

History of planning, construction and functions

The driving force behind the speedy realisation of the construction was the Protector of the University of Vienna, Archbishop Johann Joseph Graf Trautson (Fig. 8), whom Empress Maria Theresa had entrusted with the overall responsibility for all matters of construction in March 1753, at a point in time when all planning activities were already in full swing. The court had been in possession of rough drafts of the design and appearance of the building and known the name of the architect to be commissioned to implement it already since the beginning of the year. A submission to the Empress of 15 February 1753 reads: “[...] likewise there will be need for four entrances to the building so that carriages can enter on one side and leave on the other, since no large courtyards will be feasible. To ascertain in what way everything can be done properly it will be necessary to have preliminary plans and elevations drawn and, as Your Imperial Royal Majesty has already designed to demand that the new building be constructed with graceful façade on all four sides and especially on the side of the square in front of the Jesuit Church, for which purpose Court Building Inspector de Jadot is to design the necessary elevations. It will therefore be Your Majesty’s decision whether de Jadot is to be ordered to produce such elevations, and to graciously determine

who is to prepare the other elevations, plans and material requirements and thus be in charge of the erection of the building. [...]”

It is fairly unusual that at a time when no definitive plans existed about the structure and the layout of the rooms, Jean Nicolas de Jadot had already been designated as the architect responsible for the façades. According to the above source it remained to be decided who was to draw up all the other plans and be responsible for the management of construction. This explains why there is a certain inconsistency between the main façade and the layout of the rooms, which has remained a characteristic of the building to this day and is frequently mentioned in the literature. It may indicate that absolute priority was attached to the external appearance and its effect on the square. The sources imply that the Lotharingian architect Jean Nicolas de Jadot – who had moved from Tuscany to Vienna along with Franz I Stephan – was entrusted with the overall responsibility for the project.

Born in Lunéville (Lorraine) in 1710, Jadot was awarded the title “architecte ordinaire” of Duke Leopold of Lorraine in 1732. Little is known about his training and his works. He may have been a pupil of the Parisian architect Germain Boffrand, who designed several buildings in Lorraine, and may have

received further training in Paris. In 1733 the Accademia Clementina in Bologna conferred on him the title “Accademico d’onore”. In 1737 he moved to Florence where in 1738/1739 he designed the triumphal arch for the ceremonial entry of Franz Stephan as the new Grand Duke of Tuscany and was responsible for the inspection of the ducal buildings (including Palazzo Pitti). In 1745 he followed Franz Stephan, the husband of Maria Theresa, who had been crowned Emperor, to Vienna. Presumably, his main task was to draw up new plans for the Hofburg imperial residence. The plans of the architect, who had meanwhile risen to the rank of an Imperial “Bauinspector und Controlor”, have never been realised. Still, Vienna boasts the three works definitively owed to Jadot: the Menagerie of Schönbrunn (including the vivarium and the central pavilion) of 1752, the Capuchin Crypt (1753) and the plans for the new university of the same year. A few weeks after the laying of the foundation stone for the latter on 10 August 1753, Jadot, however, left Vienna for Belgium. The architect, who had been raised to nobility (Baron de Ville-Issey), died in Lorraine in 1761.

