

Political Sketches: A Defense of the American Experiment," *Miss. Vall. Hist. Rev.*, XLI (1954-1955), 623-640; *Dict. Amer. Biog.*, XIII, 368-369.

¹³²David Ramsay, *The History of the American Revolution*. 2 Vols. (Philadelphia, 1789), II, 316. On Ramsay, see *Dict. Amer. Biog.*, XV, 338-339; *David Ramsay, 1749-1815. Selections from his Writings*, ed. Robert L. Brunhouse (Philadelphia, 1965 = *Trans. Amer. Philosoph. Soc.*, N.S., LV, Pt. 4).

¹³³Guy H. Miller, "Contracting Community," (see Note 30, above).

¹³⁴*North American Review*, XXVIII (1829), 57; John R. Howe, Jr., *The Changing Political Thought of John Adams* (Princeton, 1966), 164; see also 28-58, 136, 156-161.

¹³⁵*Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (see Note 54, above), XV, 232, 237.

¹³⁶*The Machiavellian Moment* (see Note 2, above), 551-552. Cp. William Biglow, *Education: A Poem, Spoken at Cambridge at the Request of Phi Beta Kappa, July 18th, 1799* (Salem, 1799), 11: "But wealth increas'd and luxury was bred, / And virtue, knowledge and religion fled."

¹³⁷*Port Folio*, I (1801), 6-8; V (1805), 150-152. See Linda K. Kerber and Walter J. Morris, "Politics and Literature: The Adams Family and the *Port Folio*," *Wm. & Mary Quart.*, 3rd Ser., XXIII (1966), 450-476.

¹³⁸*Democracy Unveiled; or Tyranny Stripped of the Garb of Patriotism*, by Christopher Caustic [= Fessenden]. 2nd ed. (Boston, 1805), 121.

¹³⁹*Port Folio*, Ser. 3, Vol. V (1811), 486.

¹⁴⁰"An Inaugural Discourse, Delivered Before the New-York Historical Society," *Collections of the New-York Historical Society*, III (1821), 34, 37.

¹⁴¹"Classical Learning," in *Port Folio*, New Ser., V (1808), 20.

¹⁴²Letter to Richard Peters, March 29, 1811, in *Port Folio*, Ser. 6, Vol. I (1826), 452.

¹⁴³*Port Folio*, V (1805), 205, 241.

¹⁴⁴*Port Folio*, XII (1822), 249-250.

¹⁴⁵Stourzh (see Note 22, above), 35-36, 132.

¹⁴⁶Kenneth Silverman, *A Cultural History of the American Revolution* (New York, 1976), 73, 504-505.

¹⁴⁷Lawrence M. Levin, *The Political Doctrine of Montesquieu's Esprit des Lois: Its Classical Background* (New York, 1936), 68-70; *Encyclopédie*. New Ed. (Geneva, 1777), XI, 815-818, s.v. "Économie (Morale & Politique)," by Rousseau; XXXV, 261-262, s.v. "Vertu," by Romilly; Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* (New York, 1976), 158-159.

¹⁴⁸Cited by Silverman (see Note 146, above), 150.

¹⁴⁹Foner (see Note 147, above), 159. Cp. Captain Manly's speech in Royall Tyler's *The Contrast. A Comedy* (1787; reprinted New York, 1970), 63-64, on the sapping of virtue by luxury and corruption; Silverman, 558-563.

¹⁵⁰Richard D. Mosier, *Making the American Mind. Social and Moral Ideas in the McCuffey Readers* (New York, 1947).

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The Icon of Antiquity

The physical image of antiquity constituted a standard part of the artistic idiom of the Renaissance. Nevertheless, a growing interest in ancient history and archaeology in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries converted this image into a new and highly significant icon. The following pages will examine the significance of that icon as it appears in American painting, architecture and sculpture. Attention will be focused upon the key works of three artists: Benjamin West, Thomas Jefferson and Horatio Greenough. A brief epilogue will suggest the new direction which the icon of antiquity took during the nineteenth century.

Background

Although the physical remains of antiquity never entirely disappeared from sight or ceased to exercise their fascination on the mind of post-classical Western man¹, it was not until the Renaissance² that a concerted effort was made to re-discover and collect these relics of past glory. Building projects and sporadic treasure hunts unearthed such a wealth of artifacts and art objects that, throughout Italy by the latter stages of the Renaissance, princely and episcopal palaces, civic centers, universities and academies of fine arts were likely to have at least modest collections.³ Prominent families, whose names are still frequently associated with the masterworks of ancient art, gathered together especially rich collections of antiquities.⁴ In addition, the Papal collection housed at the Vatican came to possess specimens of classical art that were to inspire creative minds for centuries.

While the collections of ancient treasures grew at Rome, little was available outside the city. Some antiquities had found their way from Rome to Venice, Paris, Madrid, Munich and Prague, but it was not until the eighteenth century that this centrifugal movement gained real strength. Growing European interest in the physical evidence of antiquity induced impoverished Roman families to sell their inherited treasures. In 1724 the Odescalchi collection, composed of the statues acquired by Christine of Sweden, was sold to Spain; a part of the Chigi collection of antiquities was sold to the Elector of Sacony in 1728.⁵ Increased demand for art objects stimulated systematic, if unscientific, excavations of ancient sites. In 1738, after a false start in 1711, the King of

I wish to express my gratitude to Professor Robert Nicolich of The Catholic University of America for his assistance in acquiring materials for this study.

Naples commenced the official excavations at Herculaneum. When these were suspended in 1766, attention was turned to Pompeii, accidentally discovered in 1748.⁶ But the finds of Herculaneum were closely guarded in the palace at Portici and government restrictions prohibited even sketching among the ruins of Pompeii. Publication of the finds was therefore meager,⁷ and Rome remained the center for the dissemination of classical taste until the nineteenth century.

Rome's unique position both as custodian of the largest and most accessible collections of classical antiquities and, at the same time, as home of many of the most famous productions of Renaissance art made the city the logical center for eighteenth century travellers on the Grand Tour. English families in particular, newly enriched by their country's expanding empire, journeyed to Rome to enhance their culture and sophistication. With the help of local agents, frequently resident foreign artists, such as Gavin Hamilton, English connoisseurs were able to assemble extensive private collections of ancient art.⁸ By the middle of the eighteenth century London was second only to Rome as a museum of classical antiquities.⁹

For enthusiasts who were unable to visit the ancient sites or acquire specimens of ancient art, the middle decades of the eighteenth century provided a new accessibility to the physical remains of antiquity. Travel to the ancient sites had not been uncommon prior to the eighteenth century. For reasons of diplomacy, business, scientific research or merely for adventure, Western Europeans had journeyed throughout the Mediterranean and frequently had published accounts of their experiences. But prior to the mid-eighteenth century such accounts had usually not been illustrated. In the 1750's, however, illustrated archaeological publications made the physical remains of antiquity accessible to armchair classicists and artists throughout Europe. Robert Wood's *Ruins of Palmyra* (1753) and *Ruins of Balbec* (1757) and Robert Adam's *Ruins of the Palace of the Emperor Diocletian at Spalatro* (1764) revealed large scale remains of Roman architecture long hidden from view. J. D. Leroy's *Les Ruines des plus beaux monuments de la Grèce* (1758), Stuart and Revett's fundamentally important *Antiquities of Athens* (publication beginning in 1762), Thomas Major's *Ruins of Paestum* (1768), followed in 1769 by the first volume of Revett, Chandler and Pars' *Antiquities of Ionia*, made Greek architecture accessible once again to Western eyes.¹⁰

The rediscovery of Greek art and its dissemination through archaeological publications stimulated an intense debate over the relative merits of Greek and Roman art. This debate, to an extent the continuation of the battle of the ancients and the moderns, found vocal and talented supporters on each side. Giovanni Battista Piranesi through his *Vedute di Roma* (1748-78) and *Le antichità romane* (1756) argued the Roman cause with impressive visual drama. Piranesi's tone reached its most controversial pitch in the 1760's with the publication of the *Della magnificenza ed architettura de' Romani* (1761) and *Parere su l'architettura* (1765). The Greek position was defended eloquently by the French, by the Comte de Caylus in the *Recueil d'antiquities* (1752) and more importantly by the Jesuit priest, Abbé Laugier in his *Essai sur l'architecture* (1753). The most influential advocate of the superiority of Greek over Roman art was the son of a Brandenburg cobbler, the remarkable German archaeologist Johann Joachim Winckelmann. In 1755 he published his *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst*,¹¹ in 1762 *Anmerkungen über die Baukunst der Alten* and in 1764 the renowned *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*, the first major attempt to develop the history of Greek art and to define the principles upon which it had been based.¹² While the Greek-Roman quarrel ended for the most part inconclusively and in compromise, the theoretical discussions of the middle decades of the eighteenth century provided a stimulus for the careful consideration and enunciation of the fundamental aesthetic principles of ancient art. These principles were to dominate Western art for nearly a century.

The intense interest of the mid eighteenth century in classical antiquity and particularly in its physical remains was more than mere antiquarianism. The awakened interest in the ancient world had a distinctly pragmatic goal; it sought a most useful knowledge. Rationalist philosophy held as a sacred tenet the basic goodness and purity of man, contrary to the traditional Christian teaching of original sin. Man had, however, in the Rationalists' view, been debased by corrupt institutions. If he could once again be divested of these corrupt institutions, he would return to a state of pristine purity. Rousseau had already pointed to the noble savages as examples of men uncorrupted by their institutions.¹³ History, like a vast laboratory of human experience, yielded still further specimens.¹⁴ In Greece and Rome, before the advent of corrupt institutions, man had created ideal societies where the highest standards of virtue and social good obtained. Since that time, civilization had been in decline. For the eighteenth century classical antiquity provided a model for reconstructing society. It was therefore important to discover as much as possible about the ancient world. There was an intense desire, "born of potent social and political ideas . . . to reach back across the centuries and to touch hands with the past."¹⁵

Benjamin West

When Benjamin West, the Pennsylvania Quaker, arrived in England in 1763, he was well on his way toward developing a style of painting completely in sympathy with the classicizing tastes of his day.¹⁶ For three years previous he had observed, studied and painted in Rome and other Italian art centers and had caught the "antique fever" in the air. Although West had never met the great Winckelmann himself,¹⁷ he was acquainted with the archaeologist's Bohemian disciple, Raphael Mengs, and had absorbed through Mengs and other enthusiasts the basic principles of Winckelmann's aesthetics. West's youth, religion and nationality had made him a popular novelty in the social circles of Rome and had won for him an introduction to Rome's formidable arbiter of artistic elegance, Cardinal Albani.¹⁸ The twenty-four year old West landed in England admirably prepared to step into the vanguard of the emerging neo-classical movement in art.

