

Terracotta Sculpture on the Riga Stock Exchange Façade: Interpretation of Content and Form

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——— The article discusses sculptural decoration of the façades of the Riga Stock Exchange building (1852–1860, architect Harald Bosse), which consists of terracotta sculptures and medallions with emblematic and allegorical content created in the workshop of the Danish sculptor David Jensen in St. Petersburg. When developing the design of the Stock Exchange building in the Venetian Renaissance forms, the architect Harald Bosse intended to enrich its façades with sculptures and reliefs illustrative of the Riga Stock Exchange transactions.

Keywords: architecture, sculpture, terracotta, Harald Bosse, David Jensen, allegory, emblem.



1.
The Riga Stock Exchange building. Photo Ojārs
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Rygos biržos pastatas

The Riga Stock Exchange building is one of the public buildings in the city richly decorated with sculptures. Its façades – one facing Dom Square and the other Jēkaba Street – abound in architectural decoration of columns, pilasters, and cornices as well as terracotta (terra cotta – burnt earth, clay) sculptures and reliefs with allegorical content. When interpreting this sculptural work in the context of both classical mythology and symbols, it is necessary to take into account the fact that the realities of the economic and spiritual life of the mid-nineteenth century Baltics and Riga cannot be described with the help of two-millennia old clichés of ancient culture. Therefore, the sculptural decor of the building as commissioned by the Stock Exchange Committee can be considered as a synthesis of the modern-era cultural notions and concepts of the academically educated part of the society.

The composition of the façades of the Stock Exchange building is a stylization of the forms characteristic of the architecture of the Venetian *palazzo* [fig. 1]. In the urban environment of Old Riga, its two-story

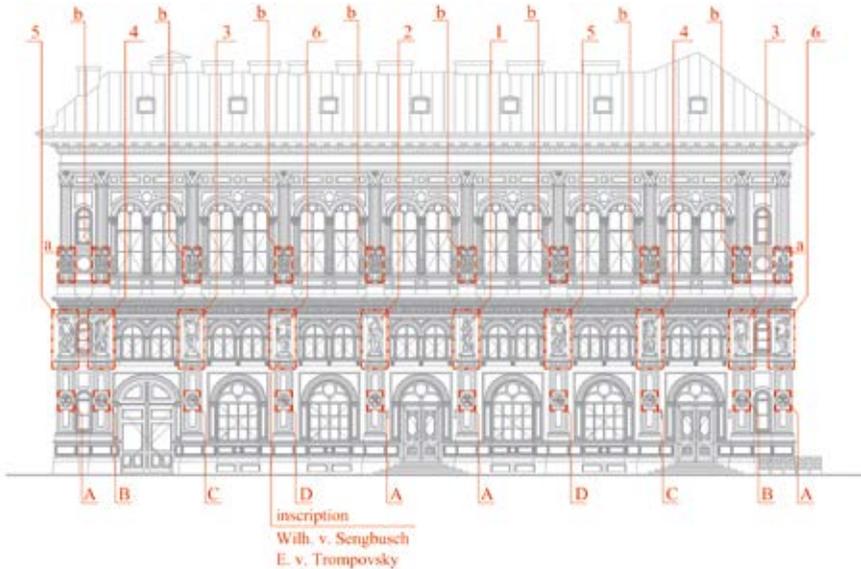
monumental façade planes are filled with detailed columns, pilasters, carefully designed window apertures, and cornices, which are further complemented by reliefs, sculptures, and other decorative elements. Viewed from a greater distance, the façades look majestically integral in their composition, and large-scale details combine with the complementary decorations to form a stylistically unified ensemble. However, from a closer distance, the façades show not only a significant difference in details, but also a great variety of sculptures, accessories, and symbolic and decorative elements. It is through these individualized examples of the façade sculpture that a purposefully designed thematic program can be traced [fig. 2 *I and II tables*].

The creator of the program and the sketches of the sculptures is the architect Harald Bose, whose St. Petersburg façades of the houses of his design had featured, since the 1840s, intensively imitated stylized Renaissance architectural forms. Twentieth-century architectural scholars have highly appreciated the sculptural complement in the classical manner which, based on the architect's own masterful sketches, was widely used in the decoration of the façades and interiors of the houses designed by Bosse. This has been noted about the decorative sculpture of the façades and interiors of the mansions of Prince Kochubei (1845–1846), Prince Yusupov (1852–1858), and the aristocratic family of the Buturlins (1857–1860).¹ It is only too obvious that at the peak of eclecticism in the mid-nineteenth century, Riga's merchants, brokers, and bankers, when envisioning the Stock Exchange building, wished to see imitated architectural façades with allegorical sculptures, like those on the buildings of Venetian traders, ship-owners, and aristocrats.