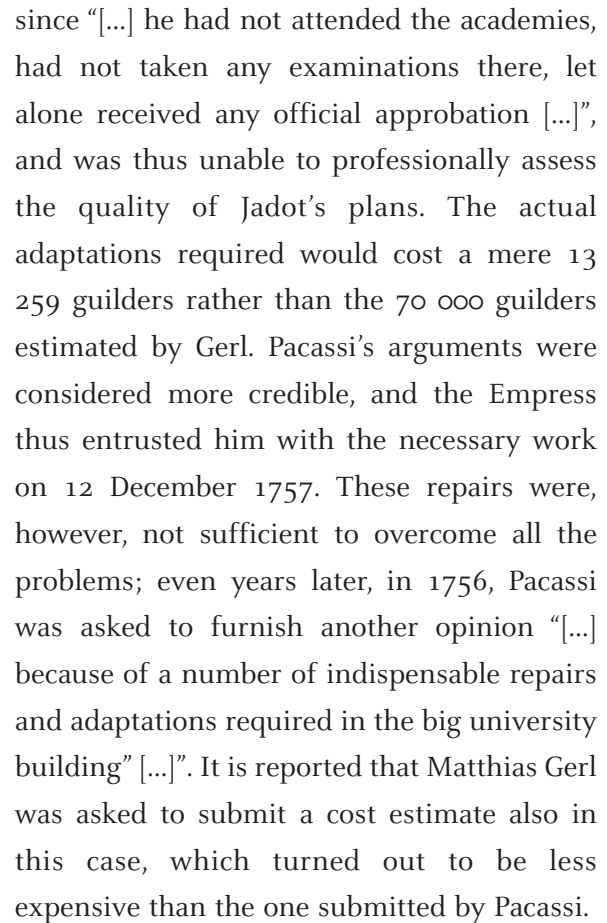
After his departure from Vienna, the Imperial Royal Deputy Court architect Johann Adam Münzer as well as Johann Enzenhofer and Daniel Christoph Dietrich were entrusted with the execution of his model, plans and elevations. By 1755 the shell of the building, the roof and the observatory topping it as well as the fountains in the façade created by Franz Joseph Lenzbauer had been completed.

In the same year Gregorio Guglielmi and Domenico Francia finished their frescoes in the Great Hall, the central project of the building. The ceremonious inauguration of the university building took place on 5 April 1756. The interior decoration of the university was completed by the frescoes by Franz Anton Maulbertsch, the most important painter of late Austrian Baroque, in the Council Room (today “Museumszimmer”) (1759) and in the lecture hall of the faculty of theology (today “Johannessaal”, the Hall of John the Baptist) (1766/1767).

It took less than three years to complete the building. Construction work gave rise to criticism of – actual or alleged – shortcomings of Jadot’s plans. The main critic was master builder Matthias Gerl, who as early as September 1754 published an expertise criticising the chimneys and parts of the interior decoration: the inadequate layout of the rooms and corridors, too thin partition walls, inadequate lighting of the halls and flat ceilings instead of vaulted ones. The main problem seems to have been that “[...] architect Jadot had worked along the principles of French palace architecture, where wood is the main building material for the residential areas, but which were in conflict with construction practices in Vienna, which relied on much more solid masonry and brick structures and vaults, and were subject to stringent building regulations. [...]” (Renate Wagner-Rieger).

This criticism did not remain unchallenged. One reaction – probably also driven by wounded pride – came from the Imperial

J. G. MACK,
GROUND PLAN
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
BUILDING,
1783/84;
VIENNA,
AKADEMIE DER
BILDENDEN
KÜNSTL,
KUPFERSTICH-
KABINETT,
INV.-NO. 16783
(FIG. 9)

