

bulletin



Architecture & Finance

2019/20

eabh (The European Association for
Banking and Financial History e.V.)

Athenian neoclassical residence in the 19th century: A photography collection

Antonopoulou Chrysalena

In 1998, National Bank of Greece merged through absorption with its subsidiary National Mortgage Bank of Greece S.A., formed as a result of the merger of two former subsidiaries National Mortgage Bank and National Housing Bank of Greece S.A. National Mortgage Bank was established in 1927 to provide mortgage lending services to both public and private sector clients, with assets and support from the National Bank of Greece. For the next few decades, the new bank undertook the responsibility of facilitating mortgage lending, playing an especially significant role during the post-WWII reconstruction period in Greece.

It was in 2007 that the accession of the National Mortgage Bank's archives by the Historical Archive of the National Bank of Greece took place. Among them, stored in yellow cardboard boxes and perfectly arranged, was a collection of 3,907 colour photographs under the title 'Athenian Neoclassical Residence, 19th century'. Three printed catalogues with addresses were also found.

Commissioned by the National Mortgage Bank, a team of architects worked together with photographers and a designer, to form this collection of great historical interest. The team managed to locate, catalogue and photograph residential buildings in the neoclassical style from nineteen districts of Athens, covering the historical center of the city and its surrounding territories. The printed photographs were organized in eleven groups and each item bore a note with the exact address of the building it depicted. In most cases, more than one photograph was taken of a single building, to cover different aspects or even details, such as door handles, metal railings or other decorative elements.

Neoclassical architecture became dominant in the Modern Greek state after its



Plaka district



Plaka district



Plaka district



Vathi Square

establishment in 1830. Influenced by European classicism, nineteenth century urban architecture in Athens presented a style born in ancient Greece, exported to Europe and reintroduced in the modern city, expressing changes in the moral and aesthetic values of society. The work of famous European architects, such as Eduard Schaubert, Ernst Ziller, Leo von Klenze, Friedrich von Gärtner, Hans Christian Hansen and Theophilus Hansen, together with that of Stamatios Kleanthis, Lysandros Kaftantzoglou and other Greek architects who had studied in Europe, played a key role in the formation of the new style. Greek neoclassical architecture soon obtained its own character and uniqueness. Adjusting to the morphology of the Mediterranean, but also taking advantage of the use of Greek marble, the new style was characterized by simplicity and detailed beauty and was to be applied to large scale public buildings, as well as smaller scale residential ones across the country.

Nearly two centuries later Athens has experienced massive transformations due to historical events and population growth. It has become a modern European capital, where different modes of cultural and architectural expression coexist, relating to different periods of its long history. What happened to the neoclassical buildings presented here? Did they all survive until today? Probably not. How many of them have maintained their unique characteristics? Have they been properly conserved? The systematic creation of this rich collection of photographs provides us with a rather scarce source of information on historical Athenian urban topography. It gives us a thorough visual outline of what is known today as Athenian neoclassicism when it comes to residential construction.

Further study of the National Mortgage Bank's archives will possibly give us additional insight on how this project served the

bank's aims and perhaps inform us about the stories of those buildings – stories just like those of their inhabitants and even that of the city itself. ●

Author Profile

Chrysalena Antonopoulou was born in 1983 in Athens, Greece. She studied Economics and holds an MSc in Finance and Banking. She started working for the National Bank of Greece in 2006. In September 2010 she became a member of the Department for Archive Management of the NBG Historical Archive and since October 2017 she is Head of the Photographic Archive Service.

All photographs belong to the collection of the Historical Archive of the National Bank of Greece.



Dionysiou Aeropagitou str



Details of neoclassical buildings in Athens



Koukaki district



Makriyanni district



Entrance of a residence with clear neoclassical elements



Details of a neoclassical residence



Detail of a residence



Detail of a residence in Plaka district



Makriyanni district



Koukaki district



Filopappou district



View of stairs and the inner yard of a neoclassical residence in Athens



Detail of a residence



View of the inner yard of a neoclassical residence in Athens