

Henrik Lilius

* 3.2.1939 † 12.6.2024



Director General of the National Board of Antiquities, State Archaeologist and Professor Henrik Lilius died on 12 June 2024 in Helsinki at the age of 85, following a long illness. Lilius graduated from the University of Helsinki with a Master of Arts in 1964 and obtained a PhD in 1967. He began his career as a research assistant at the National Board of Antiquities (now Finnish Heritage Agency) from 1959–1965 and ended it as Director General of the National Board of Antiquities from 1993–2003. He was Professor of History of Architecture at the Helsinki University of Technology from 1975–1983 and Professor of Art History at the University of Helsinki from 1983–1992. Lilius was elected a member of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters in 1979.

Lilius' scientific activities focused primarily on urban studies and building conservation. He obtained his PhD in 1967 with *Der Pekkatori in Raabe. Studien über einen eckverschlossenen Platz und seine Gebäudetypen*. The thesis explored a topical trend in art history at the time. In the 1960s, urban architecture began to be viewed in a broader context than before, taking into account the economic and social history of the city as a whole. In par-

ticular, the focus on the urban structure was a new concept, turning attention to the typological and morphological elements of architecture, represented for example by various types of public squares. The everyday environments of Nordic rural towns, as represented by Pekkatori square in the town of Raabe, were still largely unappreciated in Finland in the 1960s as topics of art historical research. Lilius followed in the footsteps of his teacher, Professor Lars Pettersson, in choosing to focus his research on modest Finnish wooden architecture. Pettersson had once had to fight for the right to study wooden churches built by folk builders with no academic training. The strongest international tradition in the discipline was still directed only towards the study of so-called high art.

In his doctoral thesis, Lilius wrote that his future goal was to study the phases of the architectural environments in Finnish cities and the history of “urban thinking”. He argued that without a detailed historical survey, more in-depth analyses would be impossible. His key publications supported this goal. *Joensuun kaupunki 1848–1890. Erään suomalaisen puukaupungin vaiheita* (1972) is a thorough analysis of

the construction of one city. It has been hailed as the pinnacle of a scientifically rigorous approach to art history. In his extensive articles over the years, Lilius came to explore the trajectories of Finnish urban architecture from the Middle Ages to the end of the 19th century with astounding accuracy. These articles were published as part of *Suomen kaupunkilaitoksen historia* (1981, 1983) and as part of the Finnish art history reference series *Ars – Suomen taide* (1987–1989). His last major effort was *Suomen kaupunkirakentamisen historia* (2014), a two-volume work with contributions by several scholars. The initiative came specifically from Lilius, and the basic outline of the work is from his pen. For this series, he wrote an even more comprehensive account of the architectural development of Finnish cities.

In his urban studies, Lilius wanted to examine how administrative and financial decisions influenced the visual appearance of cities and changes in the urban environment in different centuries. His research was based on vast archival material and extensive fieldwork. Lilius analysed the buildings themselves, starting from the function of each building and how this determines the building type. In doing so, he followed the typological approach already tested in his doctoral thesis. Consistent to this approach, Lilius also wrote monographs on individual building types. These include *Suomalaisen koulutalon arkkitehtuurihistoriaa. Kehityslinjojen tarkastelua keskiajalta itsenäisyyden ajan alkuun* (1982), *Kaupan arkkitehtuuria* (2003) and *Fängelsearkitektur i Finland ca 1635–1845* (2014).

As an urban historian, Lilius did not focus his attention on individual designers, but he has nevertheless written notable

texts on Carl Ludvig Engel (1778–1840), the most famous designer in the older history of Finnish architecture. The largest research project on Engel culminated in a major exhibition in Helsinki in 1990, which was accompanied by a book of more than 500 pages compiled by several scholars. This, the most extensive scholarly work on Engel published to date, would not have been possible without the dedicated contribution of Lilius. He was the book's chief editor and author of several articles.

One of the most significant monographs on individual buildings is *Villa Lante al Gianicolo. L'architettura e la decorazione pittorica* (1981). This work explores the complex architectural history of Villa Lante, the palace that houses the Finnish Institute in Rome. A lion's share of the study is taken up by an analysis of the imagery depicted in the building's extensive fresco and stucco decorations. Lilius did the groundwork for this study while serving as director of the Finnish Institute in Rome in Villa Lante from 1972 to 1976. Another extensive monograph on a building is the early *Birgittinerkyrkan i Nådendal* (1969). Between 1963 and 1964, Lilius led a study on the architectural history of the medieval church, which included extensive archaeological excavations. In the book, he presented a number of results and reconstruction proposals that deviated from prior research.

Lilius is remembered by his students as a passionate analyst of architectural classicism, in particular. Lilius based his analysis of classical architectural systems above all on Rudolf Wittkower's and Christoph L. Frommel's studies of Italian Renaissance and Baroque monumental architecture. He applied their technical analytical tools not only to Engel's architecture, but also to the rest of the Finnish building stock which

was based on classicism. Lilius was always particularly interested in the methodological foundations of his discipline. He developed art history methodologies also in his articles. Lilius constantly stressed the importance of theoretical premises and appreciated students who were able to transcend the empiricism of archival research. He was also surprisingly willing to accept criticism of his own research, as long as it was based on valid arguments.

The social battlefield of Lilius' career was building conservation. He was active in both international and Finnish organisations. Lilius' numerous articles on the theory and practice of building conservation draw on this experience. His most important writings on building conservation were compiled in his 60th anniversary publication *Motiivi ja metodi / Motiv och metod* (*Taidehistoriallisia tutkimuksia / Art Historical Studies* 20, 1999).

*Obituary by Riitta Nikula and
Ville Lukkarinen*