West quickly established himself in London,¹⁹ and two of the early paintings he produced while in England, *Orestes and Pylades* and *The Continnence of Scipio*, attracted much public attention. The painter's house, as John Galt recounts it, "was daily thronged with the opulent and the curious."²⁰ Statesmen and princes gave their approbation to the paintings, but no one inquired about their price. While the public was willing enough to praise such classical compositions, it would pay cash only for landscapes and portraits. As Galt lamented, "The moral influence of the art was unfelt and unknown."²¹

The turning point in West's career came when Dr. Markham, master of the Westminster School, introduced him to Robert Hay Drummond, the Archbishop of York. Archbishop Drummond soon became the painter's loyal friend and supporter. One evening in the course of a dinner conversation, the Archbishop "engaged Mr. West to paint for him the story of Agrippina landing with the ashes of Germanicus, and sent one of the young gentlemen to the library for the volume in which Tacitus describes the circumstances. Having read the passage, he commented on it at some length, in order to convey to Mr. West an idea of the manner in which he was desirous the subject should be treated."²²

The work which West executed for Archbishop Drummond incorporated all the essential principles and techniques of what was to become neo-classical painting,²³ (Plate 1) The literary inspiration for the painting was drawn from the opening lines of the third book of Tacitus' *Annals*:

Agrippina continued her journey across the wintry sea without interruption until she came to the island of Corcyra, which lay opposite the coast of Calabria. She halted there a few days to compose herself, shaken as she was by her grief and not knowing how to endure it. Meanwhile at the news of her coming, close friends and many of the officers who had served under Germanicus, as well as many strangers from the neighboring towns (some believing it their duty to the emperor, more following their lead) rushed to the town of Brundisium, the closest and safest port. As soon as the fleet was sighted out to sea, not only the port and the adjacent shore, but also the walls and roof-tops, any place, in fact, that offered a distant vantage, were filled with the throngs of mourners, wondering among themselves whether they should receive Agrippina in silence or with some utterance as she stepped from the ship. There was no agreement about what was proper to the occasion, when gradually the fleet approached, not with the usual rapid oarstroke, but with every appearance of grief. Agrippina with her two children stepped from the ship, clutching the funeral urn, her eyes downcast. There was one common groan, nor could you distinguish relatives from strangers, nor the laments of men from those of women, except that those who now met Agrippina fresh in their grief surpassed her attendants who were wearied by their long sorrow.

West's painting is remarkable not merely for its literal rendition of the scene from Tacitus, but also for its new sensitivity to archaeological detail. The arcaded facade behind the central group is adapted from Robert Adam's sketches of the palace of Diocletian.²⁴ (Plate 2) More importantly, the Agrippina group itself is inspired by Roman relief sculpture, specifically by fragments of the Ara Pacis which West had seen and sketched in Italy.²⁵ (Plate 3)

In execution the painting conforms to Winckelmann's aesthetic doctrines. In the Agrippina group West has abandoned the coloristic techniques of Renaissance painting in favor of monochromy and sculptural contours. The figures of the central group move like an ancient bas-relief with "noble simplicity and sedate grandeur in gesture and expression."²⁶ Agrippina's awful silence is the proper expression of her character. "For, the more tranquillity reigns in a body, the fitter it is to draw the true character of the soul; which, in every excessive gesture, seems to rush from her proper centre, and being hurried away by extremes becomes unnatural. Wound up to the highest pitch of passion, she may force herself upon the duller eye, but the true sphere of her action is simplicity and calmness."²⁷

In theme too, West's *Agrippina* harmonizes with the prevalent neo-classical theories. The painting is a kind of secular sermon in praise of the heroism of the dead Germanicus and the Stoic nobility of the grieving Agrippina. The painting's ultimate goal is instruction in virtue. According to neo-classical theory, art afforded moral instruction by supplying insight into the ideal realm of goodness, truth, and beauty. Charles Du Fresnoy in his *De Arte Graphica* recommended the "choice of a Subject beautiful and noble, which being of itself capable of all the Charms and shall afterwards afford . . . somewhat to the Sight, which is excellent, judicious, and ingenious; and at the same time proper to instruct and to enlighten the Understanding."²⁸

West's execution of Archbishop Drummond's commission was so successful that it led to the painter's introduction to George III. The king, duly impressed with West's achievement, engaged him to paint a related theme, *The Departure of Regulus*. The completion of the king's commission, as Dunlap judged, "placed Benjamin West on the throne of English art."²⁹ Although West was not destined to reign as undisputed

monarch his entire life, nevertheless he did retain a position of prominence in English art until his death in 1820.

During West's first two decades in England, he was concerned largely with painting in a manner which Grose Evans has termed the "Stately Mode."³⁰ The pictures painted during these years were mainly drawn from history. The subject matter was frequently classical,³¹ but by no means always. In 1772 West exhibited *The Death of General Wolfe*. (Plate 4) Contrary to the usual practice and despite the advice of King George, Joshua Reynolds and Archbishop Drummond, West painted Wolfe in contemporary rather than classical garb. Adhering strictly to the convention of decorum, West defended his decision as follows:

. . . I began by remarking that the event intended to be commemorated took place on the 13th of September, 1758, in a region of the world unknown to the Greeks and Romans, and at a period of time when no such nations, nor heroes in their costume, any longer existed. The subject I have to represent is the conquest of a great province of America by the British troops. It is a topic that history will proudly record, and the same truth that guides the pen of the historian should govern the pencil of the artist. I consider myself as undertaking to tell this great event to the eye of the world; but if, instead of the facts of the transaction, I represent classical fictions, how shall I be understood by posterity?³²

The Death of General Wolfe contains no toga-clad heroes. The emphasis is on the contemporaneity of the situation. The *dulce et decorum* theme, presented in antique surroundings in *Agrippina*, now appears in a contemporary context. "This man who heroically gave his life for his country, is an eighteenth century Englishman; the heroism, courage and dignity he demonstrates, these classical virtues, are in fact eighteenth century realities."³³ There was no need for West to dress his subject in a toga, for as Cato says in the final act of Addison's play, "Whoe'er is brave and virtuous, is a Roman."

Benjamin West, years before David and the French school, inaugurated the neo-classical style in painting.³⁴ Yet West, unlike the French neo-classicists, was never doctrinaire in his subject matter. Classical antiquity, the Bible, Renaissance and contemporary history, all supplied the subjects for his paintings.³⁵ West's preoccupation with historical themes was in complete sympathy with contemporary Enlightenment thought. David Hume had contended that the chief use of history was "only to discover the constant and universal principles of human nature by showing men in all varieties of circumstances and situations."³⁶ About human nature Hume had further noted, ". . . there is a great uniformity among the actions of men, in all nations and ages, and . . . human nature remains still the same in its principles and operations."³⁷ The historical paintings of Benjamin West constitute a visual analogue to Enlightenment thought on time, man and history. West's goal was to capture on canvas in their varied historical manifestations those timeless moral virtues that had ennobled the nature of man through the centuries. He hoped thereby to inspire the viewer to emulation. The literal rendition of archaeological and historical detail was intended to teach an important lesson, namely that material culture, manners, even time itself were subject to change, but virtue remained immutable.³⁸ The inevitable passage of time was for West's historical paintings largely an irrelevant consideration. He was able to abstract himself from the mutability of time in pursuit of timeless virtue.³⁹ Classical antiquity frequently provided illustrious paradigms of such virtue; but it was virtue which was West's theme, not antiquity per se.

Thomas Jefferson

On October 14, 1776, Thomas Jefferson introduced in the Virginia House of Delegates a bill calling for the transfer of the seat of government from Williamsburg to a new site, as yet undetermined.⁴⁰ Jefferson's proposal, though practically motivated,⁴¹ was not without its symbolic overtones. Removing the capital from Williamsburg would dramatically obliterate the last vestige of British colonial rule. The details of Jefferson's bill, the first in any of the newly independent states to make provision for new governmental forms, are of immense importance. The proposal provided that:

... six whole squares of ground surrounded each of them by four streets . . . shall be appropriated to the use and purpose of public buildings. On one of the said squares shall be erected one house for the use of the General Assembly to be called the Capitol. . . . On one other of the said squares shall be erected another building to be called the Halls of Justice. . . . One other of the said squares shall be reserved for the purpose of building thereon a house for the several executive boards and offices to be held in. Two others with the intervening street shall be reserved for the governor of this commonwealth. . . . And the remaining square shall be appropriate to the use of a public Market. Said houses shall be built in a handsome manner with walls of brick or stone, and Porticoes where the same may be convenient or ornamental, and with pillars and pavements of stone.⁴²

The unique feature of Jefferson's proposal was the plan to house each of the three branches of the government in its own separate structure. Abandoning the standard colonial practice of locating all governmental functions beneath a single roof, Jefferson's bill would have expressed through the symbolism of architecture the constitutional separation of powers of the new state government. Although Jefferson's 1776 bill failed of passage, another similarly worded bill was passed by the House of Delegates on June 5, 1779. Richmond was designated to become the new capital after the last day of April, 1780.

By the time the first session of the Assembly met in Richmond in May of 1780, Jefferson had been elected governor.⁴³ In his capacity as chairman of the "directors of public buildings,"⁴⁴ Governor Jefferson drew up plans for enlarging the city and made studies for the Halls of Justice, the governor's house and the Capitol. A number of these studies have survived, but most interesting are two large plans for the Capitol, probably made in the spring or early summer of 1780.⁴⁵ "The building proposed for the Capitol was a rectangular temple, with, at either end, porticoes eight columns wide, the full breadth of the cella."⁴⁶ On the back of one of the plans, Jefferson noted the heights of the building and its architectural order—Ionic. Five years later when Jefferson was minister to France, he was to take up the design of the Capitol again, this time with the aid of the able French architect Clérissseau. Yet, the major innovation of Jefferson's final design, the adaptation of the ancient temple form to practical modern use, had already been conceived before his departure for France.

