

British Civic Architecture in the United States of the Ionian Islands

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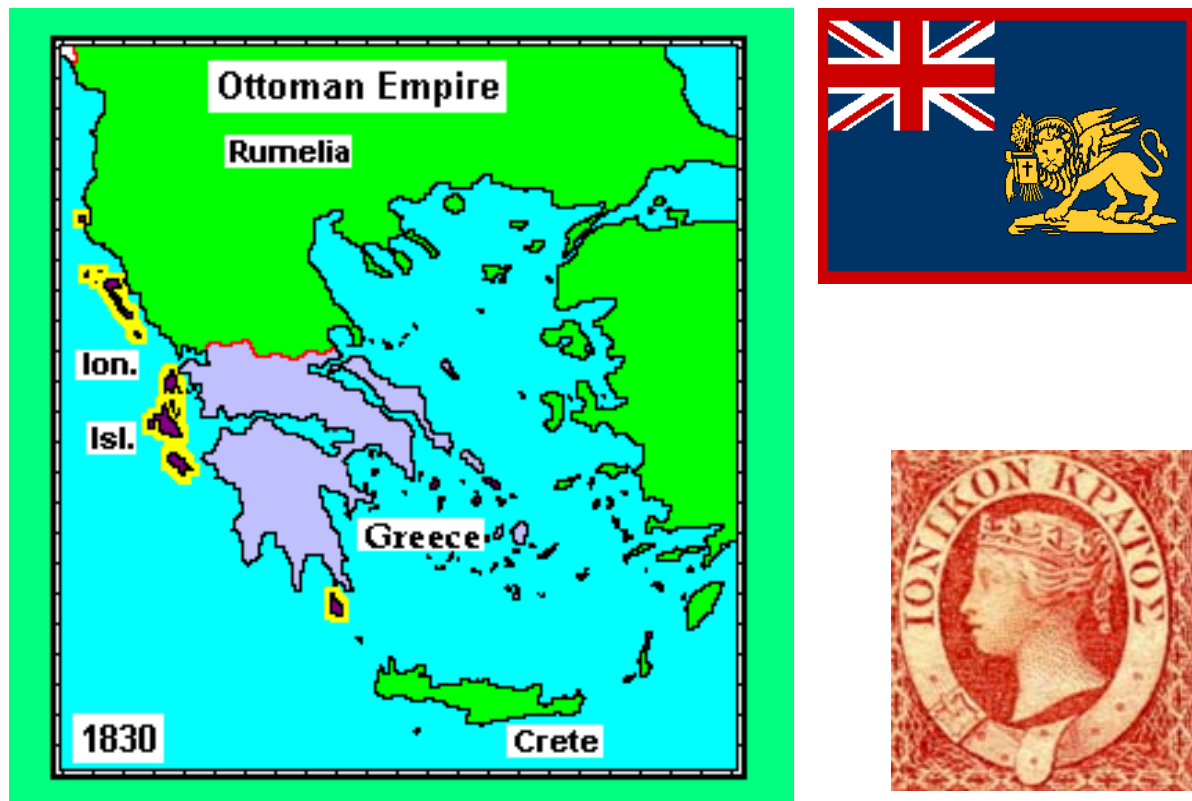
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Abstract

On 5th November 1815 the United States of the Ionian Islands was established under British protection through signature of the Treaty of Paris. British Residents were subsequently stationed on each of the seven Ionian Islands off the west coast of Greece as governors of each Island. During the Protectorate period, 1815-1864, the Residents carried out numerous public works from public buildings and structures to roads and harbors. The most prolific Resident was Charles Napier in Kefalonia. The civic architectural style of the public buildings and structures designed by British architects and engineers was inevitably Neo-Classical, ironically a new style for Greece.

Figure 1 *United States of the Ionian Islands Map, Flag, and Postage Stamp*



Context

For five decades in the first half of the nineteenth century the chain of seven Ionian Islands off the west coast of Greece constituted Britain's Greek Empire, as Michael Pratt (1978) characterized them. These islands are, from north to south, Corfu (*Kérkyra*), Paxos (*Paxoí*), Lefkas (*Lefkáda* or Venetian *Santa Maura*), Cephalonia (*Kephalonía* or *Kefallinía*), Ithaca (*Itháki*), Zakynthos (*Zákynthos* or Venetian *Zante*), and Kithira (*Kýthira* or Venetian *Cerigo*) (Figure 1). The grouping of the Islands, known in Greek as the *Eptanisa* (Seven Islands), took place at the beginning of the ninth century when the Byzantine authorities created the *théma Kefallinía* as a distinct military and administrative unit of their Empire (Patricios, 2002).

Mainland Greece and the Aegean Islands were part of the Ottoman Turks Empire from about the middle of the 15th century until the declaration of independence in 1821, the period of *Tourkokratia*. The Ionian Islands were never part of it but from the beginning of the sixteenth century until the end of the eighteenth century were part of the Venetian Republic. Venice controlled many cities in the Eastern Mediterranean but after their losses to the Ottoman Turks, the Republic maintained occupation of the Ionian Islands at all costs as they were the gateway to the Adriatic. This came to an end in 1797 when the Republic of St. Mark fell to the French under Napoleon and an independent Venice ceased to exist. Under the subsequent Treaty of Campo Formio France annexed the Ionian Islands. But in early 1799 the French were evicted from the Islands in an extraordinary alliance between Turkey and Russia. They set up the Islands as the Septinsular Republic. This arrangement continued until under the Treaty of Tilsit, signed in July 1807, when the Islands were returned to the French who incorporated them into their provinces of Illyria. Their occupation did not last long as the British, alarmed at the possibility of extended French influence in the Eastern Mediterranean, began to capture the Ionian Islands one by one, beginning on 2 October, 1809 with Zakynthos, followed by Cephalonia, Ithaca and Kithera, Lefkas in 1810 and Corfu and Paxos in 1814.

