Max Dvořák and Austrian Denkmalpflege at War

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Then someone provocatively put the pointed question as to what people really thought: What's more important? Ten thousand starving people, or a work of art?! [1]

In 1905, Max Dvořák (1874-1921) succeeded Alois Riegl as one of three conservators general at the Royal and Imperial Central Commission for the Research and Preservation of Artistic and Historical Monuments, Vienna. He effectively served as director of this venerable institution until his death in 1921, editing a number of its publications and himself publishing a significant amount on the theory and practice of *Denkmalpflege*, or monument preservation. When he was appointed head of the so-called 'second' Institute for Art History at the university in 1909, he had already got the ambitious project of the *Austrian Art Topography* underway (from 1907), and was soon to begin work on an accessible tract outlining the modern principles of conservation, the *Conservation Catechism* (1916).

In these publications and his work at the Central Commission, Dvořák picked up – broadly speaking – where his mentor had left off, and sought to cultivate the modern cult of monuments through appeals to piety, patriotism, and spirit, which he contrasted to the impiety, avarice, and materialism of his times. He lobbied for the protection of historic townscapes, most famously for the Karlsplatz in Vienna; he took up Franz Ferdinand's cause in decrying the use of inappropriate modern building materials; and he railed against an international art market that was steadily stripping Austria of its cultural heritage. The tonic to all this, he proposed, was a new 'spiritual relationship to historic art', which, though rather ill-defined, seems to have been based on an idealized picture of artistic life in the Middle Ages.

The following account will focus on Austrian Denkmalpflege during and immediately after the 1914-1918 war, and, in particular, on Dvořák's responses to the acute threats it posed to historic artworks and historic monuments.

The unexampled destruction of the war both confirmed and radically challenged the perceived importance of monuments. It was confirmed in that significant national monuments were targeted as though the very incarnations of the enemy, and it was challenged insofar as the supposedly higher 'spiritual' values of European culture came out second best in their conflict with the basic material necessities of survival and the requirements of military strategy. This threw the relative importance of monuments into sharp relief. When weighed up against human lives, the balance inevitably fell in favour of the latter.

[1] Robert Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rohwolt Taschenbuch Verlag, 2006, book II, chapter 89, 402. 'Dann stellte jemand streitbar und wirkungsvoll die Frage, was man denn nun eigentlich glaube: ob zehntausend hungernde Menschen wichtiger seien oder ein Kunstwerk?!'

In theory at least, the Geneva Conventions of 1907, which had been ratified by all major belligerents, provided rules for the protection of cultural property in warfare. An annex to the convention, section II, article 27, stated the following:

> In sieges and bombardments all necessary steps must be taken to spare, as far as possible, buildings dedicated to religion, art, science, or charitable purposes, historic monuments, hospitals, and places where the sick and wounded are collected, provided they are not being used for military purposes. It is the duty of the besieged to indicate the presence of such buildings or places by distinctive and visible signs, which shall be notified to the enemy beforehand.[2]

In practice, though, this stipulation was rendered ineffective by the proviso it contained on 'use for military purposes'. Church towers immediately became military targets when used for surveillance, and wherever historic buildings were used for cover or for quartering troops they naturally also invited bombardment. The

Figure 1 German shell exploding on Notre Dame at Rheims.

[2] 'Convention (IV) with Respect to the Laws and Customs of War on Land' [1907], in Dietrich Schindler & Jiri Toman, eds, *The Laws of Armed Conflicts: A Collection of Conventions, Resolutions and Other Documents*, 4th edn, Leiden and Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2004, 74. Annex to the Convention, Section II: Hostilities, Chapter 1, Article 27. In the case of bombardment by naval forces, these signs were to 'consist of large, stiff rectangular panels divided diagonally in two coloured triangular portions, the upper portion black, the lower portion white.' A very modern form of heraldry, comparable perhaps to a Sol le Witt. If such signs were used at all, they were probably ignored.