The 1780 studies for the complex of public buildings at Richmond were scarcely the work of a novice. Jefferson's interest in architecture had probably begun in 1760 when he entered the College of William and Mary. It was at Williamsburg that Jefferson observed the only examples of substantial public architecture in the colony.⁴⁷ There too he came into contact with men of education and culture, some of whom, like Richard Taliaferro, were accomplished amateur architects. In the College library Jefferson found some few books on architecture, but a far richer collection was available to him nearby in the extensive library of William Byrd of Westover.⁴⁸ Byrd's library contained twenty-six titles on architecture, among which was Andrea Palladio's

Four Books of Architecture.⁴⁹ In time Jefferson himself became an avid collector of architecture books, and these constituted a continuing source of authority and inspiration for his building endeavors.

The evidence of Jefferson's earliest architectural work seems to have been destroyed in 1770 by a fire at Shadwell, his ancestral home. From that time onwards, however, a host of documents attest to the continuous and highly professional nature of Jefferson's involvement with architecture.⁵⁰ The 1780 studies for the revolutionary complex of public buildings at Richmond did not spring Athena-like from Jefferson's head. Twenty years of observation, study and experience had gone before and prepared the way for them.

Jefferson must have been sorely disappointed to learn that shortly after his departure for France, the Virginia assembly in October of 1784 had amended his plans for the public buildings at Richmond.⁵¹ His proposal had proven, as Fiske Kimball put it, "beyond the ideas and resources of the time."⁵² Two of the directors, James Buchanan and William Hay, in a letter dated March 20, 1785, informed Jefferson that the symbolically separate buildings were to be consolidated into a single structure, the Capitol. They requested that Jefferson "consult an able Architect" on a suitable design. What they desired was a structure that would "unite economy with elegance and dignity."⁵³

With remarkable good humor Jefferson agreed to assist the directors in the revised Capitol project, but rather than employing a professional architect, he undertook to prepare the design himself. He had five years earlier laid out a plan for the Capitol in which he adopted the ancient temple form. Jefferson developed this concept and chose as the model for his design a specific structure, the so-called Maison Carrée in Nîmes, a pseudo-peripteral hexastyle temple of the Corinthian order, dating from c. 16 B.C.⁵⁴ (Plate 5). Jefferson was acquainted with the Maison Carrée even before his arrival in France from the plates and descriptions in the last of Palladio's *Four Books of Architecture*. Furthermore, while in France he purchased a copy of Charles Louis Clérissseau's *Monumens de Nîmes* (Paris 1778), which contained a detailed and accurate study of the Maison Carrée.⁵⁵ In a letter to James Madison, Jefferson described this Roman temple as "one of the most beautiful if not the most beautiful and precious morsel of architecture left us by antiquity . . . it is very simple, but is noble beyond expression, and would have done honor to any country . . ."⁵⁶ His affection for the edifice reached rapturous heights in his letter to Madame de Tessé: "Here I am, Madam, gazing whole hours at the Maison quarrée, like a lover at his mistress."⁵⁷

To assist him in completing the design, Jefferson consulted with Clérissseau, the author of the *Monumens de Nîmes* and a prominent architect. Although the two men worked together closely on the project, the final product was clearly Jefferson's. In the judgement of Fiske Kimball: "If one man is to be designated as the architect, it must unquestionably be Jefferson."⁵⁸ The design was communicated to the directors in Richmond by means of drawings and a plaster model made with Clérissseau's assistance (Plate 6). This plaster model best illustrates Jefferson's intentions.⁵⁹ In several respects the building has been simplified. The order has been changed from Corinthian to Ionic,⁶⁰ and the pilasters on the side walls have been replaced by windows. The depth of the portico has been reduced from three to two columns. In general, Jefferson retained the form of the original, though he felt free to depart from it in dimensions, proportions and detail. The result was a uniquely successful attempt, in symbolic, if not practical terms, to revive an ancient architectural form and adapt it to modern utilitarian purposes.

More than anyone else Thomas Jefferson may be credited with inaugurating the Classical Revival movement in American architecture. Although concern for archaeological correctness had grown continuously in eighteenth-century American

architecture, Jefferson seems to have been the first to understand the symbolic potential of archaeological revivalism. It was Jefferson who realized that buildings were valuable not only in themselves but as vehicles for communicating ideas. In Jefferson's view public buildings in particular "should be more than things of beauty and convenience; above all, they should state a creed."⁶¹

Thomas Jefferson's Capitol was an architectural declaration of independence. By reviving an ancient edifice, Jefferson paradoxically proclaimed and defined the new American identity. With one bold gesture he cast aside the Baroque and Rococo styles so intimately associated with the aristocratic and anti-democratic regimes of the old world. Through the symbolism of architecture Jefferson evoked an analogy with the Roman republic. According to Alan Gowans:

... it was more than an analogy; to him and his contemporaries (for, of course, he was hardly alone in his convictions), it seemed as if this new nation ... was the very incarnation of the grandeur that had been Rome. In the heroes and statesmen of the Revolution, the selfless patriotism of the Horatii and Cincinnatus lived again; in the new Senate on the Potomac, the old Senate on the Tiber would be reborn; just so, in the new courthouses and capitols and official mansions of America, the monuments of Rome would be rebuilt. Succeeding to Rome's destiny, America should succeed to Rome's architecture. No truth seemed more self-evident.⁶²

Jeffersonian revivalism represented a considerable advance beyond Benjamin West's neo-classicism. With fidelity to archaeological detail, West portrayed moving exempla of ancient virtue and demonstrated that immutable virtue triumphed over time. West did not envision a revival of antiquity, only an emulation of its conspicuous virtue. Jefferson, on the other hand, sought in a quite literal way to restore the crumbled forms of antiquity, to translate them to the favorable environment of the infant nation and to breathe new life into them. Through the symbolism of architecture, Jefferson announced the political revival of antiquity. Just as the Virginia Capitol, though it differed from its model in specific details, was essentially a revival of the Maison Carrée, so the New Republic, of necessity not identical with the old republic of Rome, was nonetheless in its essence a revival of it.

Horatio Greenough

Classical revivalism became the first distinctly American architectural style and dominated the country's taste in building until the end of the first third of the nineteenth century. By that time, however, the original intellectual impulse had lost its power. Classical revivalism continued to survive as a popular style largely on its own momentum. But by the 1830's serious doubts were being raised about the indiscriminate and thoughtless employment of the style. The impracticality of some classical revival structures caused critics to question the style's appropriateness for American society.⁶³ It was precisely at this time that the greatest example of American neo-classical sculpture was conceived.

On February 14, 1832 Leonard Jarvis, chairman of the Committee on Public Buildings, introduced in the United States House of Representatives a resolution authorizing the President to commission Horatio Greenough "to execute, in marble, a full length pedestrian statue of Washington, to be placed in the centre of the rotundo of the Capitol; the head to be a copy of Houdon's WASHINGTON and the accessories to be left to the judgement of the artist."⁶⁴ Jarvis' resolution, reflecting a renewed interest in the first president in the centennial year of his birth, was the first step toward realizing a long-standing official desire to erect a national statue of Washington.

Ever since the Revolution proposals for such a statue had been made, discussed and then discarded. Although local patronage had already produced four monumental Washingtons, all by European artists,⁶⁵ efforts to erect an official, national statue of the Father of his Country had always proven fruitless. After some confusion and delay, a joint Congressional bill was passed authorizing the payment of \$5,000 to Greenough (the first of four equal installments).

The commission was tremendously important not only for the artist, but also for the history of the arts in America. For the first time the government of the United States entrusted a major sculptural commission to an American. Greenough, in accepting the commission, perceived its significance for the future of sculpture in America. He wrote to his friend Samuel Morse:

... I have made up my mind on one score, Viz. that this order shall not be fruitless to the greater men who are in our rear. They are sucking now and rocking in cradles but I can hear the Pung! Pung! Puffety! of their hammers and I am prophetic too! We'll see if Yankee land cant muster some ten or dozen of 'em in the course of as many years!⁶⁶

On July 29, 1832 Edward Everett, who had been a faculty member at Harvard during Greenough's college years at that institution, and who was serving in the House of Representatives at the time of Greenough's commission, advised the sculptor to choose as the model for his Washington Phidias' colossal statue of Zeus. Reminding Greenough that the Capitol was comparable to the temple at Elis, he expressed the hope that his "Washington may be to the people of America . . . what that great national symbol was to the Greeks."⁶⁷

Phidias' Zeus had not survived the turmoil which accompanied the collapse of the Roman empire. However, an elaborate account of the statue was contained in Pausanias' *Description of Greece*.⁶⁸ In addition, ancient coins, a fragment of wall painting and a small silver-gilt statuette (now in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts) have preserved the sculptor's original conception.⁶⁹ The Phidian Zeus as a generalized type was not uncommon in Renaissance art and found neo-classical expression in John Flaxman's illustrations for the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and in Ingre's painting *Thetis Beseeching Zeus*.⁷⁰ Such representations of Zeus undoubtedly contributed to Greenough's design, but a more important, archaeologically correct source of inspiration was available to the sculptor. In 1815 Antoine Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy published a lavish tome entitled *Le Jupiter olympien ou l'art de la sculpture antique considéré sous un nouveau point de vue*. In this comprehensive study of ancient chryselephantine sculpture, Quatremère de Quincy assembled the available literary and numismatic evidence in order to produce a careful, scientific reconstruction of Phidias' Zeus. (Plate 7). This reconstruction was in all likelihood the immediate source of Greenough's knowledge of Phidias' masterwork.

