

Some New Aspects of Georges Frédéric Parrot's Visions about the Institutional and Architectural Establishment of the University of Tartu in the Early 19th Century

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Abstract: *High regard for the beneficial and transformational aspects of education with a modern curriculum where science would have a leading role constituted a major part of the Enlightenment ideology. The article observes several similarities in the visions of education and architecture of Georges Frédéric Parrot, the first rector of the University of Tartu (historically University of Dorpat), Estonia and those of Thomas Jefferson at the University of Virginia, U.S.*

Georges Frédéric Parrot worked out the principles of the University statute, essentially differing from those of other universities in the Russian Empire. The University statute demonstrated a radical change in the sphere of academic education with a goal of establishing modern university autonomy or so-called 'scholarly republic', non-existent in this part of Europe at that time.

It was the American Thomas Jefferson, who first worded a similar conception of academic freedom and for all strata of the population equal opportunities to receive education. Both, Thomas Jefferson and Georges Frédéric Parrot emphasized the importance of natural science and medicine in university programs as well as the method of raising of the students' morals through their academic environment. The architectural concept of the Universities of Tartu and Virginia, built during the same period, reflects the messages of the Enlightenment era, those of secularization, humanity and intellectual freedom. In both cases the idea to build the University Churches was abandoned, however the main buildings were erected as Temples of Humanity. Likewise, the universities of Virginia and Tartu were under

the protection of Minerva, this being also reflected in the symbols of the universities. Georges Frédéric Parrot's and Thomas Jefferson's activities serve as a splendid illustration of the potential power of Enlightenment educational ideas to yield similar results while widely separated by space.

Keywords: *academic education, Enlightenment, Georges Frédéric Parrot, Republic of Letters, Statute of the University of Tartu, the Enlightenment, Thomas Jefferson, university architecture, University of Virginia*

High regard for the beneficial and transformational aspects of education with a modern curriculum where science would have a leading role constituted a major part of Enlightenment ideology. The Baconian ideal of collective scientific research and its application to the useful purposes of life is another fundamental pillar of Enlightenment thought, and fits naturally into a programme of progressive education.

The initial idea to reopen the University of Tartu and to launch the building process dates back to 1799 during the rule of Russian Emperor Paul I. However, the Emperor soon changed his mind, influenced by the Curonian nobility, and decided in favour of *Academia Petrina* in Mitau (Jelgava in Latvia). But then Alexander I ascended to the throne and decided to open the University in Tartu. The two decades from the beginning of the 19th century were the period of active construction both in the downtown area as well as on Toome Hill. It is not accidental that this period also coincides with the rule of Emperor Alexander I during 1801–1825 because his first governing period from 1801 to the Patriotic War of 1812 is known as a liberal pre-reformation era. During this time modernized ministries commenced working, and several social reforms were adopted in the spirit of the Enlightenment, such as the new regulation on education institutions. In addition, the peasants of Livonia and Estonia were liberated from servitude, construction work based on model façades and designs was launched in the towns of the Russian Empire, etc. Based on the new school reform, the University of Tartu became the centre of the Tartu's "educational circuit", and, in addition to the university, two upper secondary schools – district and provincial – were set up here (*Polnoe Sobranie...*, 1802–1803; 1804–1805).

Georges Frédéric Parrot, a physics professor of French origin, was elected the first rector of the University of Tartu. He had arrived in Livonia in 1795 to work as a tutor and immediately joined the Common Welfare and Economic Society of

Livonia (*Livländische Gemeinnützige und Ökonomische Sozietät*). In 1800, during the troubled times in connection with the transfer of the University to Mitau, Parrot sent a circular letter to members of the Common Welfare and Economic Society of Livonia and the University Board of Trustees (*Curatorium*) with a proposal to move the Society from Riga to Tartu, where, together with the university, it would be expedient to establish a joint Livonian Academy (EAA 1185, p. 17). Parrot envisaged the merger of the Common Welfare and Economic Society of Livonia and the university as a new scientific centre, where studies and scientific work would complement each other and, in addition, the focus would also be on the application of scientific discoveries to social needs. In his circular letter, Parrot stressed that the establishment of the Livonian Academy in Tartu would advance this place as a centre of domestic learning to facilitate the consolidation of the free and independent scientific spirit. Scholars from every field of life would be represented here. Likewise, it could be possible to establish a joint scientific library in Tartu, obtain equipment for research in physics, chemistry and mechanics; and compile collections of natural sciences and arts (EAA 1185, p. 18).