German shelling of Rheims, for instance – an attack that was roundly condemned in allied propaganda[3] – was justified in the Austrian press with the claim that the French had set up their artillery around the cathedral and were thus themselves responsible for drawing down fire upon it (fig. 1).[4] In a war situation the very material solidity of monuments – what Riegl would have called their use value – came strongly to the fore in contrast to any spiritual values they might have possessed, and conservationists in Europe were forced to come to terms this hard fact.[5]

By Dvořák's own account, the Central Commission was not prepared for war. When hostilities broke out in the Summer of 1914, the Ministry for Religion and Education ordered emergency measures for the protection of monuments. In Galicia, Dalmatia, and on the Adriatic coast, movable monuments were pulled back to safety and immovable monuments were secured from bombardment wherever possible. 'In the first few months […] we still believed in the effectiveness of the Hague Convention,' writes Dvořák, 'But over the course of the first year of the war it became clear that the Hague regulations were not being respected on any side.'[6] This state of affairs was exacerbated by the fact that there were no restrictions in place for airborne bombardment. Monuments in Venice, Gorizia, and Pula (Croatia) suffered accordingly—to the indignant uproar of the western powers, and the no doubt sincere regret of the Central Commission.

In August 1915, Dvořák attended the 'Wartime Congress for Monument Preservation' in Brussels to discuss these urgent spiritual matters with his German colleagues. Here, an official from the Austrian Ministry for Religion and Education reported on measures to combat the destructive force of the Russian war machine in Galicia and Poland: regional conservationists had been granted freedom of movement to assess damage and make good injured buildings before the onset of Winter.[7] Similar powers had been given to conservators in the recently opened Italian theatre, where movables were secured and commanding officers provided with lists of buildings not to be used for billeting troops. These measures were warmly welcomed by Paul Clemen, a senior German conservationist, who condemned Russian barbarism ('truly Asiatic pleasure in destruction') before proposing a special committee for the eastern front, where, according to Dvořák, Russian plundering was an especially acute problem. Thus an *Ostmark* commission was formed and asked to present its resolutions after breakfast. As a result, letters were sent to the appropriate ministries in Austria and Germany on behalf of the

[3] See, for instance, Edmund Gosse, 'The Desecration of French Monuments', *The Edinburgh Review*, 222: 454, October 1915, 330-350.

[4] 'Die Beschädigung der Kathedrale von Reims', *Reichspost*, 23.9.1914, 1.

[5] Cornelius Gurlitt, 'Der Krieg und die Denkmalpflege', *Stenographischer Bericht: Tagung für Denkmalpflege*, 3, 1915, Kriegstagung für Denkmalpflege, 59-65.

[6] Max Dvořák, 'Einrichtungen des Kunstschutzes in Österreich' in Paul Clemen, ed., *Kunstschutz im Kriege: Berichte über den Zustand der Kunstdenkmäler auf den verschiedenen Kriegsschauplätzen und über die deutschen und österreichischen Massnahmen zu ihrer Erhaltung*, 2 vols, Leipzig: E. A. Seemann, 1919, vol. 2, 2-3. 'In den ersten Kriegsmonaten glaubten wir noch an die Wirksamkeit der Vereinbarungen der Haager Konvention. […] Der Verlauf des ersten Kriegsjahres hat uns allerdings belehrt, daß die Haager Bestimmungen von keener Seite respektiert wurden […] .'

[7] *Stenographischer Bericht: Tagung für Denkmalpflege*, 3, 1915, Kriegstagung für Denkmalpflege, 54-56.

congress, calling for organized and collaborative monument protection in the occupied eastern territories.[8]

But back in the Hinterland, monuments were soon being destroyed left right and centre by the Austrian military government itself: namely, the requisition of metals was expanded to include church bells and copper roofs as early as Spring 1916. This confronted the Central Commission with the unenviable dilemma of having to decide which monuments could be sacrificed to the war effort.[9] And indeed, by the end of the war, Germany was even starting to melt down its bronze statues, thus fulfilling Ferdinand Kürnberger's sardonic prophesy on the ultimate fate of monuments: 'Happy the nation that possesses a metallic arsenal of spiritual heroes rich enough to be recast into cannon!'[10]

If such regrettable losses could not be prevented, Dvořák and the Central Commission compensated by way of altruistic efforts to protect monuments in occupied Italy, and this good work was duly reported in the press for its high propaganda value. One such report was unfortunate enough to come to the attention of Karl Kraus, who didn't miss the opportunity to satirize it in a note entitled 'All for Art':

