

‘Solid and Permanent Grandeur’: The Design Roots of American Classical Furniture

BY CARSWELL RUSH BERLIN

Thus I hoped to entice the wealthy...to the more profitable as well as more dignified procurement of those monuments of visible elegance and intellectual beauty which, capable of being enjoyed during the longest periods, and by the greatest numbers...can alone become instruments of universal and of durable gratification, as well as of solid and permanent grandeur....

Thomas Hope, *Household Furniture and Interior Decoration*, 1807

IN 1817, THE GREAT FRENCH *ÉMIGRÉ* CABINETMAKER, CHARLES-HONORÉ LANNUIER, produced a set of outstanding armchairs in his New York workshop for the wealthy Baltimore merchant James Bosley. Although the chairs had immediate antecedents in designs by the French architects Charles Percier and P.-F.-L. Fontaine, the London antiquarian Thomas Hope, and the English furniture designer George Smith, the original source for their design is found on the marble frieze of the Parthenon in Athens (figs. 1a-f). How did the design for Bosley’s fine armchairs find its way nearly six thousand miles, from the Acropolis to America, from the greatest monument of the cradle of democracy, to the land of its rebirth more than two thousand years later? That answer is part of a remarkable story of discovery, rediscovery and international exchange that fueled American furniture design in the early 19th century.

Regretfully, it is difficult for Americans to understand and appreciate one of the most important periods of creativity and craftsmanship in American furniture-making history, that of the Classical period, from about 1805 to the 1840s. Both scholarship and public collections under-represent this rich and absorbing period of American furniture history, largely in deference to 18th-century objects. Even worse, the early 19th century is often viewed by collectors as a sad and terminal departure from the main stream of American high-style design in the 18th century – a disintegration of taste from the colonial Queen Anne and Chippendale styles so loved here. Yet by exploring the roots of design ideas that took hold in the United States after 1788, it is clear that the Classical style, contrary to being an aberrant lapse in taste, was, in fact, part of a movement linking American design to a grand tradition that is more than two thousand years old – one which has dominated western thought since its rediscovery during the Italian Renaissance in the 15th and 16th centuries.

Benefiting from an extraordinary process of cross-pollination that fertilized the minds of some of the most gifted artists and designers to have ever bent to the task of furniture design, American furniture makers partook in a rich culture of classicism that was an international phenomenon in the early 19th century. The best of them – in New York, Duncan Phyfe, Charles-Honoré Lannuiier, and Deming & Bulkley; in Philadelphia, Ephraim Haines, Henry Connelly, Joseph Barry, Anthony Quervelle, Cook & Parkin, and Isaac Jones; in Boston, John and Thomas Seymour, Isaac Vose, and Emmons & Archibald; in Salem, Nehemiah Adams, William Hook, the Sandersons, Thomas Needham, George and Elias Hook, and the firm of Kimball & Sargent; and in Baltimore, the Finlay brothers, William Camp, John Needles, and Edward Priestly – produced furniture of great originality, taste and quality. In an age enthralled by archaeolo-

gy, they, and others like them, were inspired by models of classical antiquity made available through the work and seminal publications of leading scholars, artists, architects, and designers of the period – each in turn, and in rapid succession, influencing the ideas of the next. American Classical furniture was the product of these aesthetic ideas, which flowered in Europe, Britain, and the United States, in developing stages between 1760 and 1840.

Ancient Inspiration

To understand the roots of American Classical furniture it is necessary to look back to the design precepts of the ancient world. Classical antiquity – Greece in the age of Pericles, and Rome in her Imperial glory – furnished the primary models for the furniture produced in America in the early 19th century, but ancient Egyptian forms and ornament were also influential. Forms like the Greek *klismos* chair (figs. 2a-b), the *sella curulis*, a Roman folding stool form with Greek antecedents (fig. 3a), animal-legged Egyptian seats, Roman marble benches (fig. 4a), Pompeiian bronze tables and candelabra (fig. 5a), and the fulcrum-ended Greek and Roman beds used for reclining while eating were all examples of ancient furniture revived for use in early 19th-century American interiors. Known through surviving examples of ancient furniture, or based on information gleaned from Roman wall paintings, painted Greek vases, and ancient monuments, these forms were eagerly adopted by citizens of the young American democracy in the thrall of the classical models on which their new society was based.

Awareness of these ancient cultures, however, was not new in the early 19th century. Beginning in 14th-century Italy, renewed interest in ancient literature had ignited an enthusiasm among intellectuals for all aspects of the classical past, much of it still so evident in the Italian landscape. By the late 15th and early 16th centuries, archaeological excavations in Rome and other parts of Italy had revealed buildings, statuary, monuments and even wall paintings that exerted a powerful influence over European art and design in the period and inspired an ongoing dialogue with classicism for the next two hundred years.

The perennial fascination with antiquity was reinvigorated in the second quarter of the 18th century with the discovery of the previously unexcavated Roman sites of Pompeii and Herculaneum. Known to scholars through ancient accounts, these cities had lain buried in southern Italy since their destruction following the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD. The finds from Herculaneum, excavated beginning in 1738 and Pompeii, where explorations began in 1748, captured the imaginations of learned people throughout the western world and furnished new inspiration for contemporary design as unprecedented quantities of bronze furniture, wall paintings and other objects were unearthed. These and other antiquities were made accessible through lavish illustrated publications that proliferated in the second half of the 18th century, inspiring a new concept of beauty.

Early Sources

While privileged 18th and 19th century Americans and their counterparts abroad had the opportunity to take the Grand Tour of

ancient sites and European capitals to complete their education, most gleaned information from publications. Scholarly studies of the exciting finds in southern Italy and elsewhere began to be published shortly after the material became available for study.

The earliest publication to illustrate accurately the discoveries of the Vesuvian cities was *Le antichità di Ercolano esposte*, an eight-volume, multi-authored work published in Naples between 1757 and 1792, and dedicated to its patron Carlos III of Spain, formerly the King of Naples and Sicily.ⁱ Illustrating wall paintings, bronze statuary, lamps, and candelabra, the exquisite engravings revealed ancient furniture forms and elements of furniture that would influence European designers and ultimately American cabinetmakers (fig. 2a). Evidence of its influence is apparent in George Smith's 1808 *Collection of Designs for Household Furniture*, a design directory with broad influence in England and the United States. At least two of Smith's designs for tables are based unmistakably on plates in the fourth volume of *Le antichità*.ⁱⁱ

Meanwhile, in France, the antiquarian Anne Claude Philippe de Tubières, Comte de Caylus (1692-1765), had already begun to publish an influential encyclopedia of antiquities in 1752. The earliest volumes of the Comte de Caylus's seven-volume *Recueil d'antiquités égyptiennes, étrusques, grecques, romaines et gauloises* included antiquities from Pompeii and Herculaneum, although they were drawn from memory because of restrictions at the sites themselves. Published between 1752 and 1767, the *Recueil* strongly influenced the early evolution of Neo-Classicism.ⁱⁱⁱ

As the title of the Comte de Caylus's *Recueil* makes clear, scholars of the period distinguished Roman from Greek antiquities. In 1755, the antiquarian Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768) brought a philosophical dimension to this observation with the publication of his *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerey und der Bildhauerkunst*.^{iv} Winckelmann's polemic exploration of the superiority of Greek art over Roman proposed an argument that would occupy the attention of western artists and architects for a hundred years. His writings stimulated broad interest in classical antiquity and his point of view would ultimately triumph in the "Greek Revival" in American architecture, sculpture and the decorative arts between 1820 and the Civil War.