At the request of the Stock Exchange Committee, an ensemble of terracotta sculptures in the façade of Riga Stock Exchange building was created and incorporated into sculptures and reliefs by the Danish sculptor David Jensen (1816–1902), who was active in St. Petersburg in the mid-nineteenth century and was used to creating, within a short period of time, a large number of high-quality building elements for a wide variety of representative buildings, both public and private.² In his terracotta workshop, opened in 1854, Jensen produced ceramic façade decorations for St. Petersburg and other Russian cities, and the decor for the Riga Stock

1 *Architectural Monuments of Leningrad* (Leningrad: Stroizdat, 1976), 370, 374, 382, 384.

2 Ulrich Thieme and Felix Becker, *Allgemeines Lexikon der bildenden Künstler von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, Bd. 17–18 (Leipzig: Verlag E. A. Seemann, 1999), 514.

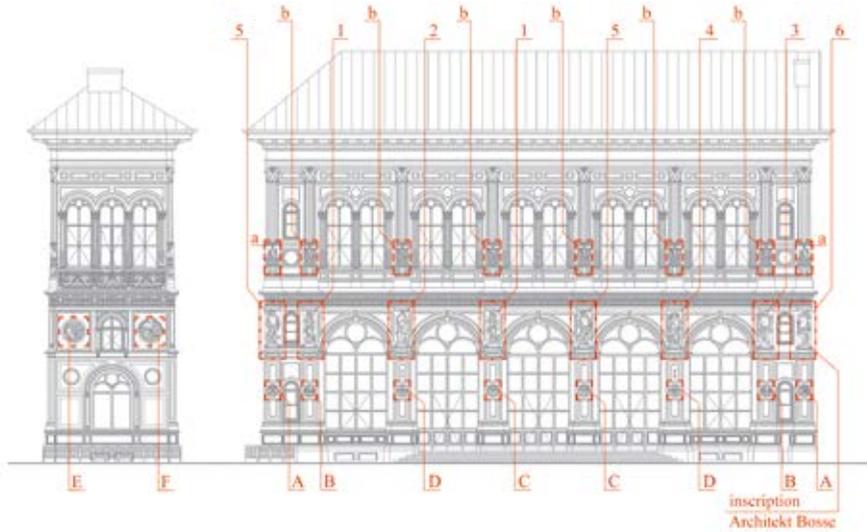


2.

Table I – Graphic design of the façade facing the Dom Square. Designed by Tatjana Toropova

Fasado į Domo aikštę grafinis dizainas, projektavo Tatjana Toropova

A <i>Harbour trade</i> <i>Uosto prekyba</i>	1 <i>Textile industry</i> <i>Tekstilės pramonė</i>	a <i>Agriculture and export</i> (pilaster decoration) <i>Žemės ūkis ir eksportas</i> (piliastro puošyba)
B <i>Trade in agricultural produce</i> <i>Prekyba žemės ūkio produktais</i>	2 <i>Food industry</i> <i>Maisto pramonė</i>	b <i>Trade (column decoration)</i> <i>Prekyba (kolonos puošyba)</i>
C <i>Shipping</i> <i>Laivyba</i>	3 <i>Agriculture</i> <i>Žemės ūkis</i>	c Inscription with the names of members of the Stock Exchange Committee <i>Užrašas su Biržos komiteto narių pavardėmis</i>
D <i>Prosperity of the city of Riga</i> <i>Rygos miesto klestėjimas</i>	4 <i>Horticulture and fruit-growing</i> <i>Daržininkystė ir sodininkystė</i>	
E <i>Foreign trade (import)</i> <i>Užsienio prekyba (importas)</i>	5 <i>Shipping</i> <i>Laivyba</i>	
F <i>Export of agricultural produce</i> <i>Žemės ūkio produktų eksportas</i>	6 <i>Trade (Mercury)</i> <i>Prekyba (Merkurijus)</i>	



2.