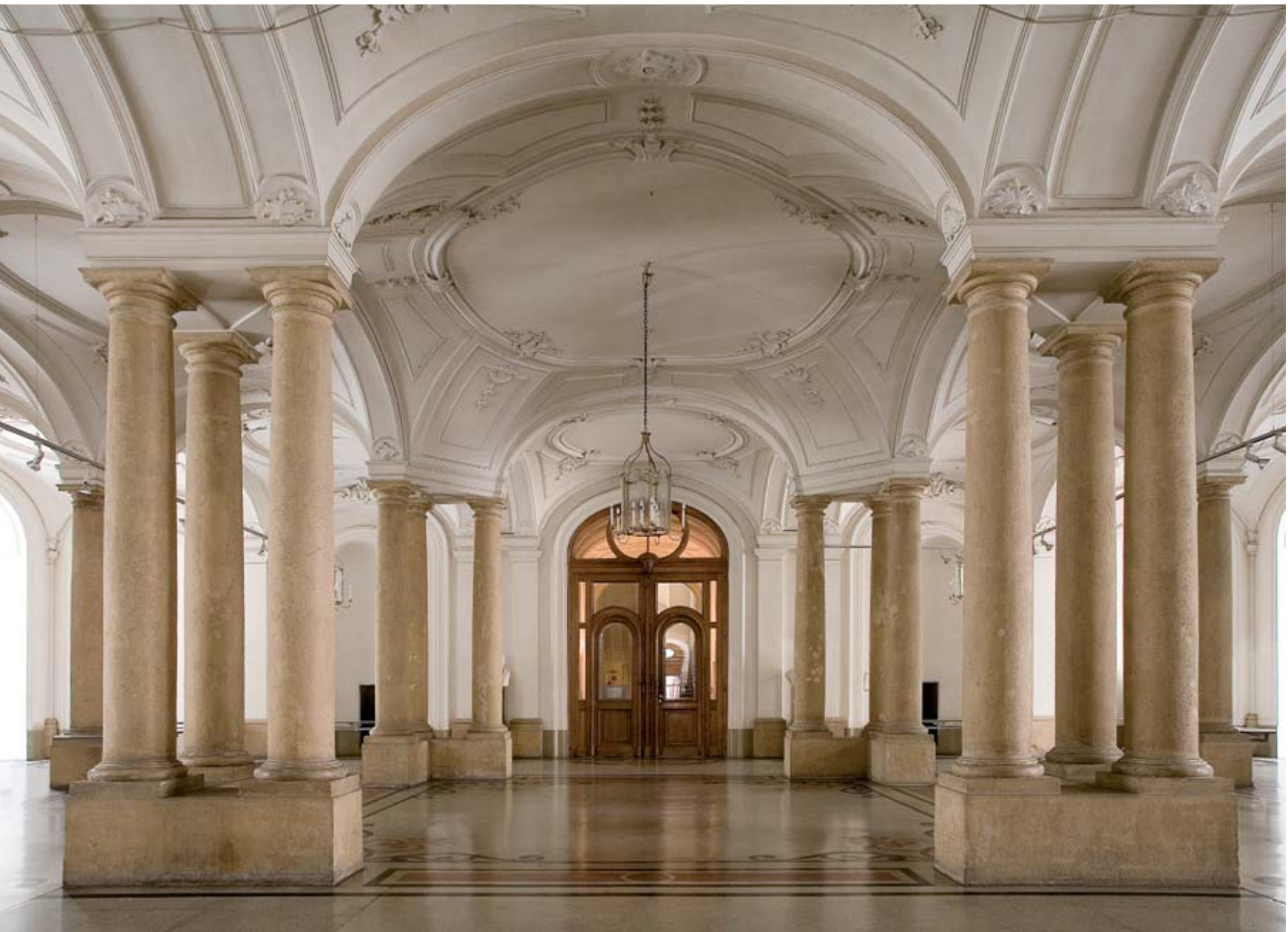


From today's point of view the ground plan can be said to have achieved a reasonable equilibrium between function and space, offsetting the shortcomings of the narrow oblong building site. The layout of halls and rooms was determined by the space requirements for the academic activities and the wish to glorify the monarchs as sponsors of the sciences. None of the original plans drawn by Jadot himself have so far been discovered that would furnish detailed information on the spatial organisation and the original layout of the individual walls. The architecture collection of the Albertina

and the graphic collection of the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, however, possess a few sets of plans, all dating from the second half of the 18th century, from which reliable information can be gleaned.

These plans probably formed the basis for planned and actually realised adaptations, both around 1759, when the premises on the second floor were handed over to the Academy of Arts, and around 1786, when the

ACADEMY BUILDING AULA (FIG. 10)







Academy moved out again and the rooms were assigned to new scientific and administrative functions.

The Albertina Collection of Graphic Art possesses two sets of ground plans (basement, ground floor, main floor and second floor) and an elevation of the observatory, while the Academy of Fine Arts has among its holdings four interrelated drawings of one of its graduates, Architect Johann Georg Mack, dated November and December 1783 and January 1784: a plan of the ground floor, a façade elevation, a side elevation and a longitudinal section.