Like Winckelmann, the architect James "Athenian" Stuart (1713-1788) and his colleague, Nicholas Revett (1720-1804), were early champions of Greek art and among the earliest to record the ancient monuments of Greece. Sponsored to map, measure and record Athenian monuments by the London Society of Dilettanti, Stuart and Revett's influential first volume of the *Antiquities of Athens* was published in 1762. In an early salvo in the discourse between those who believed in the superiority of Greek art over Roman, Stuart wrote: "Greece was the great mistress of the Arts, and Rome, in this respect, no more than her disciple, it may be presumed, all the most admired Buildings which adorned her imperial city, were but imitations of Grecian Originals." In ascribing Greek "purity of design" to their independence as a people, Stuart expressed a widely shared sentiment, one that was particularly poignant in Revolutionary France and in America. His characterization of classical Greek culture as "the most distinguished feat of genius and liberty" surely struck a responsive chord in the new American democracy.^v Indeed, it is known that Thomas Jefferson owned a copy of the first volume of the *Antiquities of Athens* and that the Library Company of Philadelphia had one as early as 1770.^{vi}

Knowledge of ancient Greek culture also spread with the publication of Sir William Hamilton's renowned collection of classical Greek vases. A connoisseur and the British plenipotentiary at Naples from 1764 to 1800, Hamilton was in an ideal position to acquire important antiquities fresh from their discovery at various sites in southern Italy. The fame and influence of his vases spread dramatically with the publication, beginning in 1766, of a four-volume folio

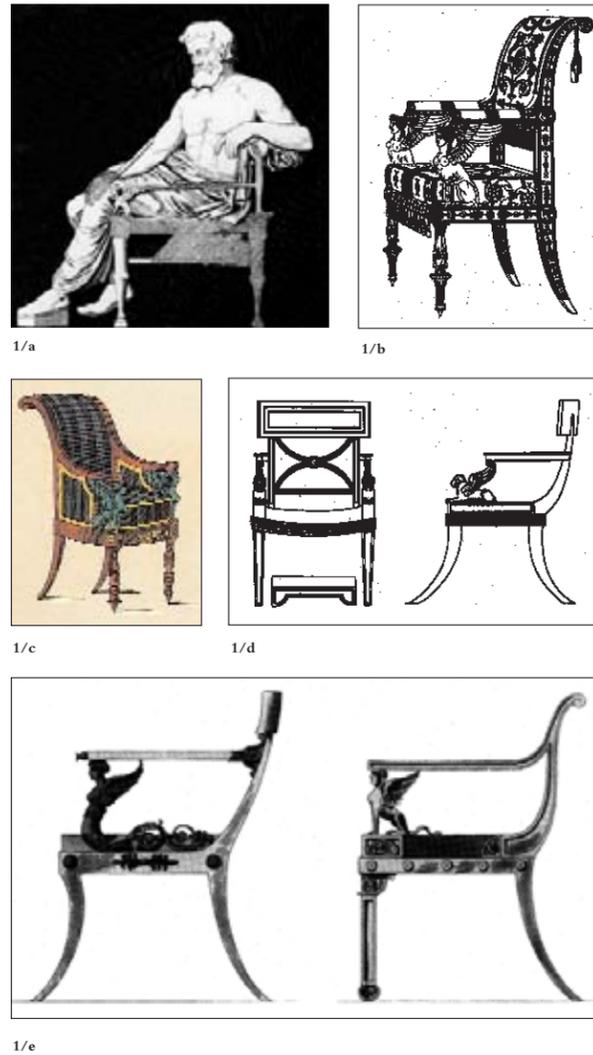


Figure 1. Examples of armchairs with winged supports

a) 'Vulcan seated in an armchair with winged sphinx arm supports,' from the Parthenon frieze. Illustrated in James Stuart and Nicholas Revett, *The Antiquities of Athens*, vol. 2 (London, 1787), pl. 24. The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

b) 'Fauteuil et Siege à deux places, exécutés à Paris pour M. le Ct. de S. en Russie.' Charles Percier and P.-F.-L. Fontaine, *Recueil de décorations intérieures* (Paris, 1801-1812), pl. 29.

c) 'Fauteuils d'Appartement.' Pierre de la Mélangère, pub., *Collection de meubles et objets de goût* (1802-03), pl. 16. Spencer Collection, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

d) 'Arm-chair.' Thomas Hope, *Household Furniture and Interior Decoration* (London, 1807), pl. 11, nos. 3 and 4.

e) 'Drawing Room Chairs in Profile.' George Smith, *Collection of Designs for Household Furniture* (London, 1808), pl. 55.

f) Armchair, bronze-mounted mahogany with carved giltwood caryatid arm supports, made for Baltimore merchant James Bosley, attributed to Charles-Honoré Lannuier, New York, 1815-1819. H: 35½ in. W: 22 in. D: 20½ in. Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore. Bequest of J.B. Noel Wyatt



1/f

illustrating the collection, catalogued by the Baron d'Hancarville.^{vii} Admired by Winckelmann himself, the beautiful representations of the scenes on Hamilton's vases depicted the postures, rituals, dress and belongings of the ancient Greeks and whetted the appetite of Europe's intelligentsia for the classical taste.

Such publications were widely influential with architects and other designers of the period. For instance, Hamilton's publications inspired Josiah Wedgwood's "Etruria" pottery works in Staffordshire, which opened in 1769 and produced ornamental pottery in the classical taste, including copies of several of Hamilton's vases. In turn, highly successful ventures like Wedgwood's promoted widespread enthusiasm for the classical taste at all levels of society. Wedgwood plaques and French copies of them were incorporated into furniture produced for the Queen of France, while Greek, Roman and Egyptian-inspired tableware and vases decorated middle-class homes throughout Europe, Britain and America.^{viii} From the grandest palaces to objects of daily use, the rage for classicism became a cultural phenomenon.

Inspiration Received

As with Wedgwood, by the 1760s architects and designers in Britain and Europe were interpreting and applying to furniture and interior decoration the classical ideas that, by this time, had claimed the attention of creative and intellectual communities throughout Europe. Some, like Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778) and Robert Adam (1728-92) produced both publications of antiquities they had studied closely and their own designs inspired by them. In turn, these publications influenced a broad audience which included cabinetmakers.