In the 18th century, the Enlightenment movement paid special attention to the improvement of the living conditions of all social strata in towns as well as in the country. To promote the application of these ideas, the Chair of Economics, Technology, Forestry and Architecture was established at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University. Among the goals of this research is to present an overview of the programme and activity of the Chair, held initially by Professor Johann Wilhelm Krause.

The events preceding and following the reopening of the University of Tartu reflected a strenuous struggle between different worldviews and ideologies. The Baltic German nobility, on the one hand, forming the membership of the University Board of Trustees (*Curatorium*), had an aim of achieving the status of *Baltische Landesuniversität*. The first Rector, Professor Parrot, opposed the University Board of Trustees whose members denied peasants' sons admission to the university and wished to control the activities of the academic staff (Tamul, 1998, pp. 74–79).

Parrot's *habitus* developed in the context of the circle of French scientists. Parrot had graduated from the University of Stuttgart, a high-level institution during the second half of the 18th century, and had thereafter started to work as a home tutor in Normandy, France, in the family of a protestant Count d'Héricy in Fiquainville Castle. Prior to going to Normandy in spring 1786, Parrot spent several months in Paris. During this period, Parrot's patron was a leading member of the research lodge *Les Neuf Sœurs*, the astronomer Joseph Jérôme Lalande,

who introduced Parrot to famous scientists working in Paris and in later years served as a source of inspiration for him (Bienemann, 1902, pp. 35–36).

Les Neuf Sœurs, referring to the nine Antique Muses, patrons of the sciences and arts, had a pyramid as its emblem, symbolizing moral perfection and harmoniously ordered nature. Inside the pyramid there were compasses, a square, and the motto, *Force, Vérité, Union*. During the period of existence of the *Loge Les Neuf Sœurs* (1776–1792), the membership comprised approximately 400 leading scientists, educational figures, and representatives of fine arts from European countries and North America. The most authoritative member of *Les Neuf Sœurs* lodge was Voltaire who agreed to join the lodge a few months prior to his death, with a reason that his famous name would facilitate the advancement of the lodge's intellectual endeavours. This unique fraternity of scholars involved a number of influential educational reformers: Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson in America; Claude-Adrien Helvétius and Marie Jean Antoine Nicolas Caritat Marquis de Condorcet, who had given a new direction to French education. From Russia, the membership of the lodge comprised Alexander Stroganov and Dmitri Golitsyn, who had already tried to reform the education system during the time of the Empress Catherine the Great. Hereby, it is worthwhile to specifically highlight the fact that all the tutors of the young Emperor Alexander I and his coterie were members of *Les Neuf Sœurs* lodge, the most influential among them being Frédéric-Césaire de La Harpe, a Swiss and a citizen of the Republic of Geneva. Regarding the circle of the close friends, or the so-called Intimate Committee of Alexander I, the ones who belonged to *Les Neuf Sœurs* lodge were Adam Jerzy Czartoryski, Pavel Stroganov and Viktor Kotchubei (Hans, 2002, pp. 279–297).

The new school system, developed on the example of the educational concept in *Les Neuf Sœurs* lodge, was first launched in Poland. The Polish National Committee on Education, established in 1773, was headed by Adam Czartoryski senior who, together with other members thereof, also belonged to the *Les Neuf Sœurs*. Although in 1792, the Constituent Assembly of France did not pass the educational reform proposed by the democrat Condorcet, the relevant principles were taken over and implemented in the Russian Empire, by way of the public education reforms of 1803–1804. Thus, the beginning of the 19th century in the Russian Empire marked the building up of one of the most forward-looking educational systems in Europe, whose roots originate from the circle of French physiocrats and the reforms devised by members of *Les Neuf Sœurs* lodge (Flynn, 1988, p. 43).

