Corinthian Order

THE CORINTHIAN ORDER

Essay by Julian.Small. Photographs by Sandy Kinghorn.

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The Corinthian Order takes its name from the city of Corinth in Greece, but appears to have been developed in Athens during the fifth century BC. The fronds surrounding the capital represent acanthus leaves. The legend surrounding its origins is that a bronze sculptor, visiting the grave of a young girl who had died, noticed a basket containing her toys on top of her grave, covered with a tile to protect the contents. Since the girl's burial, an acanthus plant had grown around and through the basket of toys, curling over at the corners of the tile, thus giving him the idea of a column capital in the shape of a round basket encircled with acanthus leaves. Whatever the truth of this story and the real origins of the Corinthian capital, it is seriously suggested that the earliest examples were made of bronze and only later were examples carved in stone. Initially, it was seen as a decorative variant on the Ionic capital, the other details copying the normal use of the Ionic Order. It is occasionally found in Greek architecture from the fifth century onwards, but its use was greatly developed under the Romans and several variations on the basic type exist. Together with the Doric and Ionic Orders, it is one of the three Classical Orders of Architecture.

The details of the column base, shaft and entablature of the Corinthian Order are very similar to those of the Ionic Order and, like the Ionic Order, the entablature incorporates dentils. In some Roman examples, however, a band of consoles or brackets, not normally found in the Ionic Order, was added to give extra support to the projecting cornice. There are several variations on the design of the capital, and Corinthian capitals employed by Robert Adam can differ considerably between buildings. The capitals visible today on the north and south terraces of Charlotte Square are of a type regularly used by Adam, despite its construction only after his death, but those used on the facade of Register House, construction of which was closely supervised by Adam, are quite different. Adam also, on occasion, might incorporate details which would not conform to Vitruvius' rules, as when at Register House he combined the frieze and architrave of the entablature into a single panel.

Corinthian Order:

* c. 400 BCE
* Invented by the sculptor Kallimachos
* Named for the city of Corinth in Greece
* The fronds surrounding the capital represent acanthus leaves with tendrils and flowers.
* Earliest examples made of bronze
* Initially used only inside temples and buildings.
* Earliest known use outside is the Choragic Monument of Lysikrates Athens, Greece, 334 BCE
* “The legend surrounding its origins is that a bronze sculptor, visiting the grave of a young girl who had died, noticed a basket containing her toys on top of her grave, covered with a tile to protect the contents. Since the girl's burial, an acanthus plant had grown around and through the basket of toys, curling over at the corners of the tile, thus giving him the idea of a column capital in the shape of a round basket encircled with acanthus leaves.” (Small)
* The base, shaft and entablature are similar to the Ionic order
* Entablature incorporates *Dentils*
* Initially seen as a decorative variant of the Ionic column
* Gives the impression of magnificence
* "all of its sides are regular, and the concavity of its abacus contrasts in a beautiful manner with the convexity of the vase." (Robert Adams)
* Greeks used a single tier of acanthus leaves
* Romans had several variations of the basic style
* Romans added a band of consoles or brackets to give extra support to the projecting cornice

Small, Julian. *The Corinthian Order*. Cadking Design LTD. Edinburgh, Scotland. 1997-2001