The proclamation the British presented to the Ionian Islanders on 2nd October 1809 read in part:¹

... the inhabitants of Cephalonia, Zante, and other of the Seven Islands, wearied and oppressed with the violence and exactions of the French government, under which their commerce has been annihilated, and their personal freedom invaded, are desirous to shake off the yoke ... [that the British] enabled them to expel their present oppressors, and re-establish a free and independent government, with the uncontrolled exercise of their civil and religious rights. ... We present ourselves to you, not as invaders, with views of conquest, but as allies, who hold forth to you the advantages of British protection, in the freedom and extension of your commerce, and in the general prosperity of your island.

Under provisions of the Treaty of Paris, signed on 5 November 1815, the great powers agreed to create the United States of the Ionian Islands as an independent state under exclusive British protection. A British Lord High Commissioner was to govern the Islands and be based in Corfu. All in all ten men served in this position from 1816 until 1864 when Great Britain ceded the Ionian Islands to Greece. Under the Constitution Charter each of the Ionian Islands was to

¹ Macgachen, 1859, 9

be governed by a British Resident, usually a military officer. Each Resident reported to the Lord High Commissioner. Alongside the Resident there was a local government in the form of a Council for each Island with a Regent, a prominent local person, as head of the Council. Britain ceded the Ionian Islands to Greece on 28 May, 1864 after considerable agitation on the Islands to be united (*enosis*) with Greece.

The imperial legacy of the British included major civic projects and public buildings that complemented Venetian impact on the residential architecture of the Islands. In mid-19th century the architectural identity of the Ionian Island cities was the result of imperial legacies - public buildings in British Neo-Classical style with mansions of the nobility and upper middle classes in Venetian Renaissance style - both overlaying the vernacular form of the remaining buildings (Patricios, 1987; 1999). The style of architecture introduced into the Ionian Islands by the British will be termed Neo-Classical although in Britain it was known as the Regency style. This style was represented by architects such as John Nash (practicing in London 1796-1835), John Soane (professor of architecture 1806-1837) and George Dance the Younger (practicing in London 1768-1825).

Corfu

The whole island is in undulations from the plain where the city is, to the higher hills on the west side; all the space is covered with one immense grove of olive-trees, ... I [Edward Lear] really think no place on Earth can be lovelier than this.

(Sherrard, 1988, 48 & 61)

The British government appointed Sir Thomas Maitland as the first Lord High Commissioner of the Ionian Islands. Maitland and all the Lord High Commissioners who followed realized the importance of new roads, prisons, hospitals and piers and provided budgets for these projects. Maitland was responsible for introducing a tertiary education system and appointed a British scholar Frederick North, Earl of Guilford, as Director. As part of this effort they founded in May, 1823 the Ionian Academy, the first university to be established in Greece. In 1840 the Academy moved into an existing barracks building and operated there until the Ionian Islands union with Greece in 1864 (Agoropoulou-Birbilis, 1977). Sir Frederick Adam, who succeeded Maitland, established a secondary school on each island and a central elementary school in the chief town of each island.

In Corfu Maitland wished to have an official residence and a meeting-place for the Ionian Senate. He commissioned George Whitmore, a colonel in the engineering unit, to design the building. Whitmore's design was for a British Neo-Classical style building. As he had not received any architectural training he relied on newly designed buildings in London, most probably the work of Robert Adam, such as his Admiralty Screen (Dimacopoulos, 1979). On the ground floor a Doric colonnade runs the full length of the front facade of the building (Figure 2). Each end of this façade terminates in a triumphal arch and is closed by a pedimented pavilion with niches. The nine axis window façade of the central section is crowned by an ornamental parapet on which the emblems of the seven islands are sculpted in stone. Ancient Greek symbols form each emblem with the goddess Demeter holding a cornucopia with a ship in the background for Corfu, a trident for Paxos, Bellerophon supporting Pegasus for Lefkas,

Cephalus the hunter holding a lance with his dog for Cephalonia, a head of Odysseus naturally for Ithaca, a mythical seated figure for Zakinthos, and Aphrodite with a dolphin for Kithira. To express British dominance the focal point of the emblem composition was Britannia in her barque but the female figure was removed after the Islands union with Greece.

The building came to be named the Palace of St. Michael and St. George as it was also to be the headquarters of a new Order of Knighthood, founded in England in 1818 for 'rewarding the merits and encouraging the loyalty of the natives.' The foundation stone was laid on St George's day, 23rd of April 1819 and the building officially inaugurated in April 1823. The ground floor housed administrative offices, the Ionian Senate, and temporarily the Ionian Parliament until a separate building could be built for it. On the second floor were the state rooms where the official receptions took place.

Adam commissioned Whitmore to build 'a circular Temple of Ionic order after the example of that one of Vesta at Tivoli' (Figure 3). He also had Whitmore design an official country residence for himself, a *casino* or summer villa now known as Mon Repos. It is an elegant Neo-Classical two-story mansion with a Doric portico supporting a balcony with a stone balustrade (Figure 4). It was started in 1828 and ready for occupation in 1831.

Other public buildings included the Stock Exchange edifice, which was on the corner of two streets. It had a simple façade on both the long and short sides of the building. The ground floor consisted of an arched colonnade while the windows of the upper two floors had stucco frames (Figure 5). A balcony railing of wrought iron at the first floor level ran the entire length of the two façades. There was also a short balcony with a similar railing on the third floor of the shorter façade.

Nugent, who succeeded Adam, developed the idea for an Ionian Bank. Eventually one was built in Corfu in 1840 with branch banks in the larger islands of Cephalonia and Zakinthos. The architectural style of the bank buildings in both Corfu and Argostoli in Cephalonia were distinctively Neo-Classical. The Corfu building had a symmetrical façade dominated by a six-columned Ionic temple front on a stone-faced base containing arched windows (Figure 6). The Argostoli building had only the six two-story Ionic columns and omitted the base and pediment. The inspiration for an Ionic temple front atop a stone-faced base of arched windows was Shelbourn House (later renamed Lansdowne House) in London designed by Robert Adam in 1765. Surprisingly the smallest building erected by the British was the one that housed the Ionian Parliament. The ground floor façade consisted of a four-columned Doric portico flanked by arched doorways. The only features on the second floor were a central window and a pediment.