From the time of his arrival in Rome in 1740, Piranesi, only twenty years of age, had embarked on a career dedicated to revealing, through prints, the majesty, beauty and superiority of the arts and architecture of the ancient Romans. An expedition to Naples in 1742-43, presumably to visit the recent excavations at Herculaneum, unquestionably influenced much of his later work. His oeuvre, comprising over a thousand published etchings and engravings, was known to scholars, archaeologists, historians, architects, artists and tourists all over Europe and the United States.^{ix} Primarily *Vedute* – views of Rome – Piranesi's prints included illustrations of ruins, architectural fragments, classical monuments and ancient furniture, as well as interiors and furnishings of his own fertile imagination. His *Diverse maniere d'adornare i cammini* (1769), and *Vasi, candelabri, cippi, sarcophagi, tripodi, lucerne, ed ornamenti antichi designati* (1778) were particularly inspirational to furniture designers (fig. 5a-g). Piranesi's influence on French design was reinforced through the efforts of his sons, who republished many prints from the original engravings in Paris after 1789.^x

The Scottish architect Robert Adam's formative visit to Italy from 1754 to 1758 acquainted him with Piranesi and with the antiquities of ancient Rome. In 1757 Adam traveled to the ancient site of the Roman emperor Diocletian's palace in Dalmatia, publishing his detailed observations in a volume of exquisitely produced plates in 1764.^{xi} Adam's experiences abroad were of paramount importance to his work of the 1760s and 1770s, when he garnered numerous commissions to redesign and redecorate some of the most important country houses in England, among them, Osterley Park, Syon House, Kenwood and Kedleston. Adam's deep knowledge of ancient Roman decoration and his deft use of the classical vocabulary, restated in his own elegant style for the modern interior, revolutionized English interior design. Widely known through the publication of his *Works in Architecture*,^{xii} Adam's Neo-Classicism significantly influenced the publications of the English furniture designers George Hepplewhite and Thomas Sheraton. In turn, Hepplewhite's *Cabinetmaker and Upholsterer's Guide* (1788) and Sheraton's *Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer's Drawing-Book* (1791-93), dominated furniture design in the United States between 1788 and 1812.

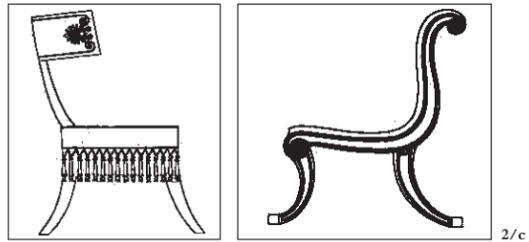
Meanwhile, in France, experiments in applying the new classical lessons – the so-called *goût grec* – began as early as the 1750s. By the late 1760s, a significant group of designers, including Jean-François de Neufforge, Gilles-Paul Cauvet, François-Joseph Bélanger, Jean-Démosthène Dugourc, Jean-Charles Delafosse and Richard de Lalonde were active in promoting a Neo-Classicism that contrasted with the Rococo taste that had characterized French furniture through much of the century. Publications like Neufforge's *Recueil élémentaire d'architecture* and Delafosse's *Nouvelle iconologie historique* were among the earliest to illustrate Neo-Classical furnishings for Parisian cabinetmakers, and these published designs were widely disseminated.^{xiii}

Indeed, classical taste had become an international language. In Paris, a fraternity of German-born cabinetmakers produced French Neo-Classical furniture for Marie Antoinette and other important patrons. *Ébénistes* such as Jean-François Oeben, Jean-Henri Riesener, Adam Weisweiler, J.-F.-J. Scherzinger and Bernard Molitor, along with French colleagues such as Georges Jacob, were proponents of the *goût grec* and the subsequent Pompeian-inspired style, the so-called *style étrusque*. Perhaps no better reflection of the international ascendancy of classical taste in the third quarter of the 18th century can be found than in two celebrated secretary-desks by David Roentgen, renowned cabinetmaker to the Paris elite. Working in the German hamlet of Neuvied for his entire career, Roentgen produced the first desk in 1779 for Marie Antoinette as a diplomatic gift for Pope Pius VI. The second, made in 1786, was the desk on which the Louisiana Purchase was signed at Malmaison in 1803.^{xiv}



2/a

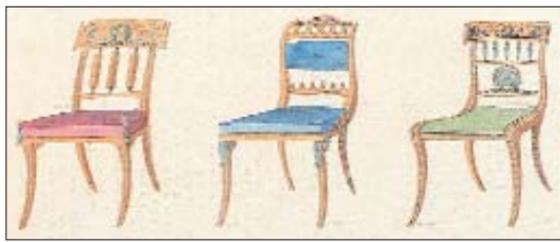
2/b



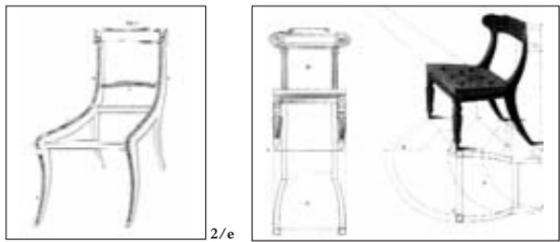
2/c



2/d



2/f



2/e

2/g



2/h



2/i

Figure 2 Examples of *klismos* chairs

a) Woman seated on a *klismos* chair from a Roman wall painting. Accademia Ercolanese, *Le antichità di Ercolano esposte*, vol. 2 (Naples, 1760), 53. The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

b) Woman seated on a *klismos* chair from a carved relief. Anne Claude Philippe de Tubières, Comte de Caylus, *Recueil d'antiquités égyptiennes, étrusques, grecques, romaines et gauloises*, vol. 7 (Paris, 1767), pl. 38. The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

c) 'Side View of a Chair.' Thomas Hope, *Household Furniture and Interior Decoration* (London, 1807), pl. 25, no. 4 and pl. 40, no. 6.

d) 'Parlor Chairs.' George Smith, *A Collection of Designs for Household Furniture* (London, 1808), pls. 39 and 40.

e) Side chair. *London Chairmakers' and Carvers' Price Book*, Supplement (London, 1808), pl. 10. The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

f) 'Parlour Chairs.' Rudolph Ackermann, pub., *Repository of Arts*, series 1, vol. 12 (October 1814), pl. 18. Courtesy, The Winterthur Library: Printed Book and Periodical Collection

g) 'Dining Chair.' Richard Brown, *Rudiments of Drawing Cabinet and Upholstery Furniture* (London, 1820), pl. 6

h) Painted klismos chair, part of a suite designed by Benjamin Henry Latrobe (1764-1820) for William Waln, attributed to Thomas Wetherill, painted decoration attributed to George Bridport, Philadelphia, c.1808-10. H: 34½ in. W: 19½ in. D: 19¾ in. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of Marie Josephine Rozet and Rebecca Mandeville Rozet Hunt

i) Carved mahogany side chair, attributed to Duncan Phyfe, New York, c.1812. H: 32 in. D: 18 in. Private collection; photo courtesy Carswell Rush Berlin, Inc.

