph Haydn's "The Creation" conducted by Court Conductor Salieri, as depicted in a water colour by Balthasar Wigand (Fig. 34). The aged composer was

taken to the university in a princely carriage and carried up to the Great Hall in a lavishly decorated sedan chair. Today the Hall serves as venue for important events of the Austrian Academy of Sciences.

The ceiling fresco was executed by Gregorio Guglielmi (1714–1773) (Fig. 35), who was commissioned on the recommendation of Pietro

Metastasio (1698–1782) (Fig. 36), who had met Guglielmi in Dresden in 1753 and was the author of the pictorial programme.

Gregorio Guglielmi

Gregorio Guglielmi had studied with Sebastiano Conca and became a member of the "Accademia di San Luca" in 1748. According to the records he was in Dresden in 1753 and in Turin in 1759, and took part in the decoration of the Small and Large Galleries of Schönbrunn Palace (1761/1762). His renown took him to many places throughout Europe, as is evidenced, amongst other things, by the ceiling paintings in the Grand Hall of the Schänzler Palace at Augsburg. By 1772 he was working in St. Petersburg, and in the same year he became a member of the "Accademia de Disegno" in Florence. Like Luca Giordano, Gregorio Guglielmi was the typical migrant artist who executed decorative work of different kinds in all parts of Europe.

The pictorial programme

In early 1755 Cardinal Prince-Archbishop Johann Josef Graf von Trautson, the Protector of the University, addressed a letter to the Imperial Court Poet Pietro Metastasio, asking him to draft the literary programme for a large ceiling fresco to decorate the hall of the new University Building (Fig. 37). While this letter has been lost, Metastasio's reply of February or March 1755 has survived. In it, the poet outlines the basics of the programme. One of Metastasio's chief demands was that the painting be iconographically unequivocal, so that even the "man in the street" ("qualunque più rozzo spettatore") would understand what the fresco meant. At the very beginning of his letter, Pietro Metastasio outlines the two central subjects of the programme. As regards the university schools or faculties, his wish is that their representation should be noble and should show, as clearly as possible, which fields of study were to be pursued by the university: "[...] Uno. Il dimostrare con la nobiltà e con la chiarezza possibile quali siano le scienze che si coltivano nell'università suddetta. [...]".

The long sides of the ceiling show the Faculties of Theology and Jurisprudence, while the more modest narrow sides are dedicated to the other two faculties. The fresco devoted to the Faculty of Theology



occupies the area facing the main entrance. Metastasio's letter describes in detail how the individual faculties are to be represented. Accordingly, the viewer is given first-hand information by a brief designation (on a painted marble tablet) of the school in question: "Theology" ("DIVINARVM RERVM NOTITIA" [Knowledge of Things

Divine]), "Jurisprudence" ("IVSTI ATQUE INIVSTI SCIENTIA" [Science of the Just and the Unjust]), "Philosophy" ("CAVSARVM INVESTIGATIO" [Investigation of Causes]) and "Medicine" ("ARS TVENDAE ET REPARANDAE VALETVDINIS" [Art of the Protection and Recovery of Health]). The tablets are flanked by angels and genii painted in grisaille.

Thematically, the ceiling design is rounded off by vases and architectural elements peopled by a variety of figures in historical and contemporary costumes. The corners contain painted allegories of the four continents and their principal rivers (Danube, Ganges, Nile and Rio de la Plata). In this way the "universality" of human knowledge is visualised in line with the traditional system of groups of four. In its present form, the ceiling fresco in the Great Hall of the Austrian Academy of Sciences is not the original but a reconstruction: A fire on 7 and 8 February 1961 completely

PORTRAIT
OF PIETRO
METASTASIO,
COPPER
ENGRAVING BY
F. ZUCCHI AFTER
ARTIST'S OWN
DRAWING
(FIG. 36)



FESTUM CORPUS CHRISTI

ARS PRODUCE REPERIUNTUR VARIETATIBUS

DIVINARUM REVERENTIA NOTITIA

OPUS OPERIS GREGORII GUGLIEMINI 1755



GREAT HALL, CEILING
(FIG. 37)



GREGORIO
GUGLIELMI,
SKETCH OF THE
CEILING FRESKO,
GREAT HALL,
WIEN MUSEUM,
INV.-NO. 114.810,
CA. 1754/55
(FIG. 38)

destroyed the ceiling fresco of Gregorio Guglielmi and the quadraturist Domenico Francia (1702–1758). Otto Demus, President of the Federal Office for the Protection of Monuments, strongly advocated restoring the fresco to its original state. The arduous work was executed by the academic painter Paul Reckendorfer and his staff within less than two years.