The more austere British Neo-Classical style was introduced into Corfu, as mentioned above, by George Whitmore who was influenced by the work of Robert Adam who in turn was inspired by the Italian Renaissance architect, Andrea Palladio. Whitmore no doubt was also inspired by the works in his copies of *The Antiquities of Athens* by Stuart and Revett (1762) and *Ionian Antiquities* (Society of Dilettanti, 1769). From about 1830 onwards local Greek architects began to design the important buildings and at the same time the manning of civil service departments. The Greek architect that emerged paramount was Ioannis Chronis who followed the Neo-Classical style introduced by Whitmore (Agoropoulou-Birbili, 1983). The major civic buildings designed by Chronis and mentioned above were the Stock Exchange (1841), the Ionian Bank (1846) and the Ionian Parliament (1854). He was also active in the design of private mansions and was responsible for a study for the expansion of the city in 1869 (Agoropoulou-Birbili, 1984).

In addition to civic works the British introduced needed health decrees and building regulations, eight in all from 1820 to 1831. They also made improvements to the urban fabric of the capital city. A notable project was the construction of a piped water supply system begun by Sir Frederick Adam in 1830 and completed by Sir Howard Douglas in 1840 (Linardos, 1962).

Paxos

According to legend the island of Paxos was created when Poseidon struck off the southern tip of Corfu with his trident to make a retreat for himself and his mistress, Amphitrite.

On Paxos the British Residency at Gaios was a small house in a restrained British Neo-Classical style later modified and altering its appearance.

Lefkas

Legend has it that Sappho, a poetess considered by Plato to be the 'Tenth Muse,' flung herself from the cliff at Cape Lefkatas when Phaeon rejected her love.

The Residency and Court House buildings at Lefkas were built in 1825 after a catastrophic earthquake demolished most of the buildings on the island. The British constructed these buildings with a new anti-seismic building system that they introduced (Argyros, Lefkokoilos & Filippas, 1972). The system, called *pontelarisma*, consisted of a wood skeleton structure that supported the roof. On the outside of the wood structure and independent of it were placed masonry walls. In the time of an earthquake the wood structure was elastic enough to absorb the movement from the earth tremors and at the same time keep the masonry walls from collapsing inward. Churches built in the capital of the island after 1825 were constructed using this system.

Cephalonia

... Cephalenia, triangular in forme ... the Mountaynes intermixed with profitable Valleys, and the Woods with Champian. Unwatered with Rivers, and poore in Fountaines, but abounding with Wheate, Honey, Corents, Manna, Cheese, Wooll, Turkeyes, excellent Oyle ... Amongst her many harbours, Argostoli is the principall, capacious enough for a Navie. The Inhabitants of this Iland are Grecians, the Venetians their Soveriegnes.

(George Sandys, *Purchas his Pilgrimes*, 1625, 1616)

Of all the achievements of the British in the Ionian Island Residents the most remarkable were in Cephalonia. The extraordinary physical transformation of Cephalonia during the British Protectorate was the result of the efforts of three men, Charles-Philippe de Bosset, Charles James Napier, and John Pitt Kennedy. Between them they developed an extensive road network

over the whole island, devised a plan for Argostoli, and built important public buildings in both Argostoli and Lixouri. Their achievements were remarkable as they managed to undertake the many public projects in Cephalonia despite the preferential treatment given to Corfu by the governing Lord High Commissioners.

Major Charles-Phillipe de Bosset was Swiss having joined the British Army in 1796 (de Bosset, 1821). Sometime after 1810 he was sent to Cephalonia to command the island and head its government. He held the post of Commandant until 1814. In recognition of the public works added to the island by him the Administrative Council of Cephalonia erected an obelisk monument "To the Glory of the British Nation" on the causeway across the Koutavos lagoon in Argostoli. Later a plaque was added to a bridge pier to acknowledge the contribution of de Bosset specifically. Robert Travers who followed and served as Resident under the new constitution instituted in 1815 did not leave any legacy. Charles James Napier succeeded him and served as Resident of Cephalonia from 1822 until 1830 (Napier C. J., 1825; 1833). Captain John Pitt Kennedy, a Second Lieutenant in the Corps of the Royal Engineers, was sent to Cephalonia as Director of Public Works and Military Secretary in 1822 and remained until 1831. Napier's outspokenness during his Residency made him an enemy of the then Lord High Commissioner, Sir Frederick Adam. When Napier left for England on leave Adam annulled Napier's appointment in Cephalonia.

Napier carried out an extensive array of projects including new urban squares, a new Court House building, and many other public buildings in the capital of Cephalonia, Argostoli (Cosmetatos, 1995). For the center of Argostoli Napier's idea was to create a new central square and link it to another new square to the north with an avenue, a half mile long and fifty feet wide. Around the edge of the central square, named Court House Square, he intended 'to erect an Exchange, Theatre and Casino, all comprised under one roof.' Napier's vision for the undeveloped northern district was for an esplanade on the waterfront and a square, Metela Square, to form the core of the new area. On the landward side of the square he built three major buildings: a prison complex, the tribunals, and the barracks.

In the city of Lixouri Napier created a new public square with a large building to house varied activities that came to be known as the *Markato*. As he explained:

The reason for building a market place on a larger scale at Lixouri than Argostoli was that the Court of Justice was hitherto held in a small hired room quite insufficient for the purpose of administering justice ... I therefore built over the Market Place an ample room capable of containing at least 600 people opening onto a balcony which passed all round it ... Under the same roof were concentrated the Public Offices and a Lancastrian school ... Under the colonnade of the Market Place, the people find shelter from the noonday sun and if late they may sleep there sheltered from the heavy dews. The labouring class find the full use and profit of great public edifices in these hot climates which is the reason I preferred the colonnade.²

John Pitt Kennedy's role was essential to making concrete Napier's visions. This began with the design of two lighthouses, the first located on Guardian (*Vardianoï*) Island was in the form of Doric column (Figure 7) and the second was on Point Theodore that took the shape of a circular ancient Greek temple with 24 columns (Figure 8). Kennedy translated Napier's idea for

² Cosmetatos, 1995, 74

the focal point of central Argostoli into a design that consisted of two buildings not one. In the first building were to be the Court House which was eventually built (Figure 9). The second building did not receive funds from Corfu and was not built. Authorities there decided to fund the 'Nausicaan' Palace on that island instead. In the second Argostoli building was to be a Public School (on the Lancastrian System), the Assembly Rooms, the Exchange, a small theater and the 'Monte di Pieta.' Kennedy also designed the Lixouri Court of Justice, or *Markato* building, in British Neo-Classical style, erected in 1824 (Figure 10). In 1836 the British resident in Lixouri constructed an artificial harbor as the town lacked a natural one. After the completion of the Ionian Bank building in Corfu in May 1840 the branch bank in Argostoli opened on 10 August of the same year (Figure 11).