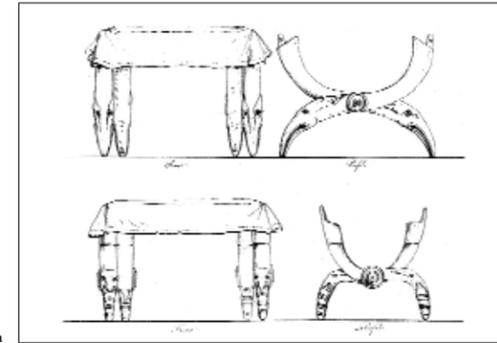
Political Correctness: A Change in Style

The second half of the 1780s brought a change to furniture styles in France, with important consequences for English and American furniture. This change is often described as a shift toward more "archaeologically correct" furniture forms, in that furniture designers began to look to actual examples of ancient furniture for their inspiration, rather than applying classical detail to existing furniture forms.

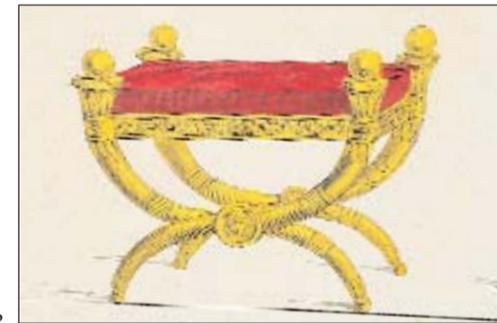
Forms like the *klismos*, modeled on ancient furniture prototypes, became popular for the first time, although for decades artists and designers had access to information about such antiquities for their inspiration. For instance, in 1760, *Le antichità di Ercolano* had illustrated two images from Roman wall paintings of women seated in *klismos* chairs of exaggerated form (fig. 2a).^{xv} Shortly afterward, in 1767, the Comte de Caylus's *Recueil* published a more recognizable *klismos*, as depicted on a relief (fig. 2b).^{xvi}

In France, the new interest in ancient furniture forms was certainly the result of several converging factors. Chief among them was the prevailing political climate in revolutionary Paris, which prompted a desire to live as the most admired republican Romans and democratic Greeks had, and later, to distance oneself stylistically from the court and the *status quo ante*. Thus, because the "new" archaeological source material had been known, by this time, for twenty-five years, it could be argued that the shift in furniture styles betokened a political rather than archaeological correctness, or at least, that they went hand in glove.

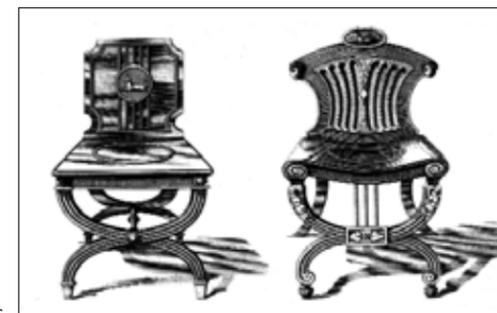
The political symbolism of this furniture was demonstrated early on by the painter Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825) who emerged at the Paris Salon of 1785, exhibiting his powerful painting, *The Oath of the Horatii*, to a society eager to receive its clear message of good citizenship. Collaborating with the cabinetmaker Georges Jacob,



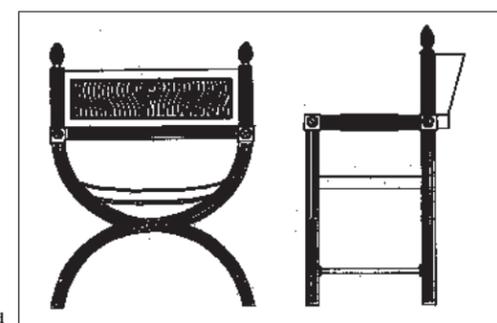
3/a



3/b



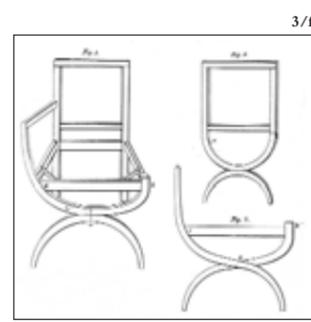
3/c



3/d



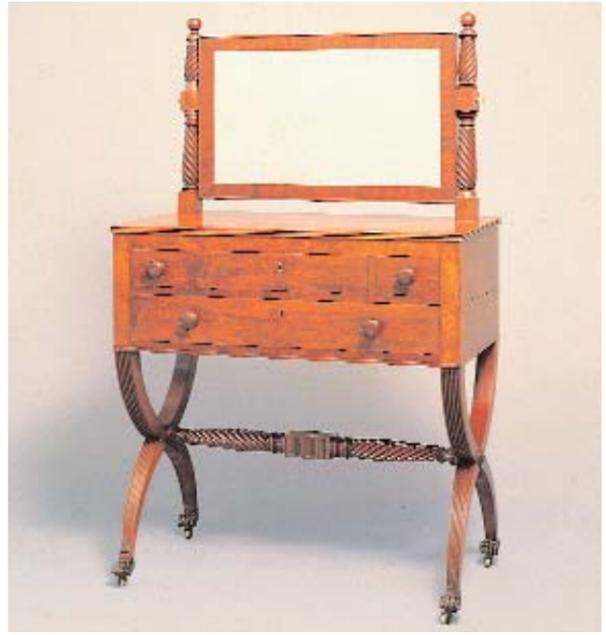
3/e



3/f



3/g



3/h

Figure 3 Examples of curule-base furniture

a) 'Sella curulis, Antique seats executed in bronze from the collection in the museum at Portici belonging to the King of Naples.' Charles Heathcote Tatham, *Examples of Ancient Ornamental Architecture* (London, 1799). Courtesy, The Winterthur Library: Printed Book and Periodical Collection

b) 'Tabouret Couvert en velours.' Pierre de la Mésangère, pub., *Collection de meubles et objets de goût* (Paris, 1807), pl. 264. Spencer Collection, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

c) 'Hall Chairs and Drawing Room Chairs.' Thomas Sheraton, *Cabinet Dictionary* (London, 1803), pls. 47 and 53.

d) 'Arm-chair, after the manner of the Ancient Curule Chairs.' Thomas Hope, *Household Furniture and Interior Decoration* (London, 1807), pl. 20, nos. 3 and 4 and pl. 29, nos. 1 and 2.

e) 'Drawing Room X Seats.' George Smith, *Collection of Designs for Household Furniture* (London, 1808), pl. 53.

f) Curule armchair. *London Chairmakers' and Carvers' Price Book*, Supplement (London, 1808), pl. 3. The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

g) Curule sofa, carved mahogany and brass, made for Nathaniel Prime, attributed to Duncan Phyfe, New York, c.1812. Courtesy of Boscobel Restoration, Inc., Garrison, NY.

h) Curule-base dressing bureau, carved mahogany, New York, c. 1812. H: 58 in. W: 36½ in. D: 18½ in. Courtesy Carswell Rush Berlin, Inc.