Georges Frédéric Parrot was definitely familiar with *Les Neuf Sœurs* lodge's educational ideas, but due to his young age he was not able to join the lodge. Arriving to the Baltic provinces, Parrot became involved in educational questions

straight away. It is highly probable that Parrot became one of the intellectual leaders who started to build a new scientific centre in the Baltic provinces of the Russian Empire. During his Tartu period he preserved correspondence with his former schoolmate Georges Cuvier, a famous French naturalist, who held the post of the Secretary of the French Institute. In that correspondence Parrot also remembers his patron Lalande, sending him his regards through Cuvier (Langins, 2004, pp. 297–304).

Parrot's ideas served as a basis for the principles of the university statute, curricula as well as the university's architectural ensemble, developed in 1803–1809. Mainly in collaboration with Karl Simon Morgenstern, Georges Frédéric Parrot drew up the University Statute that was essentially different from those of other universities of the Russian Empire in Vilnius, Kharkov, Kazan and Moscow. Parrot claimed complete academic autonomy and juridical immunity for the university with a legal subordination to the university's own court. We can characterize this statute as a radical change towards the establishment of a modern academic republic. The University Statute demonstrated a radical change in the sphere of academic education with a goal of establishing modern university autonomy or the so-called “scholarly republic”, non-existent in this part of Europe at that time. Parrot sought complete academic autonomy for the university, free from the corporative autonomy, which ruled the German cultural space in commanding the universities. (Andreev, 2006, pp. 19–20)

According to Parrot, the University of Tartu was supposed to be directly subordinated to the central authorities of the state. In Parrot's vision, the university had to be open to all social ranks, and he wished to abolish serfdom in the Baltic provinces and emancipate peasants through education to launch a process in which the more gifted among peasants could become medical doctors, lawyers and statesmen (Parrot, 1803, p. 13).

Simultaneously, Parrot was active in the foundation of co-educational parish schools and girls' schools. In his words, Enlightenment reached this province through school reform creating an educational system on a ladder principle, which means that every step in education is a preparation for the next (Parrot, 1804, pp. 1–16). This idea was first suggested by Claude-Adrien Helvétius, Pierre-Samuel Dupont De Nemours and Marie Jean Antoine Nicolas Caritat Marquis de Condorcet (Bowen, 2003, p. 247). Parrot also had great administrative ability, liberal political views, and the support of Emperor Alexander I during his liberal reforming period. It is important to point out that Parrot was the man who worked out the Statute of the University of Tartu and protected his views at the Ministry of Education and Enlightenment of Empire.

Concerning the moulding of the intellectual atmosphere of the reopened university, a great role was to be played by a circle of liberally minded professors, who gathered around Parrot, forming a certain intellectual fraternity bearing the name *Ephesische Kirche* or Ephesus Church. As a model for his “Church”, Parrot used Voltaire’s “Church” that comprised a circle of French Enlightenment thinkers who had gathered around Voltaire, Helvétius and other philosophers, who were men of letters, scientists and other intellectuals to implement the radical ideas of the Enlightenment by way of joint efforts. On the one hand, Voltaire’s “Church” was an aggregate of ideas, on the other hand – it symbolized endeavour, movement, correspondence and diffusion of ideas. (Darnton, 2003, pp. 19–21) The personal seal of Parrot depicts a compass, a measuring rod, and above this, the inscription ‘*VERITAS*’, which was also the symbol of the Ephesus Church (Krause, 1784–1842). This affirms, yet again, that Parrot’s intellectual sources originate in the French Republic of Letters and the lodge of *Les Neuf Sœurs*.

The complex of the University of Tartu buildings includes edifices, characteristic of scientific institutions, expressing in addition to their architectural and aesthetical values, the ideas of science and education of their time. The actual process indicates that the man to devise the entire architectural concept of the university was Georges Frédéric Parrot, who wanted to build a new scientific research area on Toome Hill. Aiming at the realization of his visions, Parrot invited his acquaintance, Johann Wilhelm Krause, to be the architect of the university. According to Parrot’s initial vision university as a “republic of scholars” it would be essential to create a park around the academic edifices, to achieve an integral whole. In Parrot’s words, Toome Hill was a “Temple of Wisdom, with its exterior sides altered into a Temple of Nature” – this would favourably influence the young people’s imagination and would also inspire future generations to seek education (EAA 402). Indeed, Toome Hill evolved into one of the first public urban parks in Estonia. Such a concept – a park open to the citizens – is evidence of the first signs of democratization in the Baltic provinces (Tohvi, 2009, pp. 171–172).