> 'Military commanders on both sides have taken the most extensive measures for the protection of artistic monuments in the occupied areas of Italy. A special Art Commission — — Special advisors tour the occupied area — — no really valuable monuments anywhere suffered damage worth mentioning — — the churches namely are unscathed almost everywhere. The few exceptions were caused by accidental hits from aircraft and artillery. The damage is not significant. The Italians themselves removed valuable pictures from churches, museums, and private collections a long time ago; they were allegedly secured or in most cases taken to Florence for restoration — — The townscape as a whole is mostly unscathed. The exteriors of the many country houses and numerous palaces belonging to the Fruilian nobility in Udine are untouched.'
>
> Everything saved. But then, is destruction in enemy territory never intentional? And direct hits are always accidental? So who *can* vouch for the direction of a bomb?[11]

[8] *Stenographischer Bericht: Tagung für Denkmalpflege*, 3, 1915, Kriegstagung für Denkmalpflege, 106.
[9] Dvořák, 'Einrichtungen des Kunstschutzes in Österreich', 2; Eva Frodl-Kraft, *Gefährdetes Erbe: Österreichs Denkmalschutz und Denkmalpflege, 1918-1945 im Prisma der Zeitgeschichte*, Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 1997, 3.
[10] A statue of Kaiser Wilhelm I in Heidelberg was melted down in 1918, though this was an exceptional case. For German monument requisitions see Meinhold Lurz, *Kriegerdenkmäler in Deutschland*, 3 vols, Heidelberg: Esprint Drückerei und Verlag, 1985, vol. 3, 49-52. Ferdinand Kürnberger, 'Das Denkmalsetzen in der Opposition' [1873] in *Literarische Hertzensachen, Reflexionen und Kritiken*, Vienna: Rosler, 1877, 375. 'Glückliches Volk, das dann so reiche Erz-Arsenal von Geistes-Heroen besitzt, die es in Kanonen umgießen kann!' Kürnberger (1821-1879) is deserving of further study. He was a major influence on Karl Kraus, and provided the epigraph for Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*.
[11] Karl Kraus, 'Alles für die Kunst', *Die Fackel*, 20: 484-498, 15.10.1918, 74. 'Zum Schutze der Kunstdenkmäler in den besetzten italienischen Gebieten haben die beiderseitigen Heeresleitungen die weitestgehenden Maßnahmen getroffen. eine eigene Kunstkommission — — Besondere Referenten

Kraus' point, if it needs explicating at all, is that it seems somewhat irrelevant to quibble about art in times of war, when bombs are devastating human life. The passage he sends up here, which no doubt stems from the Central Commission, bears comparison to Dvořák's own glowing account of wartime Denkmalpflege in Austria: an article entitled 'Austrian Measures for the Protection of Art'.[12] This article was included in a two volume work on *The Protection of Art During War*, edited by Paul Clemen and published in 1919 in an effort to refute claims of German barbarity. Dvořák's contribution was written at roughly the same time as his 'Letter to Colleagues in Italy', to which we shall return. The two texts share a marked Italophobia.

Dvořák's clear aim with his text on wartime Denkmalpflege was to prove Austrian goodwill vis-à-vis Italian monuments beyond any reasonable doubt. He makes a point of reproducing numerous field communications and letters that demonstrate these Austrian concerns, as well as a laudable set of instructions that had been issued to artistic attachés in occupied Italy. Ultimately, he concludes, 'These samples may suffice to illustrate the endeavours and intentions that permeated all those in Austria who were responsible for the protection of monuments, and with them all art-lovers and educated circles, throughout the war.'[13] But this written apologia was also accompanied by a second, none too subtle visual argument. A number of evocative images, which go largely uncommented in the body of the text, show the war-torn ruins of Italian buildings: 'Palace in Torre di Zuino, destroyed by Italians,' 'Church in S. Polo, shelled by the Italians,' and again, 'Palace in Conegliano, destroyed by the Italians' (figs 2-4). The rhetoric here, could these pictures speak, would have been something along the lines of: 'Look! The barbaric Italians even destroy their *own* monuments!'[14]

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bereisen das besetzte Gebiet — — die wirklich wertvollen Denkmäler im allgemeinen nirgends nennenswerten Schaden gelitten — — Namentlich sind die Kirchen fast überall unversehrt. Einige wenige Ausnahmen sind durch Zufallstreffer der Artillerie oder der Flieger verursacht worden. Bedeutend ist der Schaden nicht. Wertvolle Bilder aus Kirchen, Museen und aus Privatbesitz waren schon seit langer Zeit von den Italienern selbst entfernt worden; angeblich sind sie geborgen oder meist nach Florenz zur Restaurierung gebracht worden — — Das Stadtbild als Ganzes ist meist unversehrt geblieben. Die zahlreichen Paläste des friaulischen Adels in Udine und die vielen Landschlösser sind äußerlich unberührt. | Alles gerettet. Aber Zerstörungen im Feindesland geschehen doch nie mit Absicht? Und Treffer sind doch immer Zufallstreffer? Wer kann denn für die Richtung einer Bombe garantieren?'