David Ansted described Lixouri as a 'picturesque town, with a mole and quay, and several respectable public buildings. One principal stack of buildings includes the courts of justice, the town hall, and the exchange, and is handsomely built. Sort of a square bungalow, with a very long balcony all around, and a large, central staircase leading to the various offices. The stairs and balcony are crowded with people of all classes. The back of this building forms one side of a market place.'³

Henry Napier, in assessing his brother's efforts, wrote that there was 'order, diligence and frugality in public offices and public expenditure, good roads, improved agriculture, handsome public buildings, schools, commodious quays for the landing of merchandise, a prison, two lighthouses, increased shipping and a more widely extended commerce.'⁴ In 1834 another visitor, the Reverend Richard Burgess, described '[t]he improvements of Colonel Napier have given to this town the air of an English Watering-place. The bridge across the marshes is imposing as the traveller descends upon it from the Samos road. The quay on which the Cephalonians take their exercise in the cool of the day extends for a mile in length.'⁵

Ithaca

While most descriptions of the island relate to its association with Homer's Ithaca, a British traveler wrote:

If Corfu is the most beautiful, Cephalonia the largest, Santa Maura [Lefkas] the wildest, and Zante [Zakinthos] the prettiest of the Ionian Islands, Ithaca is, beyond all comparison, the most romantic.

(David Ansted, 1863, 231)

There is little evidence of the British presence in Ithaca. This consisted of the construction of a waterfront road in the capital, Vathy, and a lazaretto building on a small island in the bay of Vathy. Stones used for the framing of the doors and windows of this building were taken from ancient structures and on which inscriptions can still be seen (Grivas, 1849). There was also a copper bust of Sir Thomas Maitland atop a cylindrical pillar located originally in front of the Residency in the position of the Drakouli Mansion in Vathy (Kallinikos, 1991). The Residency was described as 'a neat house surrounded by a verandah ... it is a comfortable, roomy place'

³ Ansted, 1863, 360.

⁴ Napier, H. 1829, 68-9.

⁵ Burgess, 1834, 1.

(Ansted, 1863). In other words it was not particularly distinguishable from other mansions along the waterfront except for 'a statue placed on a small pedestal in front.' After the departure of the British local inhabitants moved the pillar and bust to a small square at the edge of the town. In his visit to Ithaca in 1863 Viscount Kirkwall referred to a visit to the Residency but did not provide any details (Kirkwall, 1864).

Zakinthos

O hyacinthine isle, O purple Zante
Isola d'oro, fior de Levante
(Edgar Allan Poe in Foss, 1969, 55)

British activities in Zakynthos were more of a public works nature with the construction of a new harbor mole and an aqueduct undertaken by the very active Resident, Lord Charles Fitzroy. The Lord High Commissioner Adam built a fine country house at Akrotiri later acquired by the Solomos family. The British Cemetery includes many elaborate tombs in Neo-Classical style. In Zakynthos public services were housed in rented private buildings, the *archontika*, mansions of the nobility. The Residency, for example, was in the Roma *archontiko* (Figure 12) and the law courts in the Domenegini *archontiko* (Figure 13), both on Rouga Square (Zivas, 1984). A visitor to the city wrote rather harshly that 'Zante has no distinguished buildings;' and remarked on the sole English symbol, a bronze bust of Thomas Maitland (Muller, 1822). The inscription on the bust's pedestal, in Greek, read 'To Thomas Maitland, the Zakynthians, on account of their good hopes, 1817.'

In 1841 construction was begun on an ambitious public building, a Court House, but due to its high cost was soon terminated. It was a two-story building in typical Neo-Classical style with symmetry both in the plan and in the elevations (Figure 14). A double-story Ionic Portico dominated the fifteen window axis entrance façade while a pair of two-story Ionic pilasters framed end pavilions. None of the buildings constructed during the Venetian or British periods survived the catastrophic earthquake of 1953. In the aftermath a Member of Parliament for Zakynthos wrote in a dramatic telegram to the Greek Government 'Zakynthos [the town] ceases to exist.'

Kithira

*And first she came nigh unto holy Kythera, whence next she came to sea-girt
Kypros. And she came forth as a reverend goddess beautiful, and around her
the grass waxed under her tender feet. Her do gods and men call Aphrodite,
the foam-born goddess and fair-crowned Kythereia; for that she was
nurtured in foam: and Kythereia because she had chanced upon Kythera:
and Kypros-born because she was born in sea-washed Kypros;*

(Hesiod, *Theogony*, II: 176-206)

An extremely energetic Resident was John MacPhail who during the 1820s and 1830s constructed many public projects including buildings, roads, bridges, and schools (Petrocheilos,

1940). The elegant viaduct, built in 1826, with its twelve tall arches was about 360 feet long but in the end served little purpose when the road it was to support connecting the villages of Livadi and Katouni was never completed. MacPhail also built a market-place at Chora and schools at Fatsadika and Kato Chora, both in a neo-Gothic style. The final project built by the British was an eighty foot high lighthouse on the northern promontory of Kavos-Spathi.