David, who had, himself, visited Rome in search of the antique a decade earlier, designed furniture closely based on antique forms to use as models for paintings designed to deliver a republican message. Paintings using this furniture such as the *Return of Brutus, Paris and Helen, The Lictors Bring Back to Brutus the Bodies of His Sons* and, later the famous portrait of Madame Recamier, received tremendous exposure.^{xvii}

The return to Paris from Rome in the early 1790s of the architects Charles Percier (1764–1838) and Pierre-François-Léonard Fontaine (1762–1853) also brought a fresh archaeological perspective to a moment of political ferment. Producing designs for the cabinetmaker Jacob, and later for Napoleon Bonaparte, Percier and Fontaine published illustrations of their interiors and furniture from 1801 through 1812, issuing them in a bound volume, the *Recueil de décorations intérieures* in 1812 (figs. 1b, 4b, 6b–c). Their clear, refined and comprehensive vision of interior design defined the style of the Consulat and Empire periods and cast a long shadow over the rest of the 19th century in France.

Percier and Fontaine's designs also had a profound impact on England's most influential designers of the Regency and George IV periods, Thomas Hope and George Smith, and influenced American cabinetmakers, particularly in New York (fig. 1b). The new antique style of David, Percier and Fontaine and others was also advanced in England by the Prince of Wales (the future George IV), who had a passion for French furniture. Through Paris agents, the Prince acquired many pieces of French furniture for his London palace, Carlton House. Inspired by these, the Prince's architect, Henry Holland (1745–1806), who had, himself, lived in Paris from 1784 to 1789, produced furniture designs in the new French manner for Carlton House and Samuel Whitbread's Southill.

In 1793, Thomas Sheraton, whose *Drawing-Book* was published the same year, visited Southill. The new fashions made a deep impression on him, which bore fruit in designs published in his *Cabinet Dictionary* of 1803 and *Encyclopedia* of 1804 to 1806.^{xviii} Sheraton's publications popularized the new classicism, reaching broad audiences in England, the United States and elsewhere (fig. 3c). Not only are there numerous examples of English and American furniture based on designs in both publications, but the *Drawing-Book* was published in Germany within a year of its London debut, a further indication of the international appeal of the classical style.

The influence of Charles Heathcote Tatham (1772–1842) cannot be overlooked in the story of the spread of classicism from the ancient world to America. A young architect on Henry Holland's staff, Tatham was sent to Rome to record items of archaeological interest. Antiquities that Tatham illustrated in his 1799 book, *Examples of Ancient Ornamental Architecture*,^{xix} recur again and again as sources of inspiration for both published furniture designs and pieces of furniture made in England and America (figs. 4a–i). While many of the objects that Tatham illustrated had already been published in *Le antichità*, in Piranesi's prints, or in the Comte de Caylus's *Recueil*, the fresh inspiration of Tatham's work affected Holland's and many other designers' work at the time. Tatham's publication continued to inspire English furniture designers for at least the next fifty years: his book was reissued in 1803, 1810, 1826 and 1843.^{xx}

Like Tatham, Thomas Hope, one of the most influential and archaeologically rigorous English designers of the period, visited ancient sites. Having seen Paris, Rome, Greece and the Near East on his Grand Tour, Hope (1769–1831), the scion of a Scottish banking family, returned home to "improve" the taste of his countrymen by opening his redecorated London house, designed to display his collection of Greek vases and other antiquities, to members of the Royal Academy. In 1807 Hope published illustrations of his rooms in *Household Furniture and Interior Decoration*, praising Charles Percier's work as a model for his own. Hope's publication represented the ultimate refinement in the movement towards what is thought of as

"Grecian" archaeological correctness. While his work is based as much on Roman models as Greek, the designs are infused with a Grecian sensibility, what Winckelmann famously described as "noble simplicity and calm grandeur," and what Hope called "solid and permanent grandeur."^{xxi} The grandness, simplicity and severity of Hope's designs inspired later popularizers, in particular George Smith (figs. 1d–e, 5c–d). Several pieces of American furniture have been found to reflect Hope's designs almost exactly.^{xxii}

The Popularizers

The first thirty years of the 19th century saw the publication of a flood of furniture design or pattern books that were heavily used by cabinetmakers in the United States. Predominantly English, these books included George Smith's 1808 and 1826 volumes, *A Collection of Designs for Household Furniture and The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer's Guide*; James Barron's 1814 *Modern and Elegant Designs of Cabinet and Upholstery Furniture*; Richard Brown's 1820 *Rudiments of Drawing Cabinet and Upholstery Furniture*; Peter and Michael Angelo Nicholson's 1826 *The Practical Cabinet-Maker, Upholsterer, and Complete Decorator*; and Thomas King's 1829 *Modern Style of Cabinet Work Exemplified*.

Also of considerable influence in the United States was a monthly intelligencer called *The Repository of Arts*, published in London by Rudolph Ackermann between 1809 and 1828. Each issue illustrated one or two plates of the most fashionable furniture, drawn from designs by a host of distinguished designers and cabinetmaking firms, including George Smith, George Bullock, John Papworth and John Taylor. Many of the examples of classical furniture illustrated in the *Repository* were inspired by designs by Percier and Fontaine, Thomas Sheraton or Thomas Hope, and rarely represented a wholly original conception, but added variations and distinctive embellishments to current ideas.^{xxiii} Ackermann's *Repository* was particularly popular as a source of inspiration for cabinetmakers in Philadelphia and Boston.

In Paris, Pierre de la Mésangère's *Collection de meubles et objets de goût*, published serially from 1802 to 1830, played much the same role as Ackermann's *Repository* in England, popularizing current fashionable designs. Its influence in the United States can be seen most in New York, where French style seems to have enjoyed the greatest vogue, particularly after the War of 1812.

A final link in the chain of published material connecting the United States to international style was price books. Price books, similar to union contracts, were published periodically in London and Edinburgh arbitrating agreements between journeymen and their employers regarding the value placed on the labor for each component part of a piece of furniture. This necessitated a detailed description of each piece and how it was made. Price books broke no new ground, reflecting only styles that were already in production, but they illustrated components and complete furniture forms allowing American cabinetmakers to stay in step with international trends.