Table II – Graphic design of the façade facing Jēkaba Street. Designed by Tatjana Toropova

Fasado ģ Jēkaba gatvē grafinis dizains, projektavo Tatjana Toropova

A <i>Harbour trade</i> <i>Uosto prekyba</i>	1 <i>Textile industry</i> <i>Tekstilēs pramonē</i>	a <i>Agriculture and export</i> (pilaster decoration) <i>Žemēs ūkis ir eksportas</i> (piliastro puošyba)
B <i>Trade in agricultural produce</i> <i>Prekyba žemēs ūkio produktais</i>	2 <i>Food industry</i> <i>Maisto pramonē</i>	b <i>Trade (column decoration)</i> <i>Prekyba (kolonos puošyba)</i>
C <i>Shipping</i> <i>Laivība</i>	3 <i>Agriculture</i> <i>Žemēs ūkis</i>	c Inscription with the names of members of the Stock Exchange Committee <i>Užrašas su Biržos komiteto narių pavardėmis</i>
D <i>Prosperity of the city of Riga</i> <i>Rygos miesto klestėjimas</i>	4 <i>Horticulture and fruit-growing</i> <i>Daržininkystė ir sodininkystė</i>	
E <i>Foreign trade (import)</i> <i>Užsienio prekyba (importas)</i>	5 <i>Shipping</i> <i>Laivība</i>	
F <i>Export of agricultural produce</i> <i>Žemēs ūkio produktų eksportas</i>	6 <i>Trade (Mercury)</i> <i>Prekyba (Merkurijus)</i>	

Exchange façades is just one of his many commissions during the booming construction to be eventually delivered by sea to the recipients.

The history of commissioning and making the sculptural decor of the Exchange is of special interest because it is most directly related to the work of David Jensen's terracotta workshop. On April 23, 1852, Theodor Baron von Fircks, who was responsible for the construction of the Exchange, signed an agreement with St. Petersburg artists David Jensen and Konstantin Klein on the production and delivery of the external "ornament," as the Exchange building's façade décor was called.³ Although the contract does not reflect the composition and dimensions of the iconographic content of the reliefs and sculptures, it still stipulates that "As for the form of each individual molding, it will be approved by the academician von Bose, from whom we, Jensen and Klein, shall expect detailed drawings."⁴ The contract specifies that each sculpture and facade detail would be carefully packed and delivered on board a ship in St. Petersburg. Similarly, after the shipment arrived at the port of Riga, it would be unpacked immediately and the quality of the merchandise would be checked. Both sculptors – D. Jensen and Konstantin Klein – guaranteed in the fifth clause of the agreement to produce each terracotta detail of the Exchange façade no later than 75 days of receipt of the drawing made by academician von Bosse.⁵

The sculptures and reliefs in the façades of the Stock Exchange building reflect the mastery of David Jensen, an academically educated sculptor, to create dynamic compositions with pathos and allegorical content typical of classical art. From 1832 to 1841, he had studied at the Royal Academy of Arts in Copenhagen and had already won silver and gold medals for his achievements in Denmark. His outstanding talents in the field of drawing and plastics took him to St. Petersburg as early as in 1841, where he became one of the most outstanding architects and sculptors of the mid-nineteenth century and gained the highest recognition and respect. In 1857 he was awarded the title of academician for the mythological high-relief composition *Achilles Pulling Hector's Body* and in 1868 the title of professor for the statue *Diana*.⁶

3 Prod[ucirt] in der Börsenbau Commiſſion. 23. Apr[il] 1852, LVVA, 3143 f., 23 apr., 72. L. 1.-3. lpp.

4 Ibid., LVVA, 3143 f., 23 apr., 72. L. 1. lpp.

5 Ibid., LVVA, 3143 f., 23 apr., 72. L. 2. lpp.

6 Thieme, Becker, *Allgemeines Lexikon der bildenden Künstler von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, 514.



3.
Emblem *Harbour trade*

Emblema *Uosto prekyba*



4.
Emblem *Trade in agricultural produce*

Emblema *Prekyba žemės ūkio produktais*

On the first story of the Stock Exchange, between the windows, 20 round terracotta emblems are arranged among stylized pilasters, the laconic composition of which has been created with the help of several symbols. In total, the artist made six types of emblems. Four emblems are repeated several times in the long façades. The composition of one emblem features crossed Mercury wands (A) [fig. 3] placed behind the anchor symbol and bound with fasciae. The meaning of these elements can be interpreted by summing up the individual symbols in a conceptual message with a reference to an alliance of trade organizations related to the port, the sea and shipping. The dolphin and the crossed sheaves depicted in the second emblem encourage the observer to look for a link between agriculture and the water element (B) [fig. 4]. In the context of the economic activity of the Riga Stock Exchange, this indicates the considerable turnover of grain products both through the stock exchange and through the port because during the construction of the Stock Exchange building there was no railway in the Baltics, and large-scale deliveries could be ensured only by sea.