[12] Dvořák, 'Einrichtungen des Kunstschutzes in Österreich'. The first volume, on Germany, was translated into English in time for consideration at the peace congress.

[13] Dvořák, 'Einrichtungen des Kunstschutzes in Österreich', 9. 'Diese Proben dürften zur Illustration der Absichten und Bestrebungen genügen, von denen die für den Denkmalschutz verantwortlichen Ämter und mit ihnen alle gebildeten und kunstfreundlichen Kreise in Österreich während des ganzen Krieges erfüllt waren.'

[14] Dvořák, 'Einrichtungen des Kunstschutzes in Österreich', 9. Dvořák formulated it slightly differently: 'Während der italienischen Offensive und Defensive diesseits and jenseits der Grenze Unersetzliches zum Opfer fiel – es sei nur auf Duino oder auf Conegliano hingewiesen –, wurde beim österreichischen Vormarsch in Italien kein wichtiges Bauwerk zerstört [...] .'

Figure 2 'Palace in Torre di Zuino, destroyed by Italians.'

Figure 3 'Church in S. Polo, shelled by the Italians.'

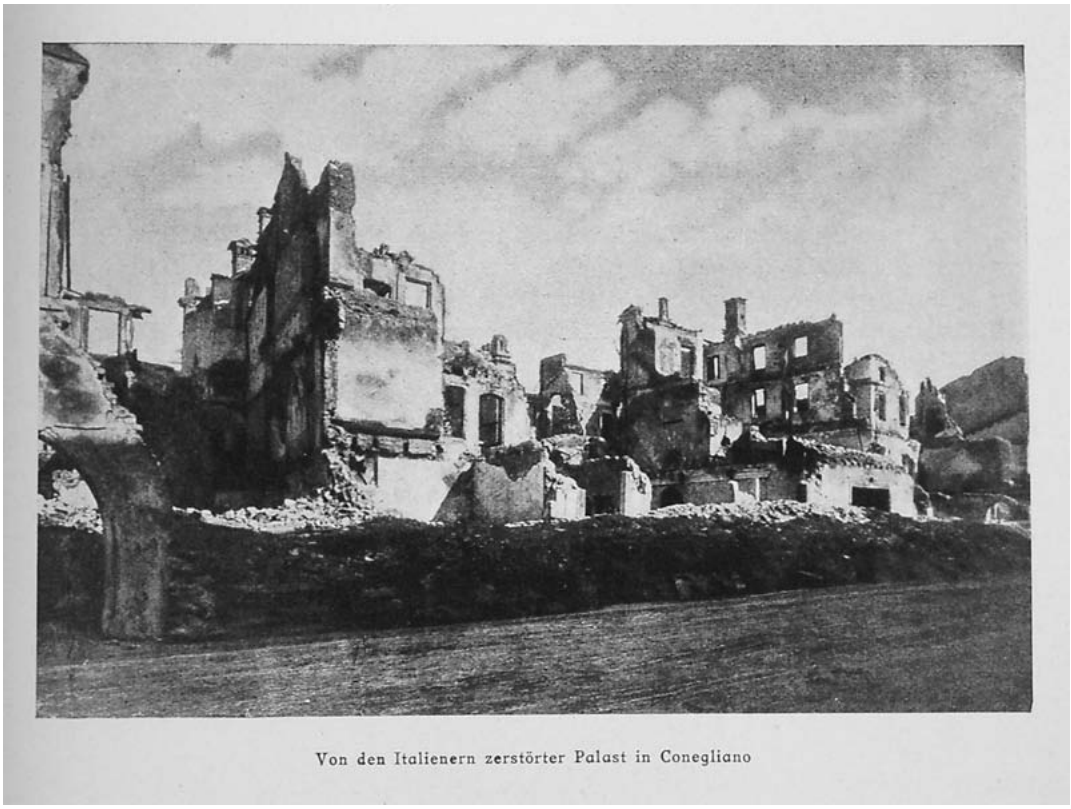

Figure 4 'Palace in Conegliano, destroyed by the Italians.'