Conclusion

The British record on public works in the Ionian Islands was good. It included the construction of roads, moles, piers, lighthouses, prisons, hospitals, and water supply systems. A British scholar, J. J. Tumelty, answered the question: "What was the balance sheet of protection to the Ionian Islands and Britain?"⁶ On the positive side he identified that the islanders 'enjoyed peace, internal order and security under an honest and active government, which, with slender resources, did much to advance their moral and material welfare.' Also, on the positive side of the balance sheet were decentralization of the judicial system and the appointment of judges. Education, though, must count as one of the significant British contributions to the Ionian Islands. On the negative side Tumelty observed that 'benefits were less spectacular than might have been expected from the connexion with a power so great.' Also he pointed out that government was very expensive. Most of the revenue from the islands went to pay the costs of protection.⁷ After considerable analysis another scholar came to the conclusion that the surrender of the Protectorate by Britain was a diplomatic act and did not involve colonial considerations (Knox, 1984). During the period of the British Protectorate the population of the Ionian Islands increased by between 52% and 58% (Table 1).

After the departure of the British in 1864 and the Islands unification with Greece the influence of Athenian Neo-Classical style spread to Islands. This style developed from the rebuilding of modern Athens between 1830 and 1900 by many German, French, and Danish architects. They brought the Neo-Classical style prevailing then in Western Europe with them that varied from the austere British version. Particularly influential were the Danish brothers, Christian and Theophilus Hansen, in devising an Athenian Neo-Classical style of architecture.

Unfortunately nearly all the British and Venetian era buildings in the central Ionian Islands were demolished in a series of devastating earthquakes that hit the Islands between the 9th and 12th of August, 1953. The islands that suffered catastrophic damage were those of Cephalonia, Ithaca and Zakynthos. The main towns of Argostoli, Lixouri and Zakynthos were virtually leveled. Fortunately, photographs taken in earlier years and now in various archives provide visual evidence of the public buildings described in this paper and illustrate Britain's imperial legacy of civic architecture.

So, in the end one departs from the Ionian Islands with the memory of:

Zakynthos drowned in flowers
Cephalonia seamed with toil
Kythera and Paxoi
Corfu the enchantress of the mind and heart
Ithaka a mariner's rhyme in stone
Leukas the watch-tower of the Armatoli

⁶ Tumelty, 1952, 66.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 120.

("Song of the Seven Islands" by Kostis Palamas
translated by Ian Scott-Kilvert in Foss, 1969, 13)

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Table 1 *Change in Ionian Island Population 1815-1860, the British Protectorate*

ISLAND	1815	1860, Ansted	1860, Kirkwall
Corfu	40,000	69,414	72,967
Paxos	4,000		4,789
Lefkas	18,000	20,672	23,466
Cephalonia	50,000	73,404	71,482
Ithaca	8,000	11,756	11,581 (1858)
Zakynthos	30,000	38,438	39,455
Kithira		13,742	13,497 (1858)
TOTALS (rounded)	150,000	227,400	237,500

Note: Figures for 1815 are broad estimates.

Sources: 1815, Holland (1815); 1860 (Ansted, 1863, 476); Kirkwall, 1864, Vol II., 327)