The third emblem includes two crossed anchors behind which there is a steering paddle covered with Mercury's cap (C) [fig. 5]. This eloquent emblem refers to the ship owners and the fleet that provided transport on behalf of the stock exchange and guaranteed commercial success. The fourth emblem succinctly combines two crossed cornucopias and a crown at the end of a walking stick (D) [fig. 6]. Like the previous emblems, the content of this composition can be detected in the synthesis of several associative conceptual meanings. The representation of the so-called heraldic "masonry crown" in the emblem indicates its connection to the city, namely Riga, the successful administration of which is the key to achieving prosperity and abundance.

Two other emblems were made in only one copy and placed in the cut-back corner façade of the Stock Exchange building facing Dom Square. Both present round-shaped reliefs. The sculptor has supplemented each with a decorative garland of flowers and Mercury's cap. Similar to antique art or the samples influenced by it, the compositions of both medallions are designed as "trophies" – symbolic objects tied with a ribbon and suspended



5.
Emblem *Shipping*

Emblema *Laivība*



6.
Emblem *Prosperity of the city of Riga*

Emblema *Rygos miesto klestējimas*



7.
Emblem *Foreign trade (import)*

Emblema *Užsienio prekyba (importas)*



8.
Emblem *Export of agricultural produce*

Emblema *Žemės ūkio produktų eksportas*

Ojārs Spāritis — *Terracotta Sculpture on the Riga Stock Exchange Façade:
Interpretation of Content and Form*

on a nail. The ornamentally crowded composition of one medallion combines an anchor, a steering oar, and a bunch of grapes, which indicate the reciprocal nature of trade and shipping when overseas goods were delivered to Riga (E) [fig. 7]. In the second medallion, a sheaf of grain, a sickle, and a bovine's head have been added to the anchor, and these attributes symbolize the notions of the role of the Port of Riga and the stock exchange in the export of agricultural goods – grain and meat (F) [fig. 8].

The figural sculpture that adorns the upper part of each pilaster between the windows on the first story of the Stock Exchange building constitutes the fundamental element of the façade decoration system. The male and female images, depicted in a total of 18 expressive sculptures and made in full plasticity, manifest the allegorical meaning found in ancient mythology and symbols of ancient culture, which nineteenth-century domestic and economic progress had modified and supplemented with new content. In all, six different terracotta sculptures were made and arranged alternately on the façades. They visually create an impression of a greater number of variations in allegorical content. The sculptures, made in good academic tradition, demonstrate masterful use of the techniques typical of ancient Greek and Roman sculpture when depicting a naked or partially clothed body. To amplify the volume of the sculptures, Jensen skillfully used pedestals. With the help of fixed gestures and dynamic movements, the sculptor used both anatomical precision and verisimilitude in the position of the torsos and legs of the allegorical sculptures. Stylized tools and symbolic accessories have not detracted from their grace or expression of movement; rather, they help to form conceptual associations for understanding the complex content. The animals, objects, and plants depicted at the feet or in the background of each sculpture serve to express the current context of the time, which has nothing to do with the tradition of ancient art. By combining a classic form with a large number of symbolic details, Jensen has created unique images where an aestheticized antique art form conveys the content of a modern industrial era. Thus, the sculptures of the Stock Exchange façades allegorically reflect the economic life of Riga and its administrators' perception of the role of the seaport in world trade.



9.
Sculpture *Textile industry*
Skulptūra *Tekstilēs pramonē*

At first sight, the sculptures on the façade of The Stock Exchange seem to have been borrowed from Greek or Roman mythology, but on closer inspection this is found not to be the case. Only the sculpture of Mercury, the patron of trade, with a sail and a caduceus, resembles images created by artists of classical antiquity and the Renaissance. The other five male and female personifications have less traditional accessories that reflect concepts pertaining to the context of the age.

One of the allegorical female sculptures is wearing tunic-like clothing, which distinguishes it significantly from the other images that are depicted similar to ancient gods and nearly naked due to their essential role in the stock exchange transactions (1) [fig. 9]. With one leg, the woman has stepped on a bundle presumably of flax or wool. The cane with sheep's wool in her hand can be understood as a distaff from which the wool will be processed into yarn. The connection between this sculpture, its symbolic



10.
Sculpture *Food industry*
Skulptūra *Maisto pramonē*



11.
Sculpture *Agriculture*
Skulptūra *Žemēs ūkis*

details, and spinning is suggested by the spinning wheel, discernible behind the woman's legs. The set of purposefully selected objects forms a complex sum of symbolic representations that characterize the significant role of the textile industry in stock exchange transactions and Riga's light industry.