Greenough's *George Washington* (Frontispiece), though it owes much to its model, is certainly not mere hack copy-work, but a talented adaptation of the ancient original. Washington is portrayed draped with a mantle from the waist down and over a portion of his right arm. His right hand is raised in a theatrical gesture. In his left hand he holds a sheathed sword, hilt extended. He sits upon a throne decorated with reliefs and surmounted with two sculpted figures. The iconography of the statue is not complicated. Washington, draped in the timeless garb of antiquity, with his raised right hand indicates the Higher Power to which all are subject and of which he is but the earthly agent. The sheathed sword in his left hand represents his power as commander-in-chief, which he peaceably resigns to the Congress. The relief panels on the throne show two related scenes: on one, Apollo driving the chariot of the sun symbolizes the dawning of the New Republic; on the other, the infant Hercules strangling two serpents represents North America

overcoming tyranny,⁷¹ while his brother Iphicles, signifying South America, shrinks back in terror. The two figures on top of the throne portray a drowsy Indian and Christopher Columbus, symbolizing the primitive and European phases of American history. The statue in its totality may be properly thought of as "ideal," that is, its function, like Jefferson's Capitol, is to communicate an idea. Its success or failure depended not upon the skill with which Greenough mastered the stone, but upon his ability to make his message clear. In 1840 Greenough completed the statue in Florence and unveiled it for public viewing. Despite delays and misunderstandings, it reached Washington in the following year and was installed on a make-shift pedestal in the Capitol Rotunda. The lighting was, as Greenough had feared,⁷² dreadfully inadequate, and cast sharp, deforming shadows across the statue. The temporary pedestal was much too high and the effect of Greenough's long labor was spoiled. So disappointed was Greenough with the placement of the statue that in 1842 he petitioned Congress to remove it from the Rotunda and place it outside in the Capitol gardens. Though a permanent structure was planned to house the statue, none was ever built. The temporary wooden shed in which it was first placed was demolished, and the statue, exposed to the elements, was surrounded by an iron fence. In 1908 it was discreetly moved into a corner of the Smithsonian Institution and now occupies an ill-suited place in the Museum of History and Technology.

An unhappy fate seemed to plague Greenough's statue from the outset. While in general the contemporary press spoke highly of the work, popular reaction was almost universally hostile. Its nudity, foreignness and the puzzling mystery of its meaning, all combined to gain the statue widespread condemnation and ridicule. The exposure of Washington's anatomy aroused vociferous criticism. The former mayor of New York, Philip Hone, declared that Washington was "too prudent and careful of his health to expose himself thus in a climate so uncertain as ours, to say nothing of the indecency of such an exposure,—a subject on which he was known to be exceedingly fastidious."⁷³ In vain did Greenough defend his rejection of more modest garb in favor of the "work of God—the human form."⁷⁴ He hoped that someday his successors in sculpture would show "that the inspired writer meant not merely the face, when he declared that God had made man after his own image."⁷⁵ George Calvert, who had seen Greenough's Washington in Florence, expressed the case for the defense wittily: "Washington, to be best seen, ought to be beheld, not as he came from the hand of the tailor, but as he came from the hand of God."⁷⁶ Public nudity, however, was not a joking matter in nineteenth century America.

Popular objection to the foreignness of Washington could scarcely have surprised Greenough. Canova's statue of Washington had caused a similar reaction.⁷⁷ One North Carolina commentator in 1821 reported that many people "not aware of Artistic license, were . . . quite struck dumb by the fact that the Father of His Country was dressed in a Roman general's costume, with toga, bare legs and sandaled feet."⁷⁸ Even Sir Francis Chantrey's Washington, dressed in contemporary garb but draped in a toga-like cloak, was not without its critics.⁷⁹ Of Chantrey's work Davy Crockett said:

I do not like the statue of General Washington in the State-house. They have a Roman gown on him, and he was an American; this ain't right. They did the thing better in Richmond, in Virginia, where they have him in the old blue and buff. He belonged to his country—heart, soul and body, and I don't want any other to have any part of him—not even his clothes.⁸⁰

Despite the explanations and apologies of the sculptor and his supporters, Greenough's statue became the butt of ridicule, frequently of a scatological nature. Left outdoors, unguarded and unprotected, it also suffered physical defacement. An oft quoted passage of S.T. Wallis' *Glimpses of Spain; or, Notes of an Unfinished Tour in 1847* tells the tale:

It is an idea, by-the-way, very prevalent with us, at home, that the taste for defacing public monuments is an American peculiarity. It is certainly one of our weaknesses. The last time that I saw Greenough's colossal Washington, in the garden of the Capitol, some irreverent heathen had taken the pains to climb up and insert a large "plantation" cigar between the lips of the *pater patriae*, while another had amused himself with writing some stanzas of poetry, in a style rather popular than elegant, upon a prominent part of the body of the infant Hercules, who is strangling serpents, in relief, upon the lower part of the work. I could not help thinking, at the time that if Washington looked less like Olympic Jove, and more like himself, not even the vagabond who perpetrated the trick of the cigar, would have dared or dreamed of such desecration.⁸¹

In the long run, the Zeus-like Washington failed because it never became intelligible to the general public, the audience for whom it had been intended. In a letter to then Senator John Quincy Adams, Greenough asserted: "I have always been and am still of the opinion that Art should address itself to the mass of men like eloquence and poetry."⁸² Greenough sensed that his Washington had missed the mark. He told Emerson that he was not confident that he had "translated the public sentiment of this country for Washington into marble. . . ."⁸³

Though Horatio Greenough's statue of George Washington was hardly free from plastic faults, it was as an intellectual concept that it failed. A democrat of the old school, Greenough failed to recognize the character of the newly emergent Jacksonian democracy. Transforming the beloved Washington into a foreign deity was contrary to the social and political egalitarianism of the day. The result of this metamorphosis was not inspiration, but an unintelligible mystery. Greenough badly miscalculated the nature of Washington's popular appeal. It was not the god-like Washington that the people cherished, but the cozy, virtuous, saccharine Washington invented by Parson Weems. Not long after Washington's death, Weems had already sensed the direction of popular taste. In the introduction to his *Life of Washington*, he exclaimed:

In most of the elegant oratory pronounced to his praise, you see nothing of Washington the dutiful son—the affectionate brother—the cheerful schoolboy—the diligent surveyor—the neat draughtsman—the laborious farmer—the widow's husband—the orphan's father—the poor man's friend. No! This is not the Washington you see; 'tis only Washington the Hero, and the Demigod . . . Washington the sunbeam in council, or the storm in war.⁸⁴

By the time Greenough unveiled his monumental statue, the Weemsian Washington had become a thoroughly familiar and understandable figure, one with whom the masses could identify. It is little wonder, under the circumstances, that in his diary Philip Hone described Greenough's statue as follows:

It looks like a great herculean, warrior-like *Venus of the bath*; a grand martial Magog, undressed, with a huge napkin lying across his lap. . . .⁸⁵

Horatio Greenough had hoped to create a monumental symbol of national identity. He chose to represent Washington's public virtue at its zenith. Benjamin West and men of the eighteenth century would quickly have perceived the significance of the representation. But to Greenough's contemporaries, who were more concerned with personal psychology and private virtue, the statue's message was unclear. Archaeological revivalism simply added to the confusion. In what way Washington was like Zeus remained uncertain. If Greenough's Washington was to be, as Edward Everett had suggested, a national symbol comparable to Phidias' masterpiece, then like the Phidian Zeus it ought to have had a uniquely native character. Jefferson's Capitol evoked a

significant analogy with the Roman republic. Greenough's analogy seemed to be without significance. Lacking a clear, intelligible meaning, the statue became simply ridiculous.

Epilogue

During his early years in Florence, Horatio Greenough had for a time shared his lodgings with a promising, young painter named Thomas Cole. Before coming to Europe, Cole had spent most of his time wandering through the American wilderness. In 1826, however, he had settled in the village of Catskill on the banks of the Hudson River. It was in the unspoiled landscape of the Catskills that Cole found lasting inspiration for his paintings. From 1829 to 1832 he travelled in Europe. In Italy Cole discovered landscapes unlike any he had encountered at home. Louis Legrand Noble, the painter's friend, travelling companion and biographer, described the impact of the new experience:

The great difference between Italian scenery, and all other, with which he was acquainted, lay, with Cole, less in its material, than in its moral and historical elements. Hitherto he had walked with nature in her maidenhood, her fair proportions veiled in virgin robes, affianced indeed to human associations, but unspolled, unwasted by human passion. But now he was in converse with her, after long centuries of marriage with man. As the word and worship of God carry faith into the events of the great future, so the very verdure of solitudes and the solemnity of voiceless evening skies swept his spirit back to mingle with the doings of past ages. Everywhere was the repetition of one awful, grand expression:—mortal triumph and defeat—mortal strength and weakness—mortal pride and degradation—man's rise and fall—man's wrestling with his fellow—his feeble strife with time, and childish struggles on the bosom of his mother earth. He saw himself on the seashore of history, and the wrecks of human passion, pride, ambition, joy and sorrow, pricking through its sands. "There were giants in those days" who clove the mountains, and thrust back the very waves: they fell along the earth; and lo! the white remnant of their frames. In the red breath of sunset he beheld both the memorial of the glory of kings, and of the flames of their funeral pyre. In the crumbling ruins, beneath the mantle of the seasons, lay the bones of empire.⁸⁶

Cole's reaction to the ruins of antiquity was typically Romantic and had illustrious precedents. As early as 1764 Edward Gibbon had been inspired to write *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* while brooding amidst the ruins of the Capitol.⁸⁷ Gibbon's "extraordinary sensitivity to surroundings" and to "the mood of the moment"⁸⁸ betrayed a distinctly Romantic strain in the Rationalist historian. Less than thirty years later this Romantic note was to set the dominant tone for an immensely influential book by Constantin Volney. In 1761 he published *Les Ruines ou méditations sur les révolutions des empires*. Numerous English translations appeared both in Europe and America during the next hundred years.⁸⁹ The popularity of this now largely forgotten book stemmed not so much from its philosophy which was neither profound nor original, but from its melancholy preoccupation with the flight of time and the brevity of human existence. The sight of the moonlit ruins of Palmyra and the profound silence of the desert interrupted only by the howling of the jackals "and the solemn notes of the bird of night"⁹⁰ plunged Volney into an elegiac reverie. As he contemplated the vast wreckage of a once flourishing civilization, he grew apprehensive about the future of the great nations of his own day:

Who knows if on the banks of the Seine, the Thames, the Zuyder-Zee, where now, in the tumult of so many enjoyments, the heart and the eye suffice not for the multitude of sensations,—who knows if some traveller, like myself, shall not sit on their silent ruins, and weep in solitude over the ashes of their inhabitants, and the memory of their former greatness.⁹¹