In contrast to what would normally have been expected, the layout of the interior is not derived from the organisation of the main façade but subordinated to the oblong shape of the building site (Fig. 9). The centre is a transverse space extending over the entire width of the plot (from Bäckerstrasse to Sonnenfelsgasse), which accommodates a colonnaded aula several aisles wide (Fig. 10) on the ground floor, and the Great Hall on the main floor above it (Fig. 11). The central aula is traversed by a longitudinal corridor with hardly any natural light, which stretches from the principal entrance on Dr. Ignaz Seipel Square to the rear entrance. As far as attempts at reconstructing the original plan suggest, the four roughly symmetrically arranged groups of rooms right and left of this longitudinal axis were assigned to the medical faculty. Following the ground plan as described by Johann Georg Mack, the two sets of rooms on the eastern side of the square (today the

ACADEMY
BUILDING,
GREAT HALL
(FIG. 11)

BOTTOM LEFT:
PLAN OF THE
GROUND FLOOR OF
THE ACADEMY
BUILDING; VIENNA,
ALBERTINA, AZ.
ALLG. 8029 (FIG. 12)

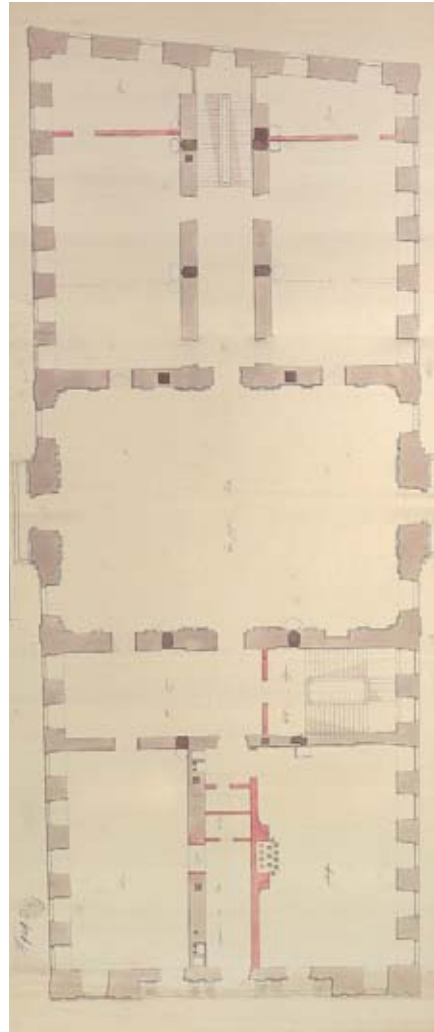
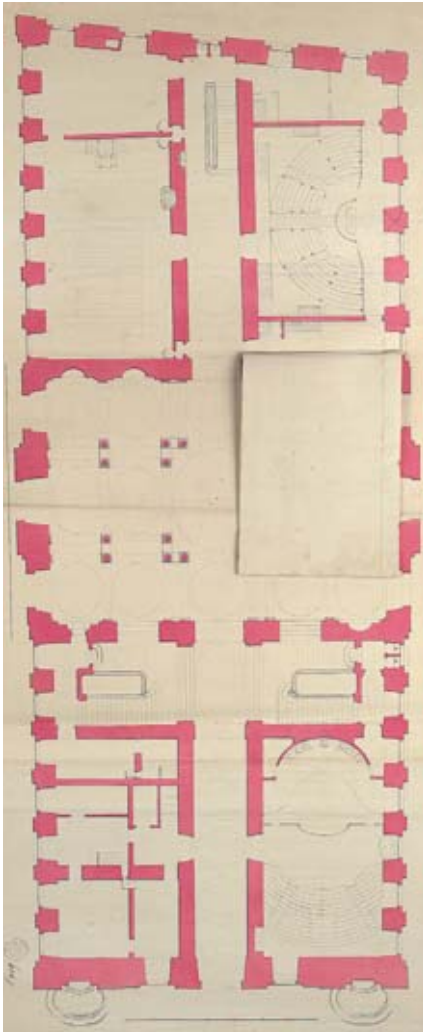
BOTTOM CENTER:
GROUND PLAN OF
THE MAIN STOREY
OF THE ACADEMY
BUILDING; VIENNA,
ALBERTINA, AZ.
ALLG. 8023 (FIG. 14)