Another terracotta sculpture embodies the sculptor's idea of the personification of a shepherd (2) [fig. 10]. The staff and the squatting dog, presenting easy-to-read clichés, clearly point to the young man's connection with a shepherd's life in the open. His naked body is only partially covered by an animal's pelt, from which both hooves and the head of a horned ox hang naturally. The content of the image of a man personified in this allegory is not directly derived from the symbolic meaning of an ancient god or the deeds of a mythological hero. The understanding of the allegory is related to the production, processing, and trade of export goods characteristic of Baltic agriculture – meat and other food products – and it is the explanation



12.
Sculpture *Horticulture and fruit-growing*
Skulptūra *Daržininkystē ir sodininkystē*



13.
Sculpture *Shipping*
Skulptūra *Laivība*

of the meaning of accessories that takes us to nineteenth-century Riga and communicates a whole host of related notions.

Another figure of an athletic man is depicted in an allegorical sculpture, his legs crossed, his right hand leaning on a plough, his left hand holding a sheaf of grain over his shoulder (3) [fig. 11]. The chain of interpretation of allegorical images related to the agrarian orientation of the Baltic economies leads us to think that the form of this sculpture and the suggestive accessories illustrate the sublime significance of production of grain-farming and production. As an associative image, this group of allegorical sculptures includes a charming woman modelled in a graceful position, whose full and slightly draped body is surrounded by the attributes of the plant kingdom: leaves, plant stems, and flowers (4) [fig. 12]. On her shoulder she playfully carries a basket full of garden gifts: ripe apples, bunches of grapes, and other fruits. In ancient culture, a set of such symbolic details that complement

the allegorical image could be identified with Ceres, called Demeter in Greek. She was considered the guardian of agriculture and the plant kingdom because her mission was to promote fertility in nature. In an attempt to specify her significance in the economic space of Riga and the Baltics, it is not possible to attribute the name or the mythological content of the particular Greek or Roman goddess to this allegory, but the role of this image as the guardian of horticulture and fruit growing remains indisputable.

Among the allegorical sculptures is the recurrent image of a young man with a shell like a trumpet at his lips (5) [fig. 13]. He is depicted stepping on a dolphin's head with one foot and holding an anchor rope with his free left hand. A connoisseur of ancient culture will recognize the allegorical half-human and half-fish image of Neptune's son, Triton, here an academically perfect young and strong male figure slightly covered by drapery. According to ancient beliefs, by blowing trumpets, tritons are able to calm a raging sea, so in art they represent guardians of seafaring and shipping. This sector of transport has played a special role in the operation of the stock exchange since the Middle Ages. Shipping was the main auxiliary trade sector. It ensured the movement of goods from Riga and other Baltic ports and guaranteed a considerable share of profits.

The easily identifiable image of Mercury is considered to be the most capacious Stock Exchange sculpture and is the most richly adorned with expressive details (6) [fig. 14]. One of the twelve Olympian gods, Mercury, son of Jupiter and Maya, is always full of energy and invention. Because of this, he has become an ambassador, a mediator between gods and people. His fast movement is ensured by winged sandals, while the winged cap (*petasus*) enables him to become invisible. With his peculiar wand – the caduceus – made like a staff entwined with two snakes, Mercury is able to put both gods and humans to sleep for his own benefit when he needs to act without being seen. However, this is not the most important feature of Mercury's nature. In addition to the traditional symbolic attributes, David Jensen has added a sail to this allegorical image, signaling the restlessness, anxiety, and haste that accompany travelers, whereas the bundles of goods at his feet eloquently testify to his personified nature of a trade guardian.



14.
Sculpture *Trade (Mercury)*
Skulptūra *Prekyba (Merkurijus)*



15.
Pilaster decoration *Agriculture and export*
Piliastro puošība *Žemēs ūkis ir eksports*

A rooster, with its beak open to sing and wings spread out, harbingers the approach of dawn and welcomes vigilance and anxiety because the success of traders and stockbrokers is unthinkable without them.