Almost all of these publications reached the United States shortly after their issue and their use can be clearly documented by many examples of furniture that relate unmistakably to the designs. In fact, contrary to the impression one might derive from the existing literature on American furniture, it is hard to find a piece that does not rely in some way on these published sources. Yet American furniture was no more derivative than the work of cabinetmakers in England, France, Germany and elsewhere who were drawing from the same Greek, Roman and Egyptian source material and its interpreters. Asserting with certainty the inspiration for a work of art almost two hundred years old without a declaration of intent by the artist himself is not without risk of contradiction, particularly given the avalanche of published source material, which in many cases was drawn from the same archaeological object. The value of the exercise is to help date American examples and the fashion trends that they repre-



Figure 4 Examples based on bench form with scrolled legs with paws

a) 'Antique Seat in Parian Marble in a Chapel Near Rome.' Charles Heathcote Tatham, *Examples of Ancient Ornamental Architecture* (London, 1799). Courtesy, The Winterthur Library: Printed Book and Periodical Collection

b) 'Face et profil d'une Table exécutée par les frères Jacob.' Charles Percier and P.-F.-L. Fontaine, *Recueil de décorations intérieures* (Paris, 1801–1812), pl. 16. nos. 5 & 6.

c) 'End of a Table.' Thomas Hope, *Household Furniture and Interior Decoration* (London, 1807), pl. 12, no. 6.

d) 'Hall seats for Recesses.' George Smith, *Collection of Designs for Household Furniture* (London, 1808), pl. 34.

e) Carved mahogany footstools, Boston, c. 1835. H: 15½ in. W: 18 in. D: 13¼ in. Courtesy of Carswell Rush Berlin, Inc.

f) 'Scroll Supports, designed for gilding, and intended for Slabs.' Thomas King, *Modern Style of Cabinet Work Exemplified* (London, 1829), pl. 3.

g) Carved mahogany marble-top pier table (one of a pair), Boston or Salem, c. 1830–1835. H: 35¼ in. W: 44½ in. D: 20 in. Courtesy of Carswell Rush Berlin, Inc.

h) Design for a pier table. Pierre de la Mésangère, pub., *Collection de meubles et objets de goût* (Paris, 1825–27).

i) Marble-top mahogany pier table in the Restauration taste, workshop of Duncan Phyfe, New York, 1835–40. H: 35¼ in. W: 42¼ in. D: 18¼ in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Edgar J. Kaufmann Charitable Foundation Fund, 68.201

sent, to understand the route that ideas took from Herculaneum to the Hudson and to better appreciate the benefits of the creative process of cross-pollination and the genius of the artisans involved.

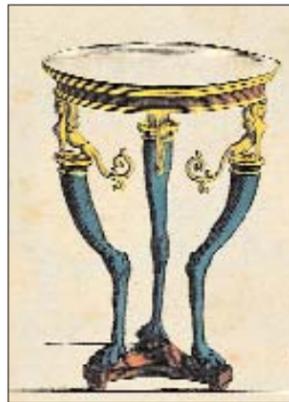
American Classical Furniture

It is this very explosion of creativity and the multiple sources of design evoking romantic associations with the past which may be the cause for persistent confusion regarding even the terminology and dates of the period now referred to as "Classical." Federal, Late Federal, Regency, Empire, Duncan Phyfe, Pillar and Scroll, and even Victorian, have been applied and misapplied to all or parts of the nearly sixty-year period during which Classical furniture was made in America. Scholars generally agree that classical taste dominated American furniture design from about 1788 to 1845 and that the period can be divided in two parts stylistically: Federal and Classical. Another source of confusion, however, is that these two related but fundamentally different styles co-existed for twenty years, 1805–1825, in the middle of the period. Terminology that refers to periods of time, therefore, cannot adequately define styles and vice versa. As such, the currently accepted American term "Federal" is somewhat problematic.

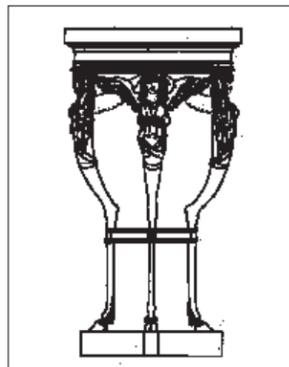
The Federal, from approximately 1788 to about the War of 1812, corresponds to the formative years of the nation. In a broader sense, Federal furniture is Neo-Classical, relating to French furniture of the Louis XVI period, as well as to the English style associated with Robert Adam in the 1760s and 1770s. Made principally of mahogany



5/a



5/b



5/c



5/d



5/e



5/f



5/g

Figure 5 Examples of tables with hocked animal legs

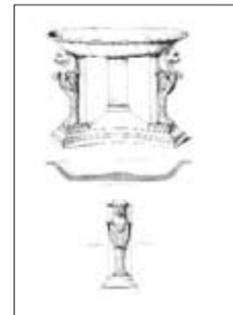
- a) **Antique bronze tripod in the Royal Museum at Portici,** Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *Vasi, candelabri, cippi, sarcophagi, tripod, lucerne, ed ornamenti antichidesignati* (1778), pl. 44.
- b) **'Gueridons.'** Pierre de la Mélangère, pub., *Collection de meubles et objets de goût* (Paris, 1802), pl. 18. Spencer Collection, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations
- c) **Design for a tripod table.** Thomas Hope, *Household Furniture and Interior Decoration* (London, 1807), pl. 22.
- d) **'Work Tables.'** George Smith, *A Collection of Designs for Household Furniture* (London, 1808), pl. 76.
- e) **Small center table (guéridon),** carved mahogany with bronze and marble top, Charles-Honoré Lannuier, New York, c.1810. The White House, Washington, D.C. Gift of Mr. & Mrs. C. Douglas Dillon (961.33.2)
- f) **'Dejune Tables, in the Chinese style.'** George Smith, *A Collection of Designs for Household Furniture* (London, 1808), pl. 81.
- g) **Restoration guéridon,** in carved mahogany with octagonal scagliola marble top, Boston, c.1830. H: 31 in. Dia: 22". Courtesy Carswell Rush Berlin, Inc.

and mahogany veneers, American Federal furniture is chaste and refined. Contrasting with the Rococo forms of the furniture that preceded it, it is often rectilinear, conforming to a strict and tight geometry; its curves, where they occur, are sweeping, or elliptical, and regular, rather than organic and asymmetrical. The style is characterized by case pieces with French splayed feet and other forms with delicate, straight, squared tapering legs and later, fine turned and reeded legs. Furniture of this period reflects the designs of George Hepplewhite, and many American pieces draw on his *Cabinetmaker and Upholsterer's Guide* of 1788. After 1795, the influence of designs published by Thomas Sheraton in his *Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer's Drawing-Book* is also obvious in America.