Unfortunately for Dvořák, the weakness of this moralizing argument was weakened further still by events back in the imperial capital towards the end of the war. A worrying number of soldiers returning to Vienna from the front had been taking out their personal grievances on prominent public monuments. The Pallas Athena in front of the parliament building had been shot at, and it was with no small amount of satisfaction that Kraus, in the same issue of *Die Fackel* as that cited above, was able to reproduce this newspaper report of another crazed attack on a statue:

> 'A soldier who was clearly not in complete possession of his faculties drew considerable attention to himself on the Franzenring the day before yesterday. Having partly undressed, he climbed up the Liebenberg monument, and, crying 'You dog! You Italian!,' stabbed the portrait medallion of Liebenberg and the figure of the lion … .'

His characteristic response to this spate of iconoclasm was as follows:

> If these lunatic soldiers would only come to their senses and avail themselves of a tour of the sights of Vienna, the whole campaign could be carried out in a methodical manner. What about the river gods on the Albrecht ramp? The Canon at the city park? And what of the Radetzky in front of the Ministry of War, is he not an enemy? In Germany, the whole thing's organized; they commandeer the monuments, when they're made of bronze, that is. The Viennese method has the advantage that the material is irrelevant. But so long as the matter is not taken up by the Ministry of War and is left to the

> initiative of a few stray soldiers, allegedly 'veterans' or even 'draft dodgers', there remains the danger that such ventures will come to nothing and that we'll never live to see the only decent result of this world war: the liberation of Vienna from its monuments.[15]

These sentiments are obviously a far cry from the universal piety and reverence towards monuments that Dvořák had hoped to inculcate in the masses by means of publications such as the *Art Topography* and the *Conservation Catechism*. And even if a few isolated soldiers and one ageing satirist can't be deemed as constitutive of broad public opinion, the socialist government of German-Austria seems to have been closer to Kraus' mindset than Dvořák's. Unfortunately, the radical measures it took to alleviate post-war poverty—the requisitioning of housing stock and the sale of Habsburg heritage—can't be gone into here, but suffice it to say, their guiding principle was that ten thousand starving people are indeed more important than a work of art. This general policy—quite at odds with Dvořák's lofty concerns—is best illustrated with reference to the *Kunstraub* (art theft) controversy.

On 12 February 1919, the morning edition of the *Neue Freie Presse* carried an article entitled 'Hunger War for Artworks: An Italian Ultimatum to German-Austria'.[16] Though ill-informed and somewhat sensationalist, the anonymous journalist behind the article had somehow caught wind of a scandal that was set to unfold over the course of the following days; a scandal concerning cultural heritage that elicited a strong response from Dvořák.

Long before the ratification of the Treaty of St Germain in October 1919, the Royal Italian Armistice Commission in Vienna decided to take the as yet undecided question of war indemnities into its own hands by requisitioning a number of important Italian paintings, manuscripts and codices from various Austrian museums and cultural institutions. 'Italy has more to conquer before the peace,' as the *Neue Freie Presse* put it.[17] What particularly offended this journalist, though, was the manner in which the requisitions were being forced through under duress. Italy had for some time been delivering much needed foodstuffs to the starving

[15] Karl Kraus, 'Einzelunternehmungen', *Die Fackel*, 20: 484-498, 15.10.1918, 73-74. 'Ein Soldat, der offenbar nicht im Vollbesitze seiner Vernunft war, erregte vorgestern auf dem Franzensring beträchtliches Aufsehen. Er erkletterte, nachdem er sich teilweise entkleidet hatte, das Liebenberg-Denkmal und stach mit dem Rufe: »Du Hund! Du Italiener!« mit dem Messer gegen das Porträtmedaillon Liebenbergs und gegen die Figur des Löwen ... . [...] Wenn die irrsinnigen Soldaten Raison annehmen und sich eines Führers durch die Sehenswürdigkeiten Wiens bedienen wollten, könnte die Aktion planvoll zu Ende geführt werden. Was ist denn mit den Flußgöttern an der Albrechtsrampe? Mit dem Canon vor dem Stadtpark? Na, und der Radetzky vor dem Kriegsministerium, ist der vielleicht kein Feind? In Deutschland wird die Sache organisiert, die Denkmäler werden einfach eingezogen, das heißt, wenn sie aus Bronze sind. Die Wiener Methode hat den Vorteil, daß das Material keine Rolle spielt. Aber solange das Unternehmen nicht vom Kriegsministerium in die Hand genommen wird, sondern der Initiative einzelner herumziehender Soldaten, vermutlich »Heimkehrer« oder am Ende gar »Tachinierer«, überlassen bleibt, besteht die Gefahr, daß solche Vorstöße ohne Entwicklung bleiben und daß wir das einzige anständige Ergebnis des Weltkriegs, die Befreiung Wiens von seinen Denkmälern, nicht erleben werden.' For the earlier attack see Karl Kraus, 'Unsere Pallas Athene!', *Die Fackel*, 20: 474-483, 23.5.1918, 152.