Figure 2 Corfu: Palace of St. Michael and St. George



Figure 3 *Corfu: Maitland Monument*



Figure 4 *Corfu: Mon Repos*



Figure 5 Corfu: The Stock Exchange

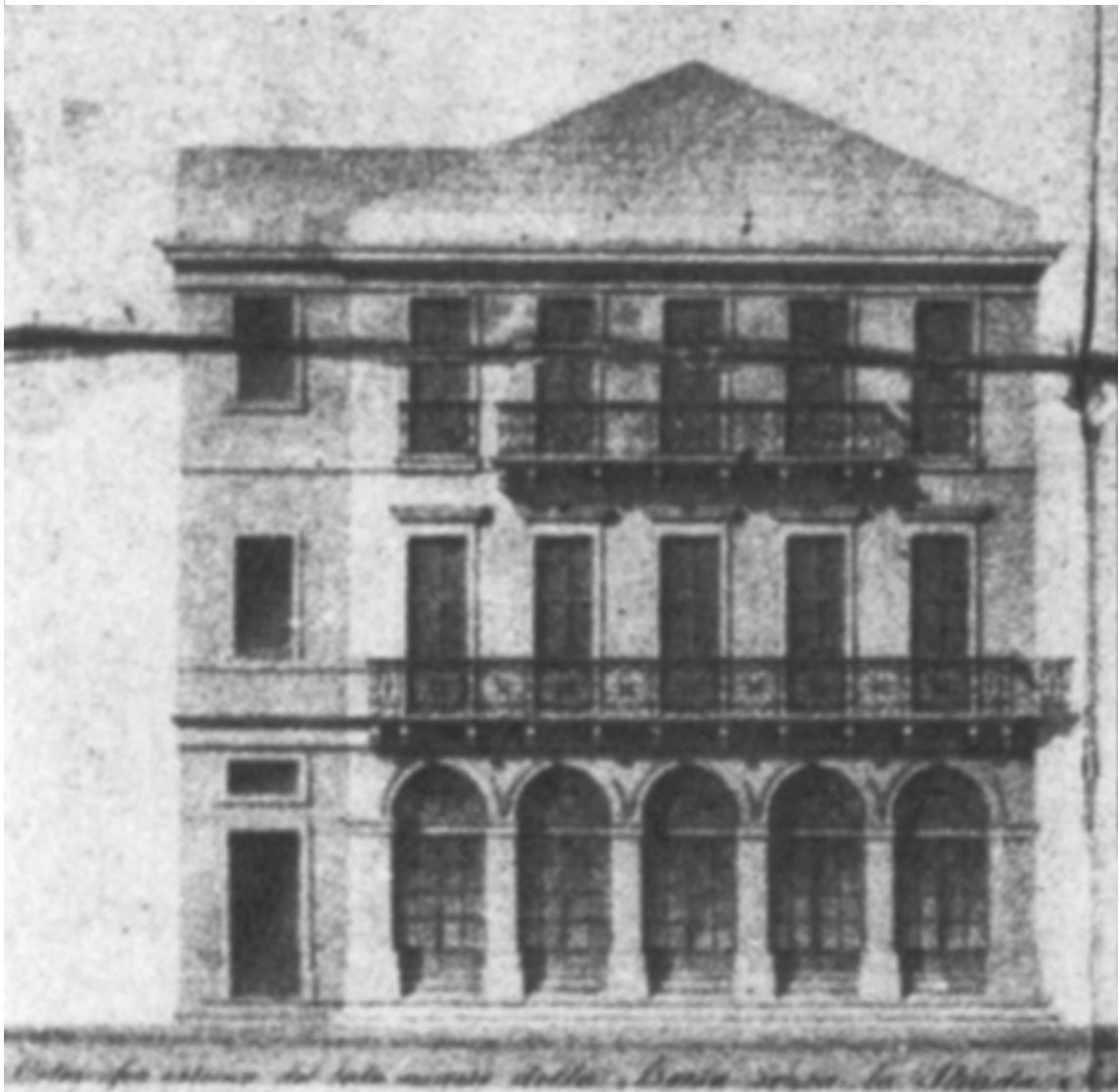


Figure 6 *Corfu: The Ionian Bank*

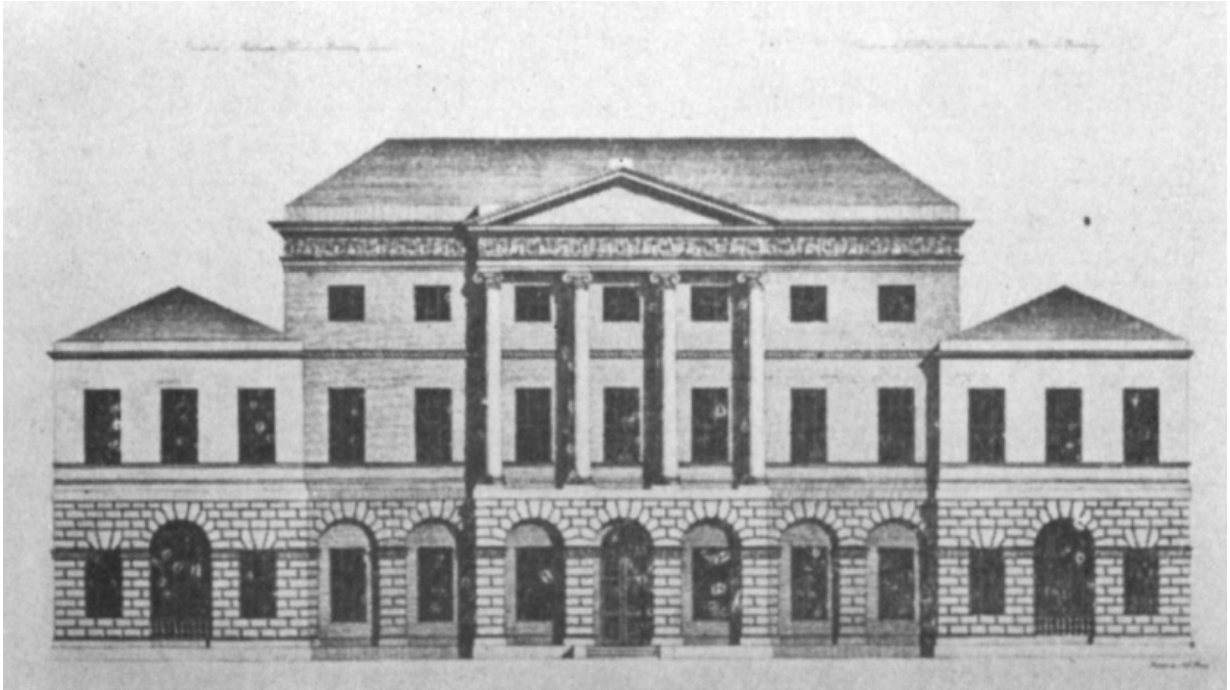