The Stock Exchange is adorned with columns and pilasters that incorporate floral designs as well as symbols derived from the emblems. In this way, even oft-repeated architectural details express concepts characteristic of the modern age. Ornamentally plastic as well as thematic compositions have been created on the bases of 18 columns and pilasters on the second story of the Stock Exchange building, based on a unified use of symbols and the principle of message composition. Their artistic image consists of high-relief bands of acanthus leaves and spirals with two types of figural compositions in the middle. They, too, are arranged alternately on the columns and pilasters of the Stock Exchange façades. The allegorical content on the column bases is conveyed by motifs borrowed from the emblematic



16.
Column decoration *Trade*
Kolonos puošyba *Prekyba*



17.
Inscription with the names of members of the Stock
Exchange Committee
Užrašas su Bīržos komiteto narių pavardėmis

content of the round medallions. In the middle of one composition there is a winged genius with a stylized helm (rudder) in one hand and a sheaf of grain in the other; thus personifying the export of agricultural goods as one of the most traditional transactions of the Riga Stock Exchange (a) [fig. 15]. The central image of the other composition, the winged genius, carries a Mercury wand and a horn of plenty, inspiring associations with prosperity through trade (b) [fig. 16].

In the course of the restoration of the Stock Exchange building from 2004 to 2011, several previously unknown details related to the sculpture of the façades of the house have been revealed, which today have the significance of the first ever documentation of facts pertaining to the history of its construction.⁷ On one of the terracotta Mercury sculptures, more precisely, on the sail he holds in his hand, a calligraphic inscription in soft clay (“Architekt Bosse”) was revealed. Other names of the Riga Exchange Committee members as well as major donors were also found engraved in

⁷ Projection and the restoration of The Stock Exchange building has been realised during 2004–2011. under the supervision of architects office “SIA Arhitektoniskās izpētes grupa”. Leading architect of the project Liesma Markova.

terracotta on the bundles of goods of the Mercury sculpture on the façade facing Dom Square: Wilhelm von Sengbusch, merchant of the Great Guild and consul, and Eduard von Trompowsky (“Wilh. v. Sengbusch,” “E. v. Trompowsky”) [fig. 17]. The bundles of yet another Mercury sculpture are supplemented by the inscription “W. Ruetz” and two other undecipherable names. These are the names of the Exchange Committee members, although not all of them are there since the committee was basically formed by 14 members, their number being supplemented by six active entrepreneurs.⁸ As five other surnames have been found on the façade sculptures besides the architect’s name, it can be assumed that there has been a connection between these people and the construction of the Stock Exchange or the decoration of its façades.

The decoration of the Stock Exchange building with a conceptually planned and consistently implemented façade sculpture in the form of emblems and allegorical figures is an unusual phenomenon of public architecture in mid-nineteenth-century Riga. The sculptures and medallions with emblems made in the terracotta workshop of the sculptor David Jensen in St. Petersburg constitute the only large-scale sculptural ensemble executed in this technique. The findings that emerged between 2008 and 2011 during the restoration of the Stock Exchange guarantee its intransient status in the history of Latvian architecture and art.

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⁸ H. von Stein, *Der Rigasche Börsen-Comite in den Jahren 1816 bis 1866*. Als Manuskript gedruckt (Riga, 1866), 27.

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Santrauka

Terakotos skulptūros ant Rygos biržos pastato fasado: turinio ir formos interpretacija

Ojārs Spāritis

Reikšminiai žodžiai: architektūra, skulptūra, terakota, Haraldas Bosse, Davidas Jensenas, alegorija, emblema.

Publikacija skirta vienam įstabiausių Latvijos architektūros paminklų – 1852–1860 m. pastatytam Rygos biržos pastatui, kurį suprojektavo Baltijos vokiečių architektas Haraldas Bosse. Jis, nepaprastai žavėjęsis renesanso architektūra, įtikino Rygos biržos komiteto narius priimti pasiūlymą stilizuoti pastato išorę remiantis Venecijos renesansiniais *palazzo* tipo pastatais, šitaip patvirtinant savo ištikimybę Europos prekybinės kultūros vertybėms. Siekiant sustiprinti įspūdį, ant prašmatnios architektūros pastato fasadų buvo pritvirtinta 20 reljefinių emblemų ir 18 alegorinių bei mitologinių skulptūrų, kurias papildė industrinės epochos ikonografijos elementai. Šio straipsnių rinkinio kontekste svarbu pabrėžti, kad visos Rygos biržos skulptūrinio dekoro detalės – terakotos reljefai ir apvaliosios skulptūros – buvo sukurtos danų skulptoriaus Davido Jenseno dirbtuvėje Sankt Peterburge.