[16] 'Hungerkrieg für Kunstwerke: Ein Italienisches Ultimatum an Deutschösterreich', *Neue Freie Presse*, 12.2.1919, Morgenblatt, 2-3.

[17] 'Hungerkrieg für Kunstwerke', 2. 'Italien will vor dem Frieden etwas erobern.'

population of Vienna in fulfilment of humanitarian aid treaty signed in Switzerland shortly after the armistice. Now, it seemed, the occupying Italians were demanding the repatriation of cultural treasures in exchange for these essential food supplies: 'They are threatening us with the cessation of all food delivery trains.'[18] It was injury enough that the defeated Austrians had been reduced to picking up the crumbs from under the victors' table; now they were to be subjected to the added insult of having to pay for the privilege with some of their most prized possessions. 'Acquiring artworks by threat of hunger, a measly quota of bread and flour in exchange for Carpaccio and Tintoretto: this glaring disparity still smacks of war.'[19]

This initial report was at least half true, and the evening edition of the paper was able to furnish its readers with concrete details of the requisitions.[20] The head of the Bibliotheca Marciana in Venice, Professor Fogolari, accompanied by two art historians and a troop of carabinieri, had rolled up in transport vehicles at ten in the morning to lay their demands before the director of the former Imperial Picture Gallery (figs 5-6, below). The Italians had then set about their task, one team inventorying and removing paintings from the walls of the Kunsthistorisches Museum and from the storage depot in the new tract of the palace, while another ordered manuscripts from the Imperial Library. Some of the works were carted off to the Italian embassy, some put directly on southbound trains. The Austrian curators duly lodged official protests, explicitly noting that they had only submitted to Italian demands under the threat of force. The director of the Imperial Library, Hofrat Dr. Donabaum, reported what he had been told on refusing to produce the manuscripts and codices: 'force would be used if the objects were not surrendered willingly. *Soldiers with hand-grenades would then be called in*.'[21]

On the following day, as requisition work continued, more extensive details emerged.[22] The government of German-Austria had in fact known of the Italian claims as early as 5 February. The foreign ministry's official protest was now published, in which it was argued that the Italian actions represented a serious violation of international law. The terms of the November armistice and article 56 of the Hague Convention were cited in making this case, which was addressed to the ultimate arbitrators, President Wilson and the other Entente powers at the Paris peace congress.[23] The serious concern of a possible halt to food supplies was also

[18] 'Hungerkrieg für Kunstwerke', 2. 'Man droht uns mit der Einstellung aller Lebensmittelzüge.'
[19] 'Hungerkrieg für Kunstwerke', 3. 'Eine Hungerdrohung, um Kunstwerke zu erlangen, die armselige Brot- und Mehlquote als Gegengabe für Carpaccio und Tintoretto, dieser schreiender Mißklang gehört noch zum Kriege.'
[20] *Neue Freie Presse*, 12.2.1919, Abendblatt, 2-3.
[21] *Neue Freie Presse*, 13.2.1919, Morgenblatt, 10. '[…] wenn die Objekte nicht gutwillig herausgegeben werden sollten, Gewalt angewendet werden würde. *Es würden dann Soldaten mit Handgranaten kommen*.'
[22] *Neue Freie Presse*, 13.3.1919, Morgenblatt, 8-10 and Abendblatt, 2; *Reichspost*, 13.2.1919, 6. The latter lists (inaccurately) a number of the paintings removed from the Venetian section of the Kunsthistorisches Museum: Cima da Conegliano's *Madonna of the Orange Tree* (now in Venice); Carpaccio's *Christ with Symbols of the Passion* (sic); numerous works by Buonfiglio (sic, Bonifazio); two works by (or from workshop of) Veronese; Bellini's *Baptism of Christ*; and Vivarini's *Saint Ambrosius with Other Saints*. For the official inventory of works taken, see Hans Tietze, *Die Entführung von Wiener Kunstwerke nach Italien: eine Darlegung unseres Rechtsstandpunktes, mit einem offenen Brief an die italienischen Fachgenossen von Dr. Max Dvořák*, Vienna: Anton Schroll & Co., 1919, 41-57.
[23] *Laws and Customs of War on Land (Hague IV)*, Oct. 18, 1907, article 56. 'The property of municipalities, that of institutions dedicated to religion, charity and education, the arts and sciences, even when State