Cole reacted to the ruins of Rome as Volney had to those of Palmyra. Again Noble described the scene:

Returning, once, from a long walk with a few friends, he seated himself on the fragments of a column to enjoy the sunset. As its splendours faded into the twilight, all lapsed into a stillness suited to the solemn repose peculiar, at that time, to a scene of ruin. There came through the deepening shadows few sounds louder than the beating of their hearts. After some minutes of silent, mournful pleasure, seated a little apart by a lady, Cole, a thing rather unusual with him, was the first to speak. This he did in his own low, quiet voice, but with such earnestness as told the depth of his emotions, and the greatness of his thoughts. The subject was that of the future Course of Empire. In his own brief and simple way, he passed from point to point in the series, making, by many a clear and vivid outline, the liveliest impression upon the mind of his listener, until he closed with a picture that found its parallel in the melancholy desolation by which, at that moment, they were surrounded.⁹²

Cole's plan to paint *The Course of Empire* (Plates 8-12) was realized, when Luman Reed, his New York patron, asked the artist to execute some paintings for one of his rooms. In a letter dated September 18, 1833, Cole described to Reed the series of canvases he envisioned.⁹³ Adhering closely to this outline, Cole produced a set of five paintings illustrating the history of an ancient society from birth to death. Five stages of civilization were extracted from *Les Ruines: The Savage State, The Pastoral State, The Consummation of Empire, The Destruction of Empire and The Desolation of Empire*. The scene of all five paintings remains the same, though the viewpoint shifts. As the society evolves through its stages, the hours of the day and the seasons of the year also change. At the conclusion of the cycle, when the works of man have crumbled, nature reasserts her power and lays claim even to the ruins of the vanished civilization.

Thomas Cole, like West, Jefferson and Greenough, converted the physical image of antiquity into a significant icon. Yet the significance of that icon in Cole's paintings was very different. West, Jefferson and, perhaps anachronistically, Greenough shared a sense of the continuity of history. All three moved with ease across the barrier of time to converse with the world of the ancients and even to revive it. But time for Cole was an insurmountable obstacle. The very existence of ancient ruins seemed to him a melancholy proof of the discontinuity of history and of the inevitable disintegration and decay of all the puny works of man. In those ruins he saw the face of death and the ultimate triumph of untamed nature. The remains of antiquity taught Cole but one certain lesson: *Sic transit gloria mundi*.

FOOTNOTES

¹For a discussion of the examples of ancient art that remained visible from the end of antiquity to the beginning of the Renaissance, see Adolf Michaelis, *A Century of Archaeological Discoveries*, trans. Bettina Kahnweiler (London 1908) 1-5 and Robert Weiss, *The Renaissance Discovery of Classical Antiquity* (Oxford 1969) 1-15; on the continuity of the classical tradition, see Benjamin Rowland, Jr., *The Classical Tradition in Western Art* (Cambridge, Mass. 1963) and Cornelius Vermeule, *European Art and the Classical Past* (Cambridge, Mass. 1964).

²See Weiss (above, note 1) 180-202.

³Carlo Pietrangeli, "Archaeological Excavations in Italy 1750-1850," in *The Age of Neo-Classicism* (London 1972) xlvi.

⁴The collections of the following families were most notable: Medici, Farnese, Aldobrandini, Chigi, Borghese, Odescalchi, Mattei, Pamfili, Giustiniani, Colonna, Boncompagni-Ludovisi and Barberini.

⁵Pietrangeli (above, note 3) xlvi.

⁶There is little agreement on the exact dates for the excavations at Herculaneum and Pompeii. False starts, interruptions and periodic suspensions confuse the issue. Compare Michaelis (above, note 1) 8 and 18 with Pietrangeli (above, note 3), xlvi-xlvii.

⁷For a list of the descriptions and plates of Herculaneum and Pompeii from the latter half of the eighteenth century, see Louis Hauteceur, *Rome et la Renaissance de l'antiquité de la fin du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris 1912) 81-83. Most of these early drawings were made from memory and are of little value. Exceptions to this rule were the illustrations produced by the Accademia Ercolanese di Archeologia, such as *Le pitture antiche di Ercolano e contorni* (Naples 1757-79). For the complete early publication of these sites, see Friedrich Furchheim, *Bibliografia di Pompei, Ercolano e Stabia* (Naples 1891).

⁸The most important early collectors were Conyers Middleton, Dr. Hans Sloane and Thomas Herbert. Charles Townley assembled the most notable of the later collections from 1765 to 1772. For a detailed study of the English collections, see Adolf Michaelis, *Ancient Marbles in Great Britain*, trans. C.A.M. Fennell (Cambridge 1882).

⁹For the development of neo-classical art in Britain, see David Irwin, *English Neoclassical Art: Studies in Inspiration and Taste* (Greenwich, Conn. 1966).

¹⁰For a discussion of the *Antiquities of Athens* and other archaeological publications of the eighteenth century, see Dora Wiebenson, *Sources of Greek Revival Architecture* (London 1969).

¹¹The work was translated into English by the artist Henry Fuseli under the title *Reflections on the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks with Instructions for the Connoisseur, and an Essay on Grace in Works of Art* (London 1765; 1767).

¹²See Wiebenson (above, note 10) 47-61.

¹³Eighteenth century thinkers seem to have experienced little difficulty in equating the "cultural primitivism" of the noble savage with the "chronological primitivism" of the ancient Greeks and Romans. When Benjamin West first beheld the Apollo Belvedere, he thought it like a Mohawk warrior. Compare Winckelmann's statement: "Behold the swift Indian outstripping in pursuit the hart: how briskly his juices circulate! how flexible, how elastic his nerves and muscles! how easy his whole frame! Thus Homer draws his heroes, and his Achilles he eminently marks for being swift of foot." See *On the Imitation of the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks*, reprinted with minor cuts and alterations in David Irwin, ed., *Winckelmann, Writings on Art* (London 1972) 62. On the representation of American Indians in the antique mode, see Hugh Honour, *The European Vision of America* (Cleveland 1975) 195-217.

¹⁴These records of wars, intrigues, factions, and revolutions are so many collections of experiments by which the politician or moral philosopher fixes the principles of his science, in the same manner as the physician or natural philosopher becomes acquainted with the nature of plants, minerals, and other external objects, by the experiments which he forms concerning them." David Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Charles W. Hendel, ed. (Indianapolis 1955) 93. See also John Adams, *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America*: "The systems of legislators are experiments made on human life and manners, society and government. Zoroaster, Confucius, Mithras, Odin, Thor, Mahomet, Lycurgus, Solon, Romulus, and a thousand others, may be compared to philosophers making experiments on the elements." *The Works of John Adams*, Charles F. Adams, ed. (Boston 1856 ff.) 4, 297.

¹⁵Jules David Prown, *American Painting from its Beginnings to the Armory Show* (Cleveland n.d.) 39.

¹⁶Even before his departure from America, West had taken his first steps toward neo-classicism. In 1756 he painted for William Henry the *Death of Socrates*, inspired by the frontispiece of the fourth volume of Rollin's *Ancient History*. See J.T. Flexner, "Benjamin West's American Neo-Classicism," reprinted in *America's Old Masters* (New York 1967) 315-340. As a result of the *Death of Socrates*, West attracted the attention of Provost Smith of the College of Philadelphia. Smith provided West with instruction in classical literature. See John Galt, *The Life, Studies and Works of Benjamin West* (1820; rpt. Gainesville, Florida 1960) 1.37-38. Hereafter this work will be referred to simply as "Galt."

¹⁷Between 1758 and 1764 Winckelmann was out of Rome preparing publications on Herculaneum and Paestum.

¹⁸Galt 1.103-107.

¹⁹It was West's good fortune that his oldest friends and patrons from America, William Allen, Governor Hamilton and Dr. Smith, were all in England when he arrived.

²⁰Galt 2.16.

²¹Galt 2.17.

²²Galt 2.12.

²³These principles and techniques, derived from the theories of Winckelmann and his adherents, may be summarized as follows: the quest for Ideal Beauty, an emphasis upon linear rather than painterly qualities and a preference for sculptural rather than natural models.

²⁴For a discussion of West's adaptation of Adam's sketches, see Allen Staley, "The Landing of Agrippina at Brundisium with the Ashes of Germanicus," *Bulletin, Philadelphia Museum of Art* 61 (1965-66) 16.

²⁵For West's own sketches of the Ara Pacis fragments, consult Ruth S. Kraemer, *Drawings by Benjamin West and his Son Raphael Lamar West* (New York 1975) 5, also figure 2 and plate 2.

²⁶Irwin (above, note 13) 72.

²⁷Irwin (above, note 13) 72-73.

²⁸Charles A. DuFresnoy, *The Art of Painting*, trans. John Dryden (2nd ed. London 1716) quoted in Grose Evans, *Benjamin West and the Taste of his Times* (Carbondale, Ill. 1959) 29-30. While still in Philadelphia, West had borrowed a copy of DuFresnoy's treatise from William Williams, an itinerant English artist.

²⁹William Dunlap, *History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States* (1834; rpt. New York 1969) 1.61.

³⁰Evans (above, note 28) 4-5.

³¹The paintings contained in the following list are some of those inspired by ancient history and literature which West executed during his first decade in England: *The Choice of Hercules, Pylades and Orestes, Agrippina Landing at Brundisium, The Departure of Regulus, The Oath of the Young Hannibal, Hector Parting with his Wife and Child, Juno Receiving the Cestus from Venus, The Death of Epaminondas, Cyrus Liberating the Family of Astyages, Venus Lamenting the Death of Adonis, Agrippina Mourning, Erastriatus Discovering the Love of Antiochus for Stratonice, The Appeal to Coriolanus, Leonidas and Cleombrotus and The Wife of Arminius Before Germanicus.*

³²Galt 2.48.

³³Prown (above, note 15) 40.

³⁴On the priority of English to French neo-classical painting, see Jean Locquin, "La part de l'influence anglaise dans l'orientation neo-classique de la peinture française entre 1750 et 1780," in *Actes du Congrès d'histoire de l'art* (1921) 2.391-402. Pertinent passages are quoted in Fiske Kimball, *Benjamin West 1738-1820* (Philadelphia 1938) 9-11.

³⁵With *The Death of General Wolfe, The Death of Epaminondas* and *The Death of the Chevalier Bayard* West composed a trilogy of heroic death scenes drawn from contemporary, classical and Renaissance history. Grose Evans (above, note 28) 43 has suggested that the contemporary political and economic scene, calling for heroic sacrifice in the cause of empire, made such themes appealing to West's audience.

³⁶Hume (above, note 14) 93.

³⁷Hume (above, note 14) 92.

³⁸See West's letter to Charles Willson Peale in 1809: "Although I am friendly to portraying eminent men, I am not friendly to the indiscriminate waste of genius in portrait painting; and I do hope that your son will ever bear in his mind, that the art of painting has powers to dignify man, by transmitting to posterity his noble actions, and his mental powers, to be viewed in those invaluable lessons of religion, love of country, and morality; such subjects are worthy of the pencil, they are worthy of being placed in view as the most instructive records to a rising generation." Dunlap (above, note 29) 1.84.

³⁹Though West would have been more sanguine about the value of history, he would have agreed with the closing thought of W. H. Auden's poem "Archaeology":

From Archaeology
one moral, at least, may be drawn,
to wit, that all
our school text-books lie.

What they call History
is nothing to vaunt of,
being made, as it is,
by the criminal in us:
goodness is timeless.

The text of the poem is contained in W. H. Auden, *Thank You Fog* (New York 1974) 14-17.

⁴⁰For Jefferson's 1776 proposal and its later implementation, see Fiske Kimball, "Jefferson and the Public Buildings of Virginia. II. Richmond, 1779-1780," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 12 (1949) 303-310.

⁴¹Williamsburg was too distant from the state's western counties. Malarial conditions also rendered it less than desirable as a capital.

⁴²Fiske Kimball, *Thomas Jefferson Architect* (1916; rpt. New York 1968) 31.

⁴³Jefferson served as governor of Virginia from 1776 to 1781.

⁴⁴The 1779 proposal, like Jefferson's unsuccessful 1776 bill, required the Assembly to elect five "directors of public buildings." In May, 1780 the Assembly, when it passed *An act for locating the public squares, to enlarge the town of Richmond, and for other purposes*, added four additional directors, among whom was Governor Jefferson.

⁴⁵Kimball (above, note 40) 309-310.

⁴⁶Kimball (above, note 40) 310.

⁴⁷For Jefferson's comments on Williamsburg architecture, see his *Notes on Virginia*.

⁴⁸See William H. Pierson, Jr., *American Buildings and Their Architects: The Colonial and Neoclassical Styles* (Garden City 1970) 287-288.

⁴⁹For a list of the architecture books in Byrd's library, see Kimball (above, note 42) 20 n. 5. During his lifetime Jefferson owned four sets of Palladio's *Four Books* and a separate edition of the first book. For a list of Jefferson's books on architecture, see Kimball (above, note 42) 90-101.

⁵⁰Pierson (above, note 48) 288-289.

⁵¹For text, see Kimball (above, note 42) 33.

⁵²Kimball (above, note 42) 33.

⁵³For text, see "Letters to Jefferson Relative to the Virginia Capitol," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 2nd ser. 5 (1925) 95-97.

⁵⁴On the date, function and history of the building, see Jean Ch. Balty, *Études sur la Maison Carrée de Nîmes* (Collection Latomus 47; Brussels 1960).

⁵⁵See the list of Jefferson's architecture books in Kimball (above, note 42) 93.

⁵⁶Paris, September 20, 1785. For text see Julian P. Boyd, ed., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Princeton 1953) 8.534-535.

⁵⁷Nîmes, March 20, 1787. For text see Boyd (above, note 56) 11.226-228.

⁵⁸Kimball (above, note 42) 41.

⁵⁹The builders deviated from Jefferson's plans in several particulars. Most notable was the introduction of pilasters between the windows.

⁶⁰It is frequently noted that Jefferson changed the column capitals to Ionic "on account of the difficulty of the Corinthian capitals." It should be recalled, however, that in his 1780 plan for the Capitol Jefferson employed the Ionic order. It has been attractively suggested that the influence of Masonic symbolism is to be seen in the change. The Corinthian order, symbolizing beauty, would appropriately be replaced in a Capitol building by the Ionic order which symbolized wisdom.

⁶¹Alan Gowans, *Architecture in New Jersey: A Record of American Civilization* (Princeton 1964) 55.

⁶²Gowans (above, note 61) 55-56.

⁶³The characters in James Fenimore Cooper's novel *Home as Found* (1838) frequently refer to the problems of classical revival architecture. Consider the following passages: ". . . public sentiment just now runs almost exclusively and popularly into the Grecian school. We build little besides temples for our churches, our banks, our taverns, our court houses, and our dwellings. A friend of mine has just built a brewery on the model of the Temple of the Winds." (chp. 1); "An extraordinary taste is afflicting this country in the way of architecture . . . nothing but a Grecian temple being now deemed a suitable residence for a man in these classical times. Yonder is a structure, for instance, of beautiful proportions, and at this distance apparently of precious material, and yet it seems better suited to heathen worship than to domestic comfort. . . . One such temple well placed in a wood, might be a pleasant object enough; but to see a river lined with them, with children trundling hoops before their doors, beef carried into their kitchens, and smoke issuing, moreover, from those unclassical objects, chimneys, is too much even for a high taste; one might as well live in a fever. Mr. Aristabulus Bragg, who is a wag in his way, informs me that there is one town in the interior that has actually a markethouse on the plan of the Parthenon!" (chp. 8).

⁶⁴Quoted in Nathalia Wright, *Horatio Greenough the First American Sculptor* (Philadelphia 1963) 119.

⁶⁵Antoine Houdon's statue was set in the Virginia Capitol in 1796. Antonio Canova's Washington was unveiled in 1821 in the North Carolina Capitol. In 1826 the Washington of Sir Francis Chantrey was put in place in the Boston State House. Finally, Enrico Causici's colossal statue was installed atop the Washington Monument in Baltimore in 1829.

⁶⁶Nathalia Wright, ed., *Letters of Horatio Greenough, American Sculptor* (Madison 1972) 128.

⁶⁷Wright (above, note 64) 125.

⁶⁸Elis 1.11.1-11.

⁶⁹On the extant evidence for Phidias' Zeus, see Gisela M. A. Richter, *The Sculpture and Sculptors of the Greeks* (4th ed., New Haven 1970) 171-173.

⁷⁰For the sources of Greenough's knowledge of Phidias' Zeus, see Wayne Craven, "Horatio Greenough's Statue of Washington and Phidias' Olympian Zeus," *Art Quarterly* 26 (1963) 429-440.

⁷¹Benjamin Franklin in a letter to Robert Livingston dated March 4, 1782 stated that he intended to commission a commemorative medal celebrating Cornwallis' capitulation. The figure of the infant Hercules strangling two serpents was to symbolize America. For a discussion and illustration of Franklin's medal as designed and executed by Augustin Dupre, see Honour (above, note 13) 246-247.

⁷²In 1836 while visiting America, Greenough inspected the Rotunda of the Capitol.

⁷³Bayard Tuckerman, ed., *The Diary of Philip Hone, 1828-1851* (New York 1889) 2.216.

⁷⁴"Memorial of Horatio Greenough," contained in Nathalia Wright, ed., *The Miscellaneous Writings of Horatio Greenough* (Delmar, N.Y. 1975) 28.

⁷⁵Wright (above, note 74) 29.

⁷⁶Wright (above, note 64) 134.

⁷⁷See above, note 65.

⁷⁸Wayne Craven, *Sculpture in America* (New York 1968) 63.

⁷⁹Chantrey shrewdly effected a compromise between neo-classicism and naturalism by enfold-ing Washington in a huge cloak. His effort was generally well received.

⁸⁰David Crockett, *Davy Crockett's Own Story as Written by Himself* (New York 1955) 193.

⁸¹Severn Treacle Wallis, *Glimpses of Spain; or, Notes of an Unfinished Tour in 1847* (New York 1849) 81-82.

⁸²Wright (above, note 66) 326.

⁸³Ralph L. Rusk, ed., *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York 1939) 3.122.

⁸⁴Mason L. Weems, *The Life of Washington*, ed. Marcus Cunliffe (Cambridge, Mass. 1962) 2-3.

⁸⁵Tuckerman (above, note 73) 216.

⁸⁶Louis L. Noble, *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole*, ed. Elliot S. Vesell (Cambridge, Mass. 1964) 110-111.

⁸⁷Gibbon himself was acutely aware of the circumstances under which his work was conceived. He described his moment of inspiration as follows: "It was at Rome, on the fifteenth of October, 1764, as I sat musing amidst the ruins of the Capitol, while the barefooted friars were singing Vespers in the temple of Jupiter, that the idea of writing the decline and fall of the City first started to my mind." See Andrew Lossky, "Gibbon and the Enlightenment," in Lynn White, Jr., ed., *The Transformation of the Roman World* (1966; paperback ed. Berkeley 1973) 3.

⁸⁸Lossky (above, note 87) 16-17.

⁸⁹For Volney's connections with America, see Gilbert Chinard, *Volney et l'Amérique d'après des documents inédits et sa correspondance avec Jefferson* (1923; rpt. New York 1973). As Chinard has shown (110 ff.), Jefferson himself translated the famous invocation and first twenty chapters of *Les Ruines* in the English edition usually attributed to Joel Barlow.

⁹⁰C. F. Volney *The Ruins, or, Meditation on the Revolutions of Empires: and the Law of Nature* (New York 1913) 4. This edition reprints the 1802 Jefferson-Barlow translation published in Paris by Levrault.

⁹¹Volney (above, note 90) 8.

⁹²Noble (above, note 86) 111.

⁹³Text quoted in Noble (above, note 86) 129-131.



Plate 1

Benjamin West. *Agrippina Landing at Brundisium with the Ashes of Germanicus*. Yale University Art Gallery. Gift of Louis M. Rabinowitz.

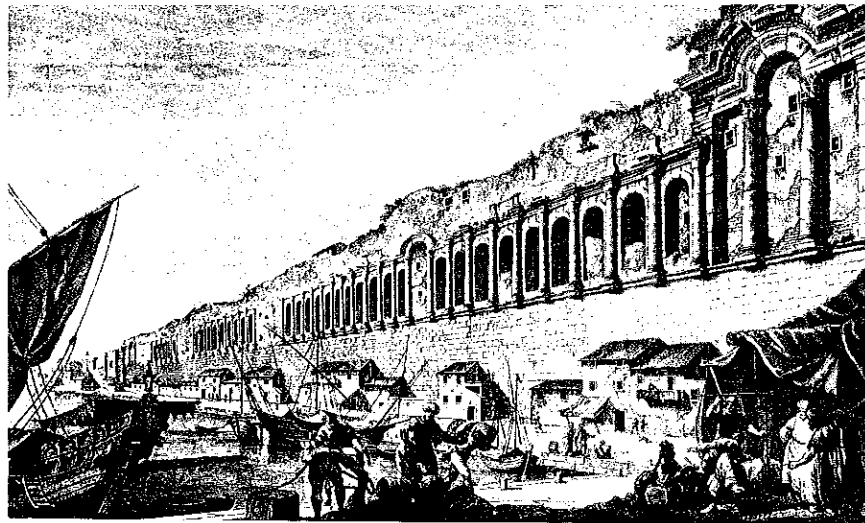


Plate 2

Robert Adam. *Ruins of the Palace of the Emperor Diocletian at Spalatro (Plate VII)*. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.



Plate 3

Benjamin West. *Procession of Romans after the Ara Pacis*. Philadelphia Museum of Art. Given by the Robert L. McNeil, Jr., Trusts.



Plate 4

Benjamin West. *The Death of General Wolfe*. The National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Gift of the Duke of Westminster, 1918.

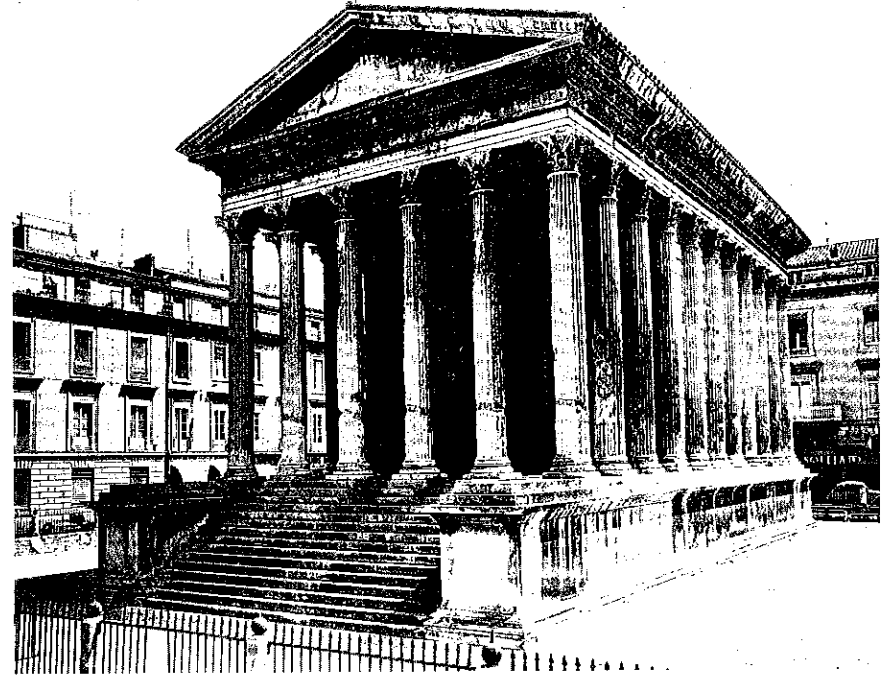


Plate 5

The Maison Carrée at Nîmes. Photo: Jane Z. Haskell. Print: David Ingram.

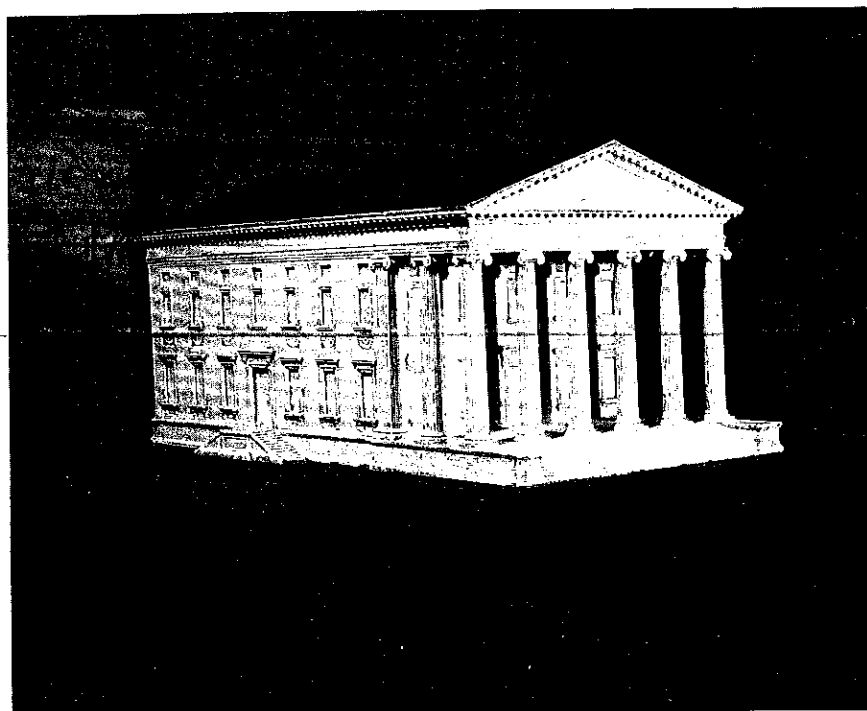


Plate 6.

Model of the Capitol of Virginia. Virginia State Library, Richmond.

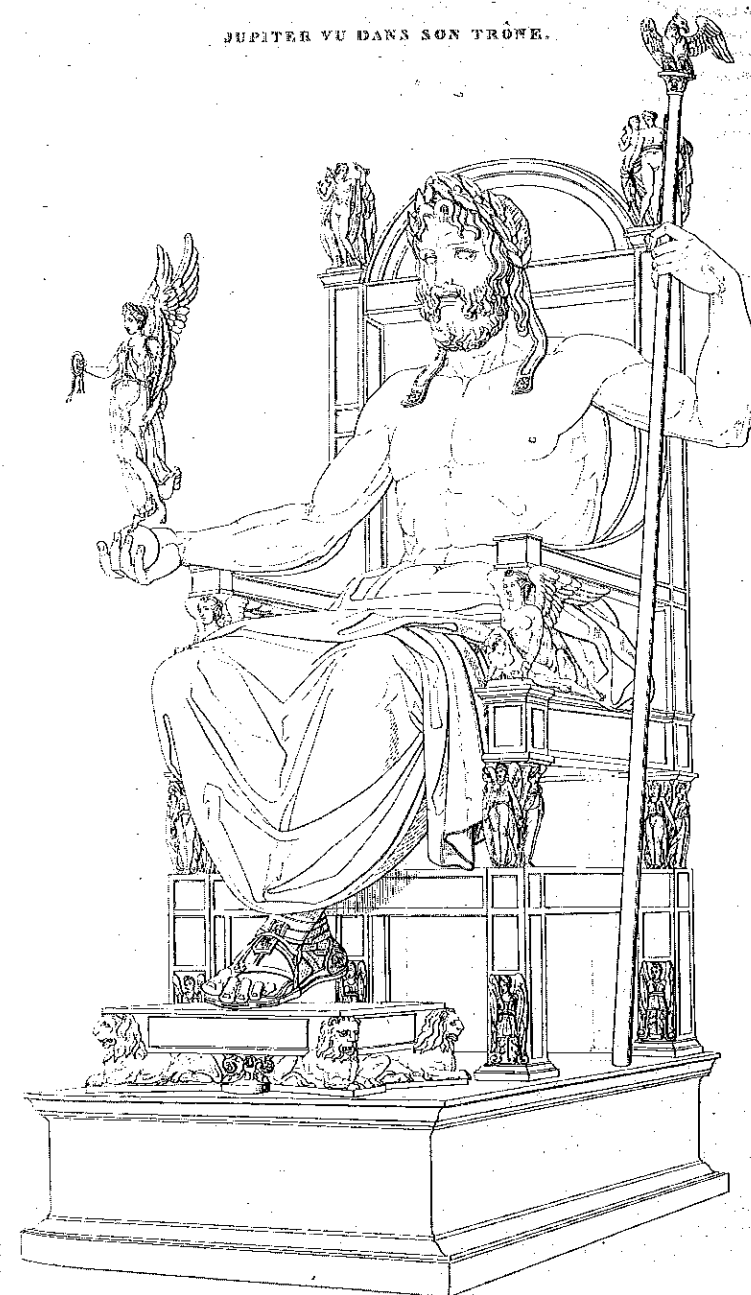


Plate 7

Quatremère de Quincy. *Le Jupiter olympien (Plate XVI).* Courtesy of the Library of Congress.



Plate 8

Thomas Cole. *The Course of Empire: The Savage State or Commencement of Empire*. Courtesy of the New-York Historical Society, New York City.



Plate 9

Thomas Cole. *The Course of Empire: The Arcadian or Pastoral State*. Courtesy of The New-York Historical Society, New York City.

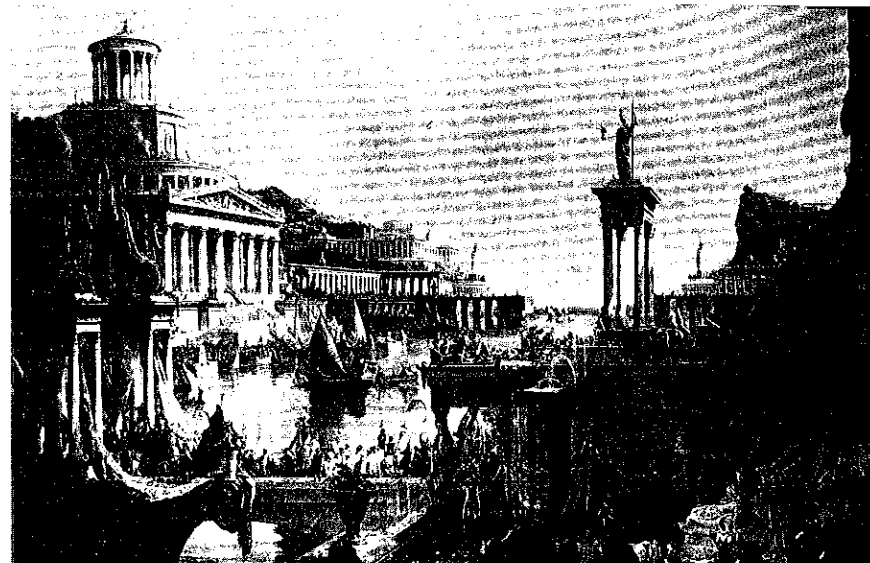


Plate 10

Thomas Cole. *The Course of Empire: The Consummation of Empire*. Courtesy of The New-York Historical Society, New York City.