porter's lodge and the mail room), i.e. to the left of the longitudinal corridor, were designated as "living quarters of the professor of anatomy" and, partitioned off from it, "porter's living quarters", while on the right-hand side was a five-bay, saucer-vaulted lecture hall assigned to the teaching of "herbal science (botany)" (today the "Club Room"). The rear of the building, the area behind the aula to the left of the corridor (today the library hall), was dedicated to pharmacology, the right-hand section (today the library

administration) to anatomy. The latter department had at its disposal a four-bay hall accommodating the "anatomical theatre", which was even equipped with a lift to convey the bodies to be dissected from the basement into the lecture hall. One of the ground plans kept at the Albertina (Fig. 12) shows rows of seats forming an amphitheatre around a central dissecting table separated from the auditorium by a balustrade. When the Academy of Fine Arts moved out in 1786, the anatomical theatre was moved up to the

second floor, not least on account of the poor lighting available on the ground floor. The ground-floor hall was subdivided into six rooms dedicated to anatomical studies.

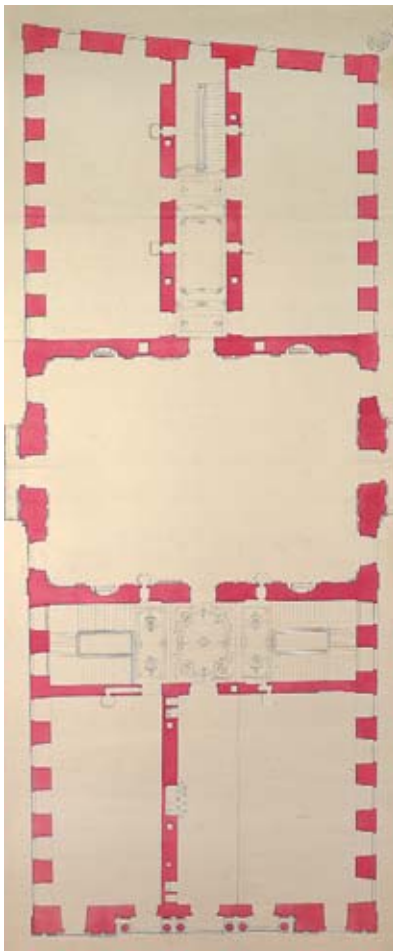
The ground plan of the main floor, the piano nobile, is by and large similar to that of the ground floor. On the side of the square, in the south-eastern corner, there was the lecture hall for the faculty of theology, which is today called "Hall of John the Baptist" on account of its pictorial decoration (Baptism of Christ) (Fig. 13). Drawing No. 8023 (Fig. 14) in the Albertina collection already assigns this large hall (127m²) to "deology". Unlike today, it was directly accessible from the foyer of the Great Hall. If we follow another drawing in the Albertina (No. 8030) (Fig. 15), the theology hall was (unlike the situation on





ACADEMY
BUILDING,
JOHANNESSAAL
(FIG. 13)

GROUND PLAN
OF THE MAIN
STOREY OF THE
ACADEMY
BUILDING;
VIENNA,
ALBERTINA,
AZ. ALLG. 8030
(FIG. 15)



the ground floor) not adjacent to a central corridor but to the large hall assigned to “philosophia”. Plan No. 8023 (see Fig. 14), on the other hand, does show the wall necessary for forming the central corridor, which is, however, drawn in a different colour, a clear indication that this partition was added later. As a matter of fact, the building itself contains some clues that would support this view. Unlike the elegant saucer domes topping the

other corridors (Fig. 16), the central corridor here shows only a modest barrel vault. Similarly, the vaulting of the Philosophy Hall (Fig. 17) is at variance with the vault types otherwise used by de Jadot: The light shallow barrel, which clashes with the deep conchae of the window bays, is a clear departure from the heavy vaulting used in the other halls of the building.