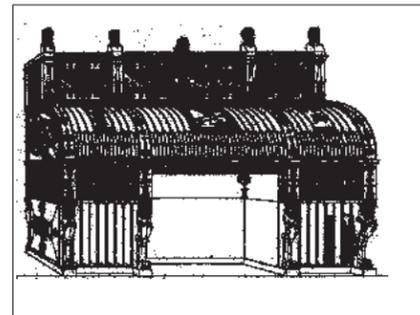
The emergence of the "Classical" American furniture with which we are most concerned coincided largely with the War of 1812, when anti-English sentiment ran high and the French "archaeological" style came into fashion in the United States. The term "Classical" is useful, in that it embodies both the Greek and Roman prototypes that informed furniture of this period. The Classical period has three discernible stylistic phases. The first, when American Federal furniture begins to change perceptibly, is analogous to the French shift, prior to the French Revolution, from Neo-Classicism to furniture forms found in antiquity and to the corresponding changes in English furniture at the turn of the century. While avant-garde examples of "Grecian" style furniture had been produced in the United States as early as 1805, the emergence of Classical American furniture – which can be defined as when the influence of Sheraton's later publications, his *Dictionary* and *Encyclopaedia*, became widespread in the United States – is most obvious just before the war. The late-Sheraton style corresponds with the Regency period in England; in America it is most associated with the prominent Scottish-born cabinetmaker Duncan Phyfe, whose name is frequently used to describe it, although he did not invent the style or make most of the furniture ascribed to him. In fact, over his fifty-year career, Phyfe's firm made superior furniture in all of the fashionable styles of the early 19th century.

In addition to Sheraton's books of designs, other publications that illustrated antique-inspired furniture were also available in the United States.

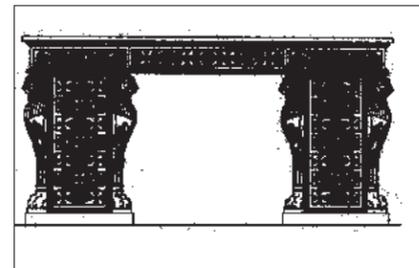
A copy of Thomas Hope's *Household Furniture* is documented in the Library Company of Philadelphia by 1813 and a labeled sideboard by the Philadelphia firm Cook and Parkin attests to its use.^{xxiv} An arm-chair by the New York firm of John and Thomas Constantine is nearly identical to one illustrated in Hope's book, showing that it was



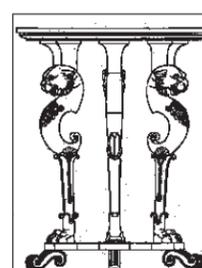
6/a



6/b



6/c



6/d



6/e



6/f



6/g

Figure 6 Examples of furniture with lion monopodia

- a) **'Grand antique Tripod of verd-antique marble from the Collection in the Museum of the Vatican.'** Charles Heathcote Tatham, *Examples of Ancient Ornamental Architecture* (London, 1799). Courtesy, The Winterthur Library: Printed Book and Periodical Collection
- b) **'Secrétaire à Cylindre exécuté à Paris pour Mr. H....'** Charles Percier and P.-F.-L. Fontaine, *Recueil de décorations Intérieures* (Paris, 1801-1812), pl. 32.
- c) **'Bureau exécuté à Paris pour Mr. V.'** Charles Percier and P.-F.-L. Fontaine, *Recueil de décorations Intérieures* (Paris, 1801-1812), pl. 38.
- d) **'Tripod table, in mahogany and gold.'** Thomas Hope, *Household Furniture and Interior Decoration* (London, 1807), pl. 32.
- e) **'Tripod and Stand.'** Peter and Michael Angelo Nicholson, *Practical Cabinet-Maker* (London, 1826).
- f) **Secretary bookcase,** allegedly once owned by President Andrew Jackson, carved mahogany and satinwood, Philadelphia or Baltimore, c.1825-35. H: 77 in. D: 25 1/4 in. Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village, Dearborn, MI.
- g) **Pier table,** bronze-mounted rosewood veneers with carved giltwood and verd-antique decorated monopodium, attributed to Duncan Phyfe, New York, c.1815-20. Private Collection

used in New York as well.^{xxv} The Paris-trained New York cabinet-maker, Charles-Honoré Lannuier, quickly responded to the changing fashion, by forcefully expressing his French vocabulary in furniture closely relating to designs in Pierre de la Mélangère's *Collection de meubles*. His competitors followed suit.

This phase of fashion is characterized by the introduction of zoomorphic and anthropomorphic features such as elaborately carved animal paw feet, supports in the form of dolphins, swans, caryatids, griffins, eagles and lion monopodia (figs. 6f-g). Typical also were *klismos* and *klismos*-inspired chairs, with swept-back "saber" legs (figs. 2h-i) and tables with pedestal or columnar supports closely related to Roman candelabra forms, such as those published by Piranesi. Various and imaginative uses of the curule form, the recurved x-form based on ancient folding stools, also typifies furniture of this period (figs. 3g-h). Moreover, every manner of classical Greek and Roman iconographical or architectural motif was widely employed, including lyres, fasces, lion masks, acanthus leaves, urns and anthemia. Mahogany remained the wood of choice for most formal furniture. Imported brass and gilt-bronze were used in delicate appliqué with classical motifs and also as column capitals. Gilt and verd-antique carved elements – in imitation of patinated bronze – accented high-style pieces (fig. 6g). Painted furniture was also in vogue; in Baltimore, the Finlay brothers took it to a high art, employing a lexicon of classical symbolism on plain color and faux-rosewood surfaces.

The second stage of American Classical furniture, beginning about 1818, was heavily influenced by French *Empire* style. This style saw the continuation of many features of the previous phase, but forms became more robustly architectonic, with freestanding columns and pilasters frequently adorning case pieces. Expanses of highly figured mahogany veneer were increasingly important for their decorative effect, while rosewood was used more and more for the best pieces of parlor furniture. Carving became deeper and more robust. Decorative gilt stenciling with sophisticated penwork was extensively used in New York and Philadelphia.

By the late 1820s the influence of French *Restoration* style began to affect American cabinetmakers. This marks the third and final phase of American Classical furniture. Known to Americans of the period as Grecian, Plain Style or Modern furniture, and referred to by early 20th century collectors as American Empire or Pillar and

Scroll, this furniture is characterized by bold, but less severe contours, with curving or scrolled legs, and rounded corners (fig. 4h-i). The best New York furniture of this period notably lacks carving, while in Philadelphia and Boston, deeply and elaborately carved anthemion and lotus leaves remained popular motifs (fig. 4g). By this date, brass and bronze mounts were seldom used, the figure of the wood veneers on flat undulating surfaces becoming the principle decorative device. The Classical period came to a close by 1845 when a series of revival styles including Elizabethan, Gothic and Rococo came into favor.^{xxvi}

Lacking royal and aristocratic patronage, American cabinetmakers had to adapt the classical style to the needs of a democratic populace of merchants, professionals and landowners – for houses on a different scale and tastes different than their European counterparts. Yet, that the prototype of the Bosley armchairs is on the frieze of the Parthenon, or that the type of chair Benjamin Henry Latrobe designed for William Walm of Philadelphia in 1807 is depicted on wall paintings found at Herculaneum (figs. 2a & 2h) and countless Greek vases, belies the argument that American furniture constitutes provincial copies of London or Paris originals. Furthermore, these examples, and many others like them, connect American furniture not just to an international style dating to the middle of the previous century, but to a design tradition still considered today as one against which all others must be judged. Indeed, as Johann Winckelmann argued, “The study of nature must be, at best, a longer and more difficult way to gain knowledge of perfect beauty than the study of antiquity.”^{xxvii}

It is said that there is nothing new under the sun. What is new, perhaps, is the way in which old ideas are reinterpreted and reapplied in endlessly fresh and creative ways by artists, architects, designers and cabinetmakers. It is this process that will continue to fascinate and delight lovers of art for as long as artists find inspiration in the creativity of others. And it is in this context that the evolution of classicism can be viewed and that American furniture design of the early 19th century can be understood.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank Bruce Laverty, of the Philadelphia Athenaeum; Eleanor Thompson of the Winterthur Library; Elizabeth and Stuart Feld; staff at the Bard Graduate Center Library; and Heather Jane McCormick for assistance and advice in all aspects of this project.

