

## **Twinning Project: ‘Greek Heritage in European Culture and Identity’ (GrECI)**

### **Research Meeting III: Public Lectures on ‘Classics and Classical Scholarship in Norway in the Age of National Independence’ – Oslo 2024**

**23-24 May 2024**

**Blindern Campus and Old University Campus (Faculty of Law), University of Oslo (UiO)  
– Oslo, Norway**

The GrECI project held its Research Meeting III between the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of May at the University of Oslo. Within the context of this meeting, the participants had the opportunity to attend a series of events dedicated to Classics and classical scholarship in Norway in the age of national independence.

The first day of the meeting opened with a session dealing with the reception of Classical Antiquity in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Norway. The session, which was open to the public, included two presentations by Prof. Christine Amadou and Victoria Marie Mostue.

After a warm welcome by Prof. Mathilde Skoie, Vice Dean for Research at the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Oslo, and introductory notes by Natasha Constantinidou and Han Lamers, Christine Amadou opened the session with her paper “Norway and Antiquity in the Age of National Independence”. In her presentation, she discussed Norway’s quest for national identity after the country became independent in 1814, during which period Norwegian intellectuals focused on uncovering distinct elements of Norwegian identity. They also tried to find connections to what they perceived as ‘universal’ classical antiquity. On many occasions these two objectives converged, such as in the case of a translation of Homer into Norwegian and the imagined stylistic connections between medieval Scandinavian stave churches and Byzantine architecture. Prof. Amadou discussed the way in which Classical Antiquity was used to legitimize the young nation during the resurgence of nation states across Europe. She added that as Norwegians re-discovered distinct elements of Norwegian identity, classical elements became less prominent. Christine Amadou also introduced the Research Group “Norway’s Antiquity”, a collaborative research group including researchers who examine three interrelated academic fields, all of whom are interested in the Norwegian reception of Greek Antiquity.

Victoria Marie Mostue’s presentation “Norway and Classical Scholarship in the Age of National Independence” discussed the educational and cultural status of classical languages and literature in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Norwegian academic world but also in print, politics, and wider society. She highlighted the debates regarding classical, and particularly Latin-based, education. The presentation made clear that an opposition emerged between those who believed that emphasis should be given to “modern sciences” instead of classical studies and those who championed a more traditional classical education. Mostue also discussed how, during the age of National Romanticism, some academics maintained that the teaching of a Norwegian language should take precedence over the teaching of classical languages. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was a decline of Classical Studies and by the end of the century Latin was removed from school curricula. The speaker also discussed how Classical Studies were presented mostly negatively in literature, using as an example Alexander Kielland’s novel *Gift* (Poison).

On the following day, the project members attended a guided tour of the historic university buildings Domus Media and Domus Academica conducted by Prof. Bjørn Vidar Johansen. The tour began from the neoclassical (partly German-inspired) Royal Palace, making its way towards the old university buildings, which are characteristic examples of Norwegian neoclassicism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The architects of the old university buildings borrowed elements from Ancient Greek architecture, as well as symbols relating to Ancient Greece. By making associations with Classical Antiquity, they lent legitimacy to the first highest education institution in Norway. The tour at the Old University Campus focused on two main areas, the Aula and the Gamle Festsal (Old Festive Hall). The Aula exemplifies how neoclassical architecture was fused with distinct national elements, notably evident in the wall paintings of Edvard Munch displayed in the university's aula and which express the artist's conception of education and sciences. These artworks establish a link between specific national styles and the more 'universal' neoclassical elements, effectively connecting the building's design with similar European projects. The Old Festive Hall is a large auditorium in the shape of an ancient amphitheatre and is today used for doctoral defenses and other formal events. The tour complemented the two papers from the previous day, showcasing the material dimensions of intellectual debates discussed by Amadou and Mostue. Simultaneously, the two papers provided the intellectual context behind the architectural creations.