A pen drawing with watercolour wash dating from 1754/1755 (Fig. 38) kept at the Wien Museum is likely to be one of the earliest general sketches for Guglielmi's ceiling fresco (1754/1755). Unlike the version ultimately executed, this drawing relegated "Theology" and "Jurisprudence" to the narrow sides of the hall. Considerable differences between the drawing and the executed fresco are also found in the centre, where – in contrast to Metastasio's

programme – the original plan envisaged only one figure, that of "Fama" (with a trombone), to proclaim the glory of Maria Theresa.

The Ceiling Centre (Fig. 39)

The zenith of the ceiling bears an oval medallion with profile portraits of the Imperial couple, Franz I Stephan and Maria Theresa, surrounded by three figures: that of Chronos, a huge hoary old man with spread wings, holding in his hands an upright oval tablet bearing the portraits. That the medallion is placed in the hands of the God of Time serves as an admonition to keep the memory of the celebrated monarchs for all times. Opposite Chronos, a cherub kneeling on a dark cloud and surrounded by a drape holds in his left hand an olive branch, while his right supports the portrait medallion. In front of him hovers an eagle, its talons grasping the fragments of a scythe, the attribute of Chronos. In allegory, the eagle signifies Temporality overwhelmed by Eternity – time "superseded" by the eternal quality of lasting fame. Above, a little angel holds a laurel wreath in his left hand. The original pictorial programme envisaged five figures around the medallion with the portraits of Maria Theresa and Franz I: Chronos, the eagle and the three cherubs carrying the olive branch, the laurel and a serpent with its tail in its mouth (the "Ouroboros" as a symbol of eternity). Possibly, the cherub with the serpent was left out in the final version because the



GREAT HALL,
CEILING FRESCO,
CENTRE
(THE IMPERIAL
COUPLE)
(FIG. 39)

personification of Eternity was already symbolised by the broken scythe of Chronos.

“Theology” (Fig. 40)

The background is formed by a domed circular structure with Corinthian pilasters. A bearded old man in a bright robe (possibly John the Evangelist) sits on a pedestal in front of it, holding in his left a tablet with the inscription “In principio erat verbVm” from the Prologue of the Gospel according to St. John (John 1, 1). The central figure and two youthful figures flanking it, holding a cross (right) and censer (left), form the top of a pyramid on the sides of which there are groups of men apparently in a state of agitation. The two dominant figures – preachers – probably symbolise the preaching of Gospel by the Apostles. The preacher on the right is addressing a group of

avid listeners, the one on the left is facing an audience that appears, at least at first sight, to be unwilling to listen. The base is formed by a carpet spread over the stairs strewn with precious liturgical objects. The lower corners show a representative of “Tradition” (the author of the Acts of the Apostles?) with an open book and a pen (but without specific attributes) and what might perhaps be a “historian”, while playing cherubs form the front edge of the foreground. The sides are peopled by groups of men along the balustrades engaged in disputation. The group of scholars to their right evidently includes representatives of “Speculation”. And the third sub-discipline of Religion envisaged in the programme, “[...] which is imprinted in our souls by Nature [...]”, appears to have been depicted as representatives of Greek paganism, Islam and one representative of the heathen peoples.

“Jurisprudence” (Fig. 41)

The background is a decorative stage architecture with half-pillars and pilasters forming a semicircle. As in the case of the “Theology” allegory, richly draped figures form a pyramidal structure at the top of which a young man holds a stone tablet on which the eighth “tabula” of the Roman Law of the Twelve Tables is inscribed (“SI QVADRVPE / PAVPERIEM SARCITO / QVI FRVGES / EXCANTASIT / ENDO”). To the left, another group studies and discusses the laws of the first “tabula”, whose contents are summarised in the form of individual