

Description of the building

One of the designer's principal objectives (Fig. 21) was for the façade to rival with, if not outstrip, the façade of the neighbouring church as the main visual attraction (see Fig. 7). While it was impossible to compete with the church façade in terms of height, its unassuming Early Baroque aspect invited competition, which persuaded the architect, Jean Nicolas de Jadot, to design an opulent yet noble façade.

At a first glance the building does not appear to be aimed to fit into, let alone submit to, the older buildings. The immediate surroundings were (and still are today) characterised by a quiet, even monotonous façade design such as was typical of urban construction in the 17th and early 18th centuries: flat façade subtly divided by stringcourses and reglets, partly with flat oriels and framed plaster fields. Outstanding plastic elements are confined to early 18th century window aediculae. Jadot's repertory of motifs is in utter contrast to these features: The three-storeyed building fronts along Bäckerstrasse and Sonnenfelsgasse (and, somewhat less pronounced, the rear facing Windhaaggasse) are characterised by the regular sequence of the ground-floor windows cut out from the fluted background and in particular the window aediculae with alternating round-arch and

triangular pediments along the piano nobile. The uniformity of the two lateral façades is only broken by a flat central three-bay projection with a central aedicula and balcony (Fig. 22).

Quite unlike the sparse direct application of decorative elements on the façade along the sides of the building, the façade facing the square is richly ornamented with columns and pilasters. However, some of these elements form part of a most elaborate system of organisation: On the side of the square, the wall of the five-bay façade is increasingly recessed from storey to storey. At the ground level, the ribbon structure forms the foremost, though very thin, layer which exposes, on the window and fountain arcades, the narrow but clearly discernible margin of the wall core, while the latter is carved out to form deep niches; the rear walls of the lateral fountain niches are deepened further by conchae (Fig. 23).

The Corinthian order on the piano nobile takes the form of an accessible colonnade which constitutes a spatial symbol of sovereignty in front of the deeply recessed central wall. On the third storey, finally, the façade with the three central bays is also recessed, with a balustraded balcony flanked by two lateral projections replacing the colonnade of the storey below.

The four fronts of the free-standing building show a clear hierarchical organisation reflecting their functions. The fairly simple decorative pattern along the short





ACADEMY BUILDING, PRINCIPAL FAÇADE (FIG. 21)



façade fronting the square, and its location corresponds externally to the central projections of the two lateral façades. It is this absence of a genuine connection between the splendour of the façade and the interior that demonstrates the architect's intention to set off the façade from the university building behind it in order to enter upon a direct dialogue with the predetermined features of the square. The first thing one tends to note is that the height of the university building is similar to that of the Jesuit College opposite (Fig. 24). The storeys by and large correspond to each other in height (one important difference being that the height of the piano nobile of the

ACADEMY
BUILDING,
SIDE FAÇADE
(FIG. 22)

Windhaaggasse lane is enriched on the two longitudinal fronts and culminates – rather surprisingly for a structure built in the latter part of the 18th century – in a magnificent façade reminiscent of a Baroque mis-en-scene. What all four fronts have in common is a basic repertoire of decorative elements (dominant stringcourses, aediculae with triangular pediments and pedimented windows with cartouches) that emphasises homogeneity and ensures that the architect's message is easily read.

As the ground plan of the piano nobile (see Fig. 15) shows clearly, the noble, triumphal colonnade architecture of the principal façade has but little to do with the interior structure of the building. The splendid Great Hall, situated in the central part of the building, is completely independent of the



ACADEMY
BUILDING,
FOUNTAIN
ON PRINCIPAL
FAÇADE
(FIG. 23)



DR. IGNAZ SEIPEL-
PLATZ WITH
THE ACADEMY
BUILDING, THE
JESUIT CHURCH
AND THE JESUIT
COLLEGE
(FIG. 24)



ACADEMY
BUILDING,
FAÇADE, GROUP
OF STATUES
(FIG. 25)

Aula corresponds to the combined second and third storeys of the College). Another important aspect is that the axial division of the university front is inspired by that of the church façade (see Fig. 5): both consist of two flat single-bay lateral projections and a three-bay central portion. Both the respect for the proportions of the earlier building forming the counterpart and the transposition of the basic five-part rhythm, give rise to the minimum of harmony required to form a solid basis for a design after all characterised by considerable differences in approach. Similarly, the alternation of rounded and triangular window pediments used by Jadot may be interpreted as the architect's deliberate response to the decorative elements of the church façade. Jadot can use the sculptural and spatial design of the façade to produce an aesthetic effect which challenges, as it were, the unachievable height of the church front with its monumental storeys,



ACADEMY
BUILDING,
FAÇADE, GROUP
OF STATUES
(FIG. 26)

the massive gable and ornate steeple roofs, creating a more than adequate counterpoise to the flat and almost two-dimensional organisation of the Early Baroque church façade. The spatial effect of the dominant colonnade (historically taking its cue from the east façade of the Paris Louvre) is a first-rate expression of dignified authority. The viewer may even go farther than Renate Wagner-Rieger, who speaks of “Erscheinungsarchitektur” (architecture of appearance), and interpret the principal façade as triumphal theatre-like architecture, perhaps intended for the Emperor and Empress to present themselves to the public on the occasion of university celebrations on the square. The imagery of the façade (see Fig. 21) is sparse. The peculiar grotesque faces on the bosses and the groups of statues adorning the fountains on the ground floor can hardly be interpreted as fitting into the university context. At the level of the principal floor

there are empty coat-of-arms cartouches and eagles carrying trophies. As regards the third-floor allegorical sculptures representing the various faculties above the triangular pediments, it is not entirely clear whether they were not meant to stand for the two originally envisaged faculties, medicine (left) and jurisprudence (right) (Fig. 25, Fig. 26), whose attributes were subsequently altered in view of the addition of two more faculties. At the centre above the attic, the dominion of the monarch who commissioned the structure is documented by the monumental imperial coat of arms representing the alliance between the houses of Habsburg and Lorraine (Fig. 27), the small escutcheons between the two faculty groups – with the coat of arms of Neu-Österreich on the left and probably that of Alt-Österreich on the right [today empty] – and the coats of arms above the side portals, that of the Kingdom of Hungary (Fig. 28) in Bäckerstrasse and of

ACADEMY
BUILDING, FAÇADE,
HABSBURG-
LOTHARINGIAN
COAT OF ARMS
(FIG. 27)



the Kingdom of Bohemia in Sonnenfelsgasse (Fig. 29). The territorial claim of the university was succinctly characterised by Ignaz de Luca in 1797: “[...] Vienna and the Austrian universities in general certainly do not intend to attract foreign students; their attention is focused merely on educating young men of local origin and leading them to the source of scholarship so that the State may assign them usefully to its offices and provide its people with adequate culture and refinement. And that is enough [...]”.

ACADEMY
BUILDING, FAÇADE
FACING BÄCKER-
STRASSE, COAT OF
ARMS OF THE
KINGDOM OF
HUNGARY (FIG. 28)

ACADEMY
BUILDING, FAÇADE
FACING SONNEN-
FELSGASSE, COAT
OF ARMS OF THE
KINGDOM OF
BOHEMIA (FIG. 29)