Figure 7 Cephalonia: The Guardian Island Lighthouse

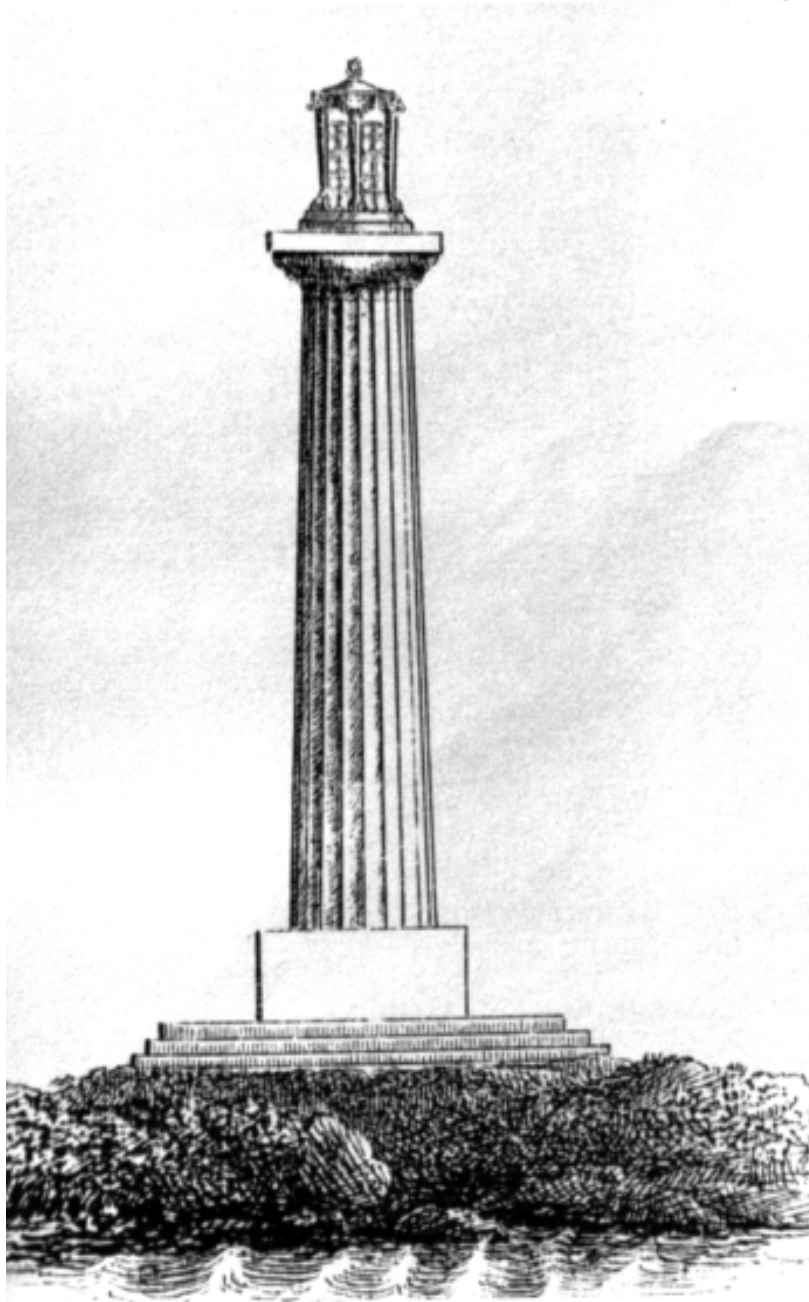


Figure 8 *Cephalonia: The Point Theodore Lighthouse*

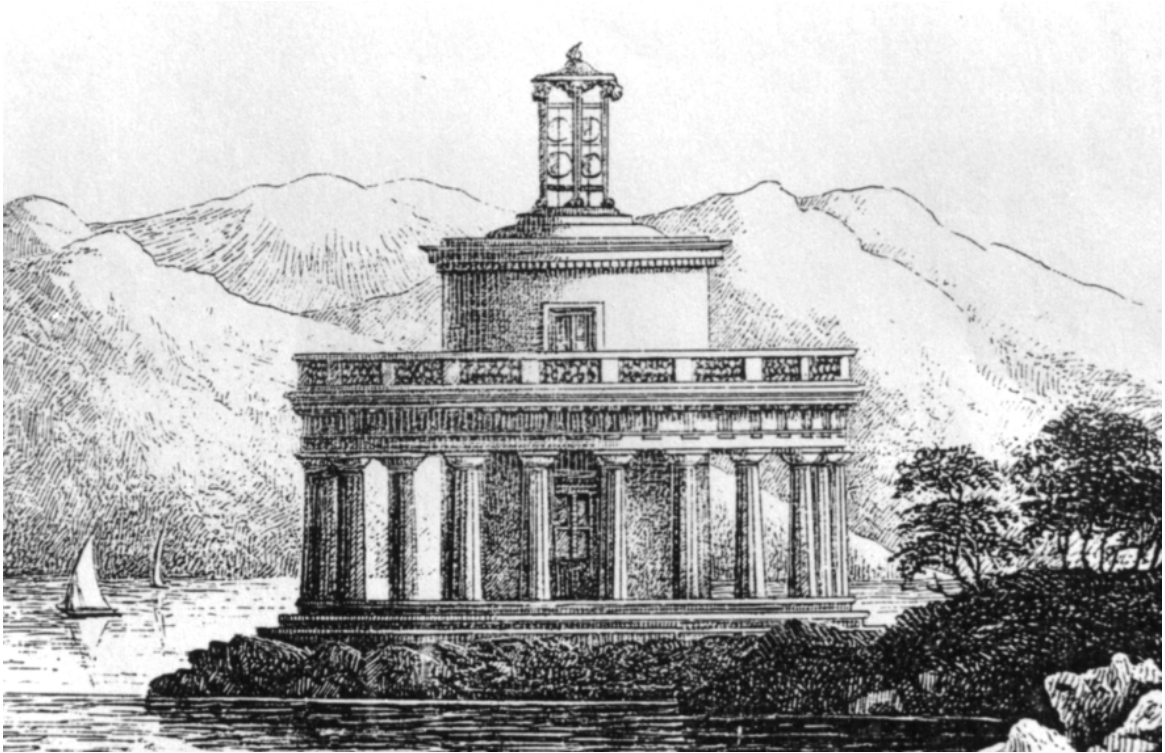


Figure 9 Cephalonia: Court House in Argostoli

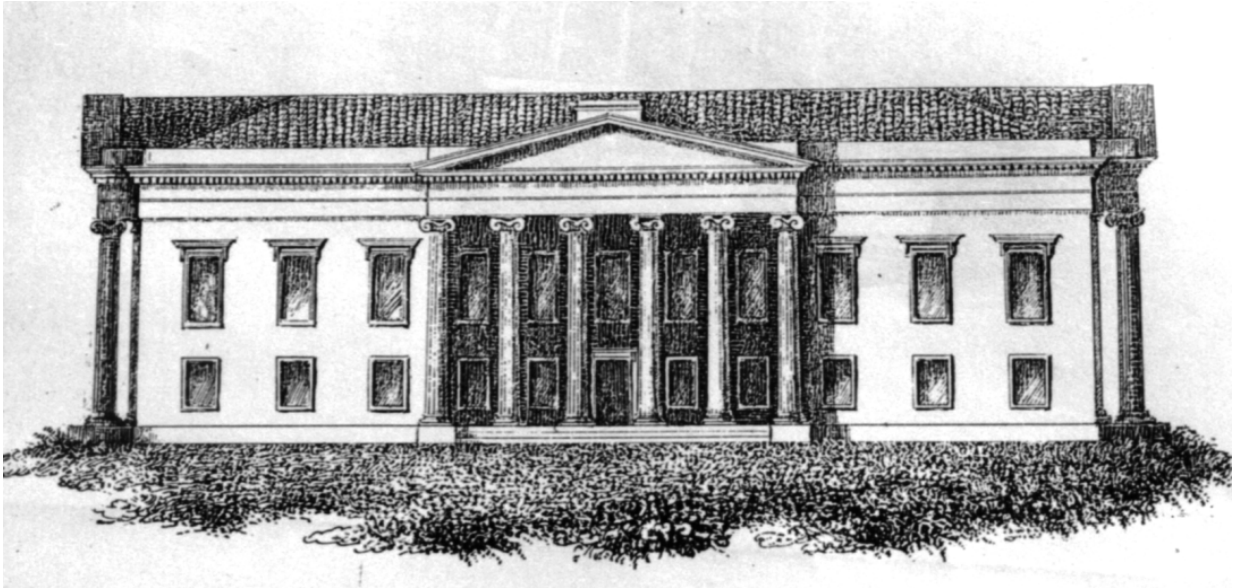