worriedly discussed. To one Viennese councillor who had personally signed the humanitarian aid agreement on behalf of the city, the previous day's report had seemed quite literally incredible. The *Reichspost*, providing relatively non-partisan coverage of the affair and taking a conciliatory approach, reproduced the official protest before attempting to clear up this foodstuff question with the categorical statement that there had been 'no threat of a blockade on deliveries' and that any claims to the contrary were spurious.'[24] And whilst the *Reichspost* frowned upon the Italians' poor treatment of masterpieces in transit, it made a point of mentioning the quality and quantity of their food deliveries, as well as their promise of a fourth daily transalpine train that was soon to augment the existing three.

This was not enough to placate the rest of the Viennese press, however, and the controversy mounted over the course of the week, occasioning a number of denunciatory feuilletons.

Die Italiener führen Kunstschätze aus Wien weg: Die Gemälde aus dem Kunsthistorischen Museum (von links nach rechts): Palma Vecchio, „Wahrheit und Gerechtigkeit"; Cignaroli, „Madonna mit dem Kinde"; Bonifacio Veronese, „Mariae Verkündigung"; Jolatti, „Pieta"; Palma Vecchio, „Die unbefleckte Empfängnis"; Malinori, „Christus vor Kaiphas", vor dem Abtransport.

Phot. M. Richard Hauffe, Wien.

Figure 5 'The Italians taking artistic treasures from Vienna. The paintings from the Kunsthistorisches Museum before transportation […] .'

property, shall be treated as private property. All seizure of, destruction or wilful damage done to institutions of this character, historic monuments, works of art and science, is forbidden, and should be made the subject of legal proceedings.'

[24] 'Die Italienische Besitzergreifung von Wiener Kunstschätzen', *Reichspost*, 13.2.1919, 6. 'Keine Drohung mit der Lebensmittelsperre.'

Die Italiener requirieren, ohne den Spruch der Friedenskonferenz abzuwarten, Kunstschätze in Wien: Die Gemälde werden aus dem Kunsthistorischen Museum weggeführt.
Phot. Karl Seebald.

Figure 6 'The Italians requisitioning artistic treasures in Vienna, without waiting for the outcome of the peace conference. The paintings are being taken from the Kunsthistorisches Museum.'

> The war is over? I beg your pardon, but the war goes on, perhaps in another form, but whilst we have laid down our weapons, the Italians—despite the armistice, the collapse of Austria, our complete defencelessness, and the impending peace congress—have not relinquished the use of military force. […] The Italians have waged war on our most distinguished cultural institutions and have threatened both the living and those who have been dead for centuries with hand-grenades.[25]

Another author made similar claims, with similar indignation, throwing the common accusation of German barbarism back at the Italians and comparing their actions to those of a certain Corsican despot who had pillaged Venice, and indeed Europe, a century earlier.[26]

But the Italians were also allowed to make their case, which was frankly a weak one, and, in an effort to quell the growing public suspicion that they were

[25] Richard Hoisel, 'Italien bei uns', *Fremden-Blatt*, 13.2.1919, 1. 'Der Krieg ist zu Ende? Bitte um Verzeihung, der Krieg dauert fort, vielleicht in anderer Form, aber während wir unsere Waffen niedergelegt haben, verzichten die Italiener trotz des Waffenstillstandes, des Zerfalls Oesterreichs, unserer vollständigen Wehrlosigkeit und des bevorstehenden Friedenskongresses nicht auf die