It was the American Thomas Jefferson, who first worded a similar conception of academic freedom and equal opportunities to receive education for all strata of the population. In 1779 Thomas Jefferson sent his proposals to the legislative assembly of Virginia titled *Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge* and commenced preparations to establish the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. This bill was one of the two landmarks in Jefferson’s career as an educational statesman. The key element in Jefferson’s bill advocated a pyramid-shaped system of public education, with many elementary schools feeding into a more select level of grammar schools, and a single university

at the top. The primary level was intended to teach basic literacy necessary for everyday business transactions and familiarize young Republican boys and girls with their political rights and obligations. Tuition rates were based on a sliding scale: poor students would be subsidized but those who could pay would. The university was intended to train future leaders and professionals in law and medicine (Addis, 2003, p. 12).

Despite his provincialism when it came to location, Jefferson still looked to Europe for ideas. When working overseas as Minister to France in 1785–1789, he introduced his ideas to the circles of intellectuals in Paris. It must be emphasized that Parrot had enjoyed the same atmosphere in the French capital before arriving in Livonia. Jefferson studied the universities in Paris, Italy, Switzerland, and Scotland. During Jefferson's first term of presidency of the U.S. he solicited advice from the National Institute of France and the Universities of Edinburgh and Geneva (Addis, 2003, p. 27).

In the 1790s and 1800s, Jefferson corresponded with intellectuals like Thomas Cooper, Joseph Priestley, and Pierre-Samuel Dupont de Nemours about education. Jefferson made his first reference to the University of Virginia in an 1800 letter to Priestley: "We wish to establish in the upper & healthier part of the state a University on a plan so broad & liberal & modern, as to be worth patronizing with the public support, and be a temptation to the youth of other states to come and drink of the cup of knowledge & fraternize with us." (Jefferson, 1984, p. 1070). Another Jefferson's letter to John Hollins in 1809 is entitled 'The Republic of Science'. Jefferson highly appreciated the nature of the correspondence which was carried on between societies instituted for the benevolent purpose of communicating to all parts of the world whatever useful is discovered in any one of them. These societies are always at peace, even if their nations may be at war. Like the Republic of Letters, they form a great fraternity spreading over the whole earth, and their correspondence is never interrupted by any civilized nation. (Jefferson, 1984, p. 1201)

As early as in 1804–1805 he had been considering buildings in the form of "an academic village rather than one large building". By 1810 his ideas had crystallized into a complex of buildings with "a small and separate lodge for each professorship". Jefferson's new University of Virginia conception planned as an academical campus located in the nature, which was brought to life in 1810. The pavilion-like 'academic village' became the new model for future university campuses. According to Jefferson's architectural concept, 'science' and 'virtues' had to be consolidated under the cupola of the Rotunda and be open to the Virginian landscape where studious youth could walk between

the colonnades together with their professors. The new university had to be governed by absolute harmony and the intellectual freedom of the Seeker for Truth. This idea is very similar to Parrot's seal design. Jefferson had said, "This institution will be based on the illimitable freedom of the human mind. For here we are not afraid to follow truth wherever it may lead, nor tolerate any error so long as reason is left free to combat it." This private saying came to be regarded by later generations as a classic statement of the principle of academic freedom. (Malone, 1981, pp. 417–418).

Both Thomas Jefferson and Georges Frédéric Parrot emphasized the importance of natural science and medicine in the university programs, as well as the method of raising of students' morals through their academic environment. The architectural concept of the Universities of Tartu and Virginia, built during the same period, reflects the messages of the Enlightenment era, those of secularization, humanity and intellectual freedom. In both cases the idea to build the University Churches was abandoned, however the main buildings were erected as Temples of Humanity. Likewise, the universities of Virginia and Tartu were under the protection of Minerva, this being also reflected in the symbols of the university (Tohvri, 2009, p. 153).

To summarize briefly, the two themes of the Enlightenment, namely progressive education and a rationally constructed environment, were vividly expressed in the thoughts and deeds of Georges Frédéric Parrot and Thomas Jefferson. Their activities serve as a splendid illustration of the potential power of ideas to yield similar results in a widely separated space. The University of Tartu and the University of Virginia are the monuments to Enlightenment rationality.

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