Karl Friedrich Schinkel’s reputation as one of the greatest architects of the 19th century has eclipsed his importance in the development of preservation in Germany. Schinkel was born in Neuruppin, Germany, in 1781, and moved with his widowed mother to Berlin in 1794 where he studied architecture under David Gilly. He wrote this seminal text immediately after Prussia and its allies defeated Napoleon in 1815, and the new German Confederation was beginning to create a new bureaucracy. By then, Schinkel’s work had gained royal notice, and he had become an official of the Prussian public works department. He conceived a national preservation authority that would be a lynchpin of the Confederation’s modernization program—significantly, no such bureaucracy existed in the world at the time, and it would take another 15 years for France to create it. Such a preservation bureaucracy, he thought, would be an invaluable ideological tool to unite the citizenry of the 39 previously disparate German states by educating them about their common cultural history. Schinkel envisioned it as a decentralized organization, in keeping with the federal political model. Its role would be to oversee the proper education of architects and artist in restoration, to commission them with restorations, to set standards for their work, to organize exhibitions, and to educate the public about the value of historic monuments. Significantly the new preservation bureaucracy would also oversee a national inventory of historic buildings, a task that was not accomplished in some German states until the early 20th century. In Schinkel’s own projects, preservation figures as part and parcel of the process of incorporating historical precedents into the architectural modernization of secondary cities into 19th century capitals, as can be seen in his work in Berlin, and especially in his unexecuted plans for the transformation of the Athenian Acropolis into a royal palace for the Bavarian-born King Otto of Greece. He died in Berlin in 1841.

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