Figure 10 *Cephalonia: Court House in Lixouri*

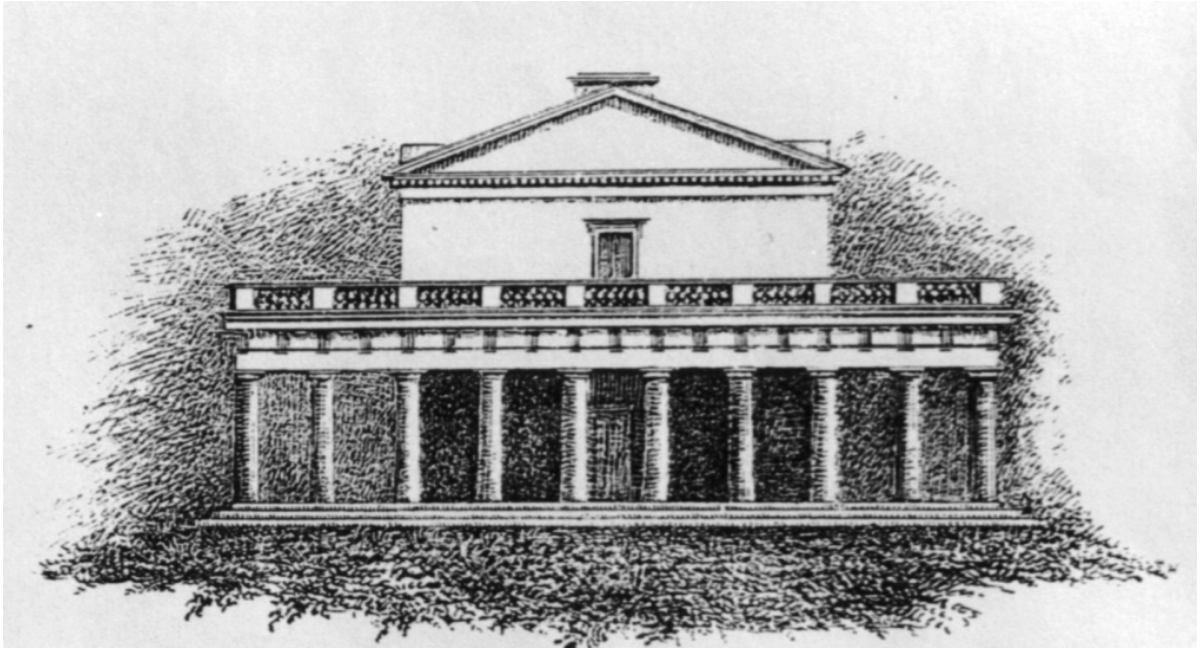


Figure 11: *Cephalonia: Ionian Bank in Argostoli*

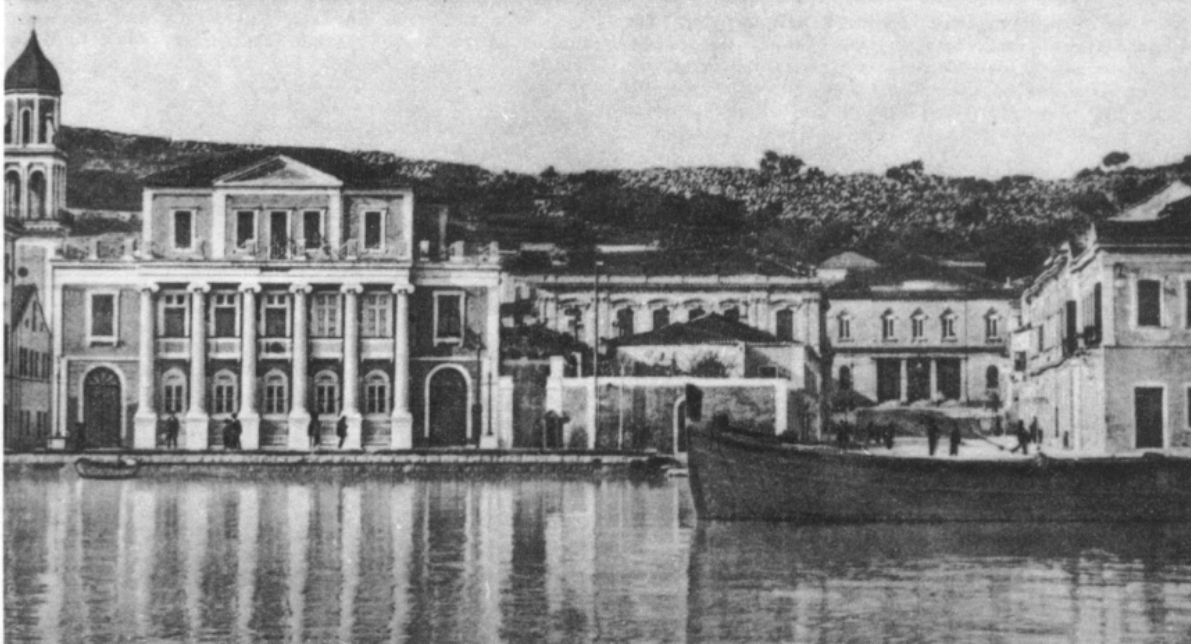


Figure 12 *Zakinthos: The Roma Archontiko*



Figure 13 Zakinthos: *Domenegini Archontiko*



Figure 14 Zakinthos: *The Court House*