NOTES

- i Accademia Ercolanese, *Le antichità di Ercolano esposte*, 8 vols. (Naples, 1757–92).
- ii George Smith, *A Collection of Designs for Household Furniture and Interior Decoration* (London: J. Taylor, 1808). Smith’s plates 75 and 82 relate to illustrations in the fourth volume of *Le antichità*, pages 85 and 277 respectively. John Morley has also observed George Smith’s close reliance on a reprint of this publication. John Morley, *Regency Design, 1790-1840: Gardens, Buildings, Interiors, Furniture* (London: Zwemmer, 1993), 388.
- iii Anne Claude Philippe de Tubières, Comte de Caylus, *Recueil d’antiquités égyptiennes, étrusques, grecques, romaines et gauloises*, 7 vols. (Paris, 1752–67).
- iv Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerey und Bildhauerkunst* (Dresden, 1755).
- v James Stuart and Nicholas Revett, *The Antiquities of Athens*, vol. 1 (London, 1762).
- vi Talbot Hamlin, *Greek Revival Architecture in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), 339.
- vii P. F. Hugues [P.-F.-H. d’Hancarville], *The Collection of Etruscan, Greek and Roman Antiquities, from the Cabinet of the Honble. Wm. Hamilton*, 4 vols. (Naples, 1766–76).
- viii Patricia Lemonnier, *Weisweiler*, intro. by Maurice Segoura (Paris: Editions d’art Monelle Hayot, 1983).
- ix In 1788, William Short, Thomas Jefferson’s protégé and private secretary during Jefferson’s term as minister to France, embarked on his Grand Tour visiting Piranesi in Rome and acquiring from him views of Paestum which can be seen in the background in his por-

trait painted in Philadelphia by Rembrandt Peale, c. 1802 (Muscarella Museum of Art, College of William and Mary in Virginia). In fact, Short never visited Paestum. The author thanks Jonathan Greenberg for this information.

- x Luigi Ficacci, *Piranesi: The Complete Etchings* (Köln: Taschen, 2000), 9–49.
- xi Robert Adam, *The Ruins of the Palace of the Emperor Diocletian at Spalatro in Dalmatia* (London, 1764).
- xii Robert Adam and James Adam, *The Works in Architecture of Robert and James Adam*, vols. 1–2 (London, 1773–8); vol. 3 (London, 1822).
- xiii Jean-François de Neufforge, *Recueil élémentaire d’architecture*, 10 vols. (Paris, 1757–68 and 1772–80); Jean-Charles Delafosse, *Nouvelle iconologie historique*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1768–1785).
- xiv Hans Huth, *Roentgen Furniture: Abraham and David Roentgen, European Cabinet-Makers* (London and New York: Sotheby Parke Bernet, 1974), pls. 55 and 64.
- xv Accademia Ercolanese, *Le antichità*, vol. 2 (Naples, 1760), 13, 53.
- xvi Comte de Caylus, *Recueil d’antiquités*, vol. 7 (Paris, 1767), pl. 38.
- xvii Clifford Musgrave, *Regency Furniture, 1800-1830* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1961), 34.
- xxviii Thomas Sheraton, *The Cabinet Dictionary* (London, 1803); Thomas Sheraton, *The Cabinet-Maker, Upholsterer, and General Artist’s Encyclopaedia* (London, 1804–6). Musgrave, 31.
- xix Charles Heathcote Tatham, *Etchings of Ancient Ornamental Architecture Drawn from the Originals in Rome and Other Parts of Italy during the Years 1794, 1795 and 1796* (London, 1799).
- xx Musgrave, 35.
- xxi Thomas Hope, *Household Furniture and Interior Decoration Executed from Designs by Thomas Hope* (London, 1807), 6.
- xxii A sideboard by Cook & Parkin at the Baltimore Museum of Art and an armchair by John and Thomas Constantine at Winterthur Museum (see note xxiv and xxv).
- xxiii Pauline Agius, *Ackermann’s Regency Furniture and Interiors*, intro. by Stephen Jones (Ramsbury, Wiltshire: Crowood Press, 1984), 11–16.
- xxiv Phillip M. Johnston, “A Checklist of Books Relating to Architecture and the Decorative Arts Available in Philadelphia in the Three Decades Following 1780,” Master’s thesis, University of Delaware, 1974. Johnston’s outstanding work documents the dates when most of these books were recorded in public or known private libraries in Philadelphia. Unfortunately, a similar study has not been conducted in New York, Boston, Salem or Baltimore. Wendy A. Cooper, *Classical Taste in America, 1800-1840* (New York, London and Paris: Baltimore Museum of Art and Abbeville Press, 1993), 56–57.
- xxv Henry Francis Du Pont Museum, Winterthur, 98.9.
- xxvi It is easy to find exceptions to these broad guidelines because design publications were not the only means by which ideas crossed the Atlantic, nor the only arbiter of designs that were actually produced. Emigration patterns affected the taste of regional populations, and the background and training of the cabinetmakers influenced the furniture they made. For example, the arrival of Charles-Honoré Lannuier in New York in 1802 no doubt helped push New York more quickly along the road to French fashion than other cities, although English taste co-existed there with French “Grecian” and *Empire* furniture. London-trained architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe’s work in Philadelphia advanced the “Grecian” style there as early as 1798. Meanwhile, conservative anglophile New Englanders favored English-style furniture until well into the 1820s, flirting only coyly and much later with the gilt- and bronze-mounted furniture fashionable in New York. Courtly French-style furniture, including a set of Louis XVI-style gilded armchairs, was made in Philadelphia in the first decade of the 19th century and continued to be produced as late as 1833 by Joseph Barry. As Charles Venable has pointed out, the arrival of a flood of German furniture craftsmen in Philadelphia in the late 1820s brought designs and construction details not seen in Boston or New York. And, of course, prominent and influential American ministers to France such as Thomas Jefferson and his protégé, Robert R. Livingston, brought home French ideas and French furniture. Others imported English furniture. Charles Venable, “Germanic Craftsmen and Furniture Design in Philadelphia, 1820–1850,” in Luke Beckerdite, ed., *American Furniture* (1998): 41–80.
- xxvii Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture*, trans. by Elfriede Heyer and Roger C. Norton (1755; La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1987), 19.