The Philosophy Hall (today the meeting hall of the two sections of the Academy), whose size was reduced by the later partitioning to 127 m², the same size as the

Theology Hall, was formerly used as lecture hall for physics and mechanics and also accommodated a collection of physical instruments, artefacts and mechanical models.

The rooms in the rear part of the building, designated as the “retirade” in our plan, were, according to Colland, used as lecture halls for law and the political sciences from 1796 onwards. After repeated modifications, they now accommodate the administration of the Academy and the rooms of its President. As a transverse barrier the Great Hall, which extends over two storeys in height, separates the eastern and western parts of the building.

ACADEMY
BUILDING,
CENTRAL
CORRIDOR,
GROUND FLOOR
(FIG. 16)



With its size of more than 400 m² it divides the building into three largely separate sections (see Fig. 11). For practical purposes, this layout was, admittedly, not ideal: Direct communication between the parts of the building in which the lecture halls were located was only possible by passing through the Great Hall which, by its very nature, proved an obstacle to the conduct of day-to-day business. This problem is rendered even worse on the second floor, where the two parts dedicated to lecture halls are completely separated from one another on account of the height of the Great Hall. Incidentally, the second floor only became available to the faculties when the Academy of Fine Arts moved out in 1786. The area now reserved for administrative purposes was then used for the new anatomical theatre and for lecture halls for the departments of pathology, “*materia medica*” and obstetrics.

Access to the individual storeys is by three sets of stairs. The two principal stairs are embedded between the front part with the lecture halls on the side of the square and the central area with the aula and, above it, the Great Hall. Johann Georg Mack’s longitudinal section (Fig. 18) clearly shows that this staircase section is to be seen as a structural unit in its own right: it is intercalated between the other parts of the building and, at its top, bears the observatory, which gives it a tower-like quality. The third staircase is in the rear part of the western central corridor (For the staircases, see also pp. 32, 33).

The Observatory

Ignaz de Luca’s “*Neuester wienerischer Wegweiser für Fremde und Inländer vom Jahr 1797 oder kurze Beschreibung aller Merkwürdigkeiten Wiens*” (Short Guide to Vienna for Foreigners and Natives for the Year 1797 or Brief Description of all Sights of Vienna”) recommends a visit to the university observatory: “[...] Ultimately, foreigners are especially advised to visit the observatory of