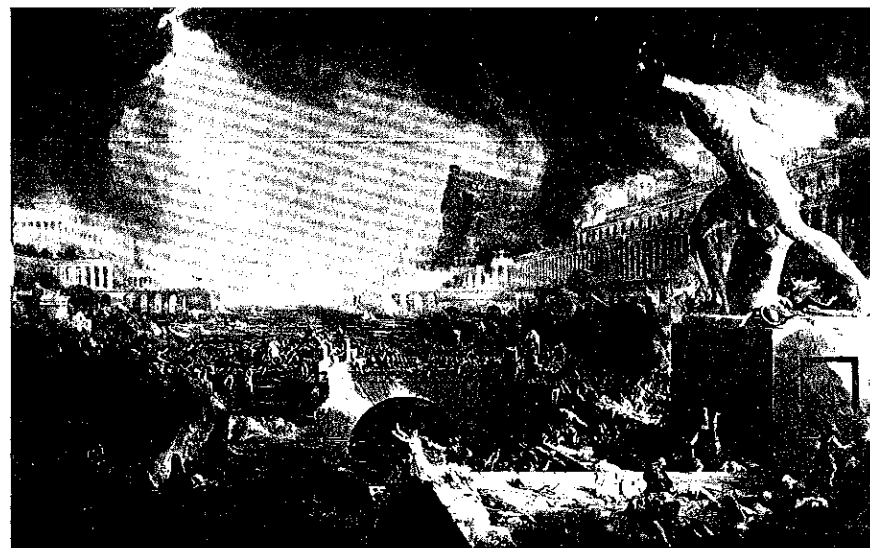


Plate 11

Thomas Cole. *The Course of Empire: The Destruction of Empire*. Courtesy of The New-York Historical Society, New York City.

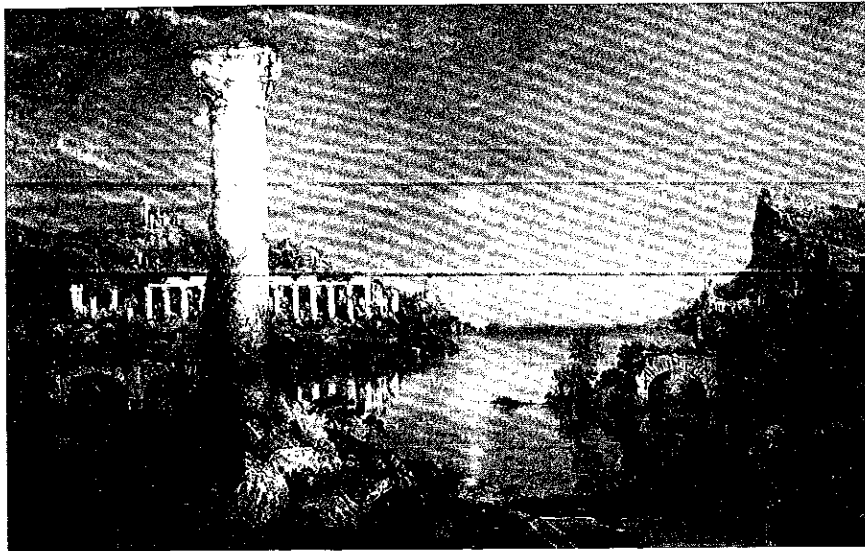


Plate 12

Thomas Cole. *The Course of Empire: The Desolation of Empire*. courtesy of The New-York Historical Society, New York City.

DAVID S. WIESEN
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Ancient History and Early American Education

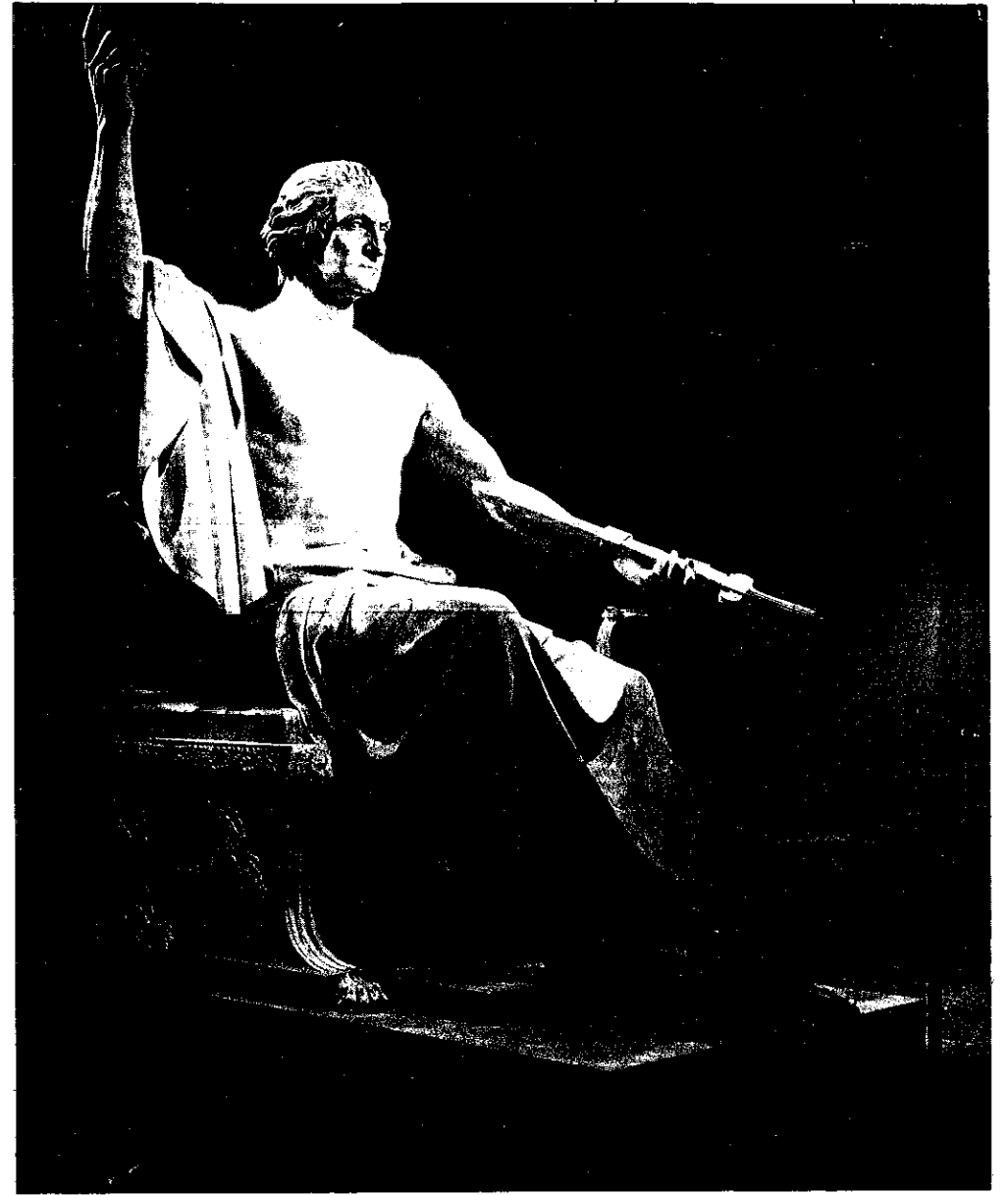
From the time of the first Puritan settlements in New England until the period of the great debate over slavery, educated Americans would have subscribed to—indeed, they sometimes quoted—Cicero's encomium on history: *testis temporum, lux veritatis, vita memoriae, magistra vitae, nuntia vetustatis*.¹ The founders of a new community set in the wilderness and the fathers of a new nation constructing their government had to be reassured constantly that they were not moving too far beyond the range of known human experience and had not sundered themselves utterly from the common culture of civilized and rational people.

When Cotton Mather called the Atlantic "a River of Lethe," he was expressing the Puritans' fear that their settlement had been isolated from the larger world and forgotten.² The tendency of the Puritans constantly to compare themselves to the ancient heroes of Biblical and classical history can be explained in part, writes Kenneth Murdock, "if one accepts the idea that the biographers and historians wanted to establish for themselves and their companions an ancestry extending back to the farthest antiquity. Some of the pages in colonial books most easily dismissed as pedantic exhibitions of useless learning can be read instead as efforts to give the Puritans in the New World the welcome shelter of an ancient family tree."³

A half-century after the death of Cotton Mather, at the time when republican institutions were being established, the history of antiquity acquired more direct pertinence, for where were statesmen to look for the record of continuous republican government if not to Athens, and more importantly, to Rome? History came to be viewed as an invaluable guide to present action. John Adams, illustrating the usefulness of antiquity with an elegant metaphor, compared the history of Greece to an octagonal apartment with a full-length mirror on every side and another in the ceiling. "The use of it is, when any of the young ladies or gentlemen . . . are at any time a little out of humour, they may retire to a place where, in whatever direction they turn their eyes, they see their own faces and figures multiplied without end. By thus beholding . . . the deformity brought upon them by their anger, they may recover their tempers and their charms together."⁴

The conception of history as an endless series of instructive reflections in the mirror of time is based on a belief that human nature is a constant, essentially the same from

Roger T. Marfisi



Frontispiece

Horatio Greenough. *George Washington*. Courtesy of National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution.

THE USEFULNESS
OF CLASSICAL LEARNING
IN THE
Eighteenth
Century

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