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Art History Survey

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Walking Tour of Greek Temples

On October 19th I attended a walking tour of greek temples throughout Providence. By exploring College Hill, Brown University Campus, and downtown Providence, Professor Durgun was able to show us a variety of monuments that were inspired by the architectural design of Ancient Greece. She also taught us interesting facts about the history behind each stop, as well as the artistic and religious backgrounds of each of the Greek revival and Neo-classical buildings.

This tour immensely enhanced my knowledge of Greek architectures and temples. Prior to this walk, I had only really thought of temples when I thought of Greek art, in particular, the Parthenon which we studied in class. This walk reiterated the ideas that Greek architecture all over the world maintains the same strong emphasis of structural design and decoration of buildings. Temples are perfect examples of this because they have a very structurally prominent presence that captivates viewers. I was also able to see at each of our stops the prominence of simplicity and perspective in ancient Greek architecture.

The first stop on our tour was the Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology on Brown campus. It has four doric order columns at the front, and a pediment on the top. The pediment was left blank, which I had not seen before, as the pediments I had seen usually had elaborately decorations and engravings. For example, the pediment sculpture at the Temple of Aphaia,

shows a detailed depiction of the Trojan War, with both side of the West and East shown in it's stone architecture.

The next stop was John Carter Brown Library also on Brown campus. The front of this building has two impressive ionic order columns on either side of the door. It is clear they are ionic order due to their swirling decorated tops. The additional column-like structures that make up the rest of the front of the building look to be of the doric order, due to their square-like tops. This building also had an ornately decorated pediment featured at the top. The original library was constructed and formally dedicated to John Nicholas Brown in 1904, but got a 15,000 square foot addition in 1990, dramatically transforming the place. They remained true to the classical style of the original building however.

Then we went to the Athenaeum on Benefit Street. This building followed the form of a typical Greek temple, with the main entry located a full story above ground level. This created a visual perspective which made the building seem larger than it actually is. It's built from granite and then lower level and sides are stone. The granite front steps lead up to a double wooden door, which makes the entrance appear very impressive. The Providence Athenaeum has an interesting history that stuck out to me because it was founded in 1836 after a previous version of it and the Providence Library Company could not agree on terms for a merger. Both organizations dissolved and instead decided to form a new library, which included the collections of both earlier institutions. This new organization was known as The Athenaeum, but not until 1850 would it change its name to the Providence Athenaeum as we know it today.

After this we stopped at the Old Stone Bank on South Main Street. This was my personal favorite, as I loved how much it stood out on the side of the street due to the contrasting types of

art and colors on it. There is a gold leaf dome that sits on top that reflects the light and appears to be glowing. This is immediately where your eye is drawn to when passing by. The architecture seen is a prime example of the style of bank architecture that was heavily prevalent from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century to communicate stability.

Our final stop on the tour was The Arcade. At this stop, Professor Durgan drew comparisons to the White House and the Capitol Building in Providence. This is actually a historic shopping center located in downtown Providence. It's the first enclosed shopping mall in the United States. The main elements that stuck out were its impressive Greek revival columns, granite walls, and wide granite steps.

I grew up in Burlington, Vermont, and have vivid memories from a young age of always being absolutely entranced by the Follet House, which is at the center of downtown. I would always ask my parents to stop at it so I could admire it, and now that I have the education I do, I know that the reason it appears so grand and impressive is because it is of the Greek architecture style. It has five Doric columns on the front that face the waterfront.

A key part of Greek architecture is its use of columns. This element was seen throughout almost all of the stops on our walk. Typically it follows three styles: Doric order, which are more rectangular, wide, and flat. I tend to see the most amount of buildings that have columns of Doric order around my town, and am always excited to share with my friends or family when I can spot the type of order used on a building now that I have taken this class. There is also the Ionic order, which is known for its use of volutes. The final order, which I find most impressive, is the Corinthian order. This order is characterized by the elaborate scrolls present at the top of its columns.

Another key element of Greek architecture that was seen throughout the walk is the architectural design strategy of post and lintel form. This is composed of upright beams or posts supporting horizontal beams (lintels). I remembered seeing this building style first when we learned about the Neolithic age, and examined Stonehenge. Stonehenge uses sandstone megaliths in a post and lintel way to support the heavy weight of the rock. This same building style is beneficial in Greek architecture, as it has to support a lot of weight with its use of elaborate columns.

In conclusion, I am so glad I decided to step out of my comfort zone and try something new by attending this tour. Not only did it allow me a chance to explore Providence as a city more, but it gave me real life applications and examples of the kinds of work and art we had focused on in class. There's a huge difference between learning about a style of art, and getting to actually go out and experience it first hand. I was also very appreciate of the fact that Professor Durgun provided insightful background information about the history and timeline of each building. By hearing about the longevity of these monuments, I was able to better understand the work that went into them, and how they got to the place they are today. Since I am unsure of when I'll ever be able to travel to Greece myself and directly see the famous pieces of architecture depicted in our textbooks, this was the next best thing, and even more intriguing because they are just down the road from where I'll be spending the remainder of my college career.