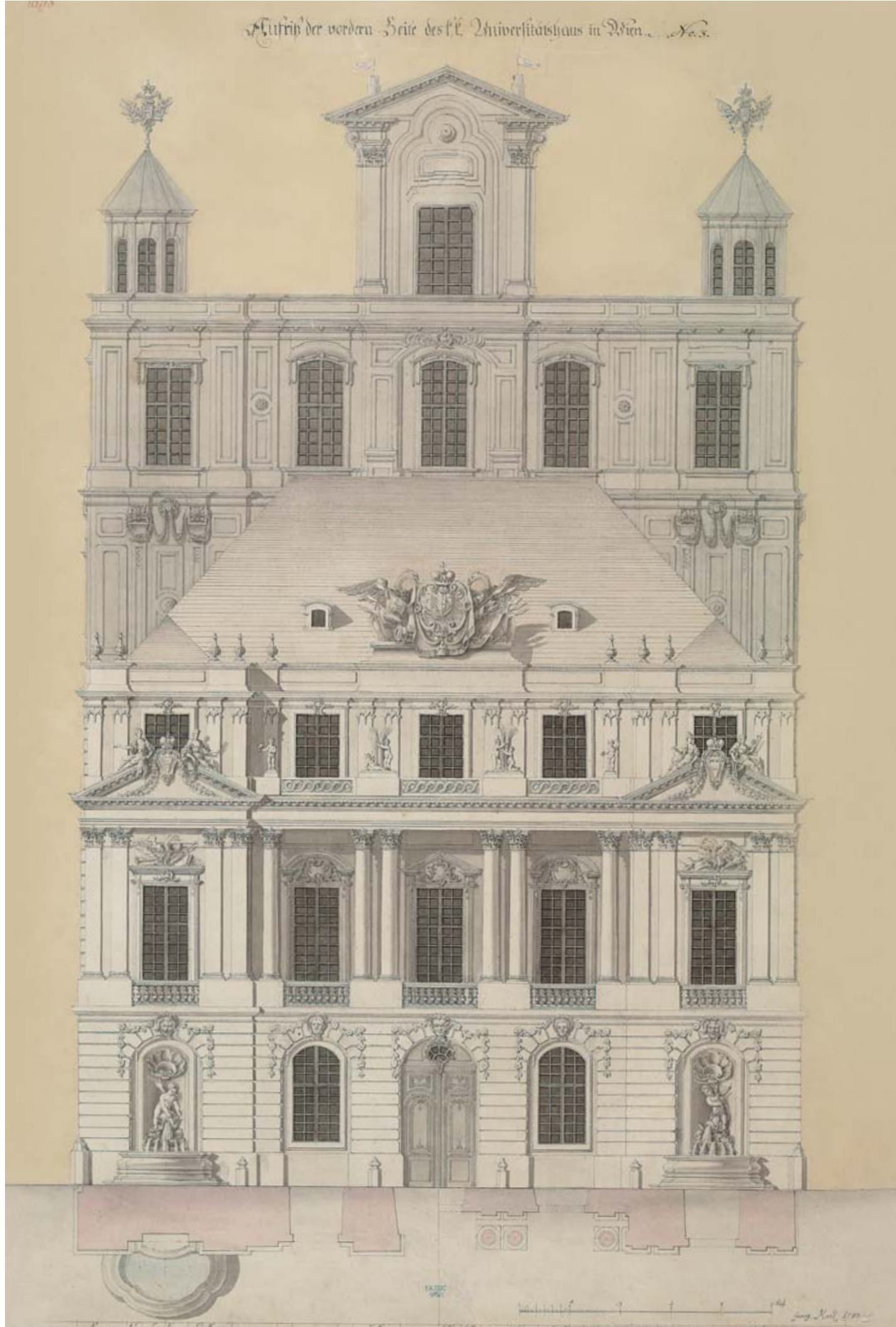


the university. It is perfectly equipped with all instruments required for astronomical observations. M. l’Abbé Driesneker, a disciple of the late M. l’Abbé Hell, Imperial Royal Court Astronomer, will most graciously receive foreigners and other scholars desirous of seeing or using the instruments and the observatory [...].”

The observatory, clearly visible on Johann Georg Mack’s longitudinal section and elevation (see Fig. 18 and Fig. 19), was placed

ACADEMY
BUILDING,
MEETING ROOM
(FORMER
LECTURE HALL,
FACULTY OF
PHILOSOPHY)
(FIG. 17)

J. G. MACK, FAÇADE
ELEVATION OF
THE ACADEMY
BUILDING, 1783/84;
VIENNA, AKADEMIE
DER BILDENDEN
KÜNSTE,
KUPFERSTICH-
KABINETT,
INV.-NO. 16718
(FIG. 19)





J. G. MACK,
LONGITUDINAL
SECTION OF
THE ACADEMY
BUILDING,
1783/84;
VIENNA, AKADE-
MIE DER BILDEN-
DEN KÜNSTE,
KUPFERSTICH-
KABINETT,
INV.-NO. 16784
(FIG. 18)

on top of the staircase section behind the hip roof on the side of the square, towering over it so as to impress its mark on the overall aspect of the building. A comparison with other pictures of the building from the late 18th and first half of the 19th century raises doubts as to the validity of the previous assumption that Bellotto's painting represented the original building as planned by de Jadot (see Fig. 7). In Mack's drawing, the platform with the large pavilion has at each corner a tower-like gazebo – which is also confirmed by Joseph Daniel Huber's bird's-eye view of Vienna (drawn 1769–1774) (Fig. 20). In 1879 the university observatory was moved to Türkenschanze

in the western part of Vienna. It is not known at what time the structures on top of the university building were dismantled. The only part of the superstructure that has survived is the platform.



D. HUBER,
BIRD'S EYE VIEW
OF VIENNA,
1769–1774
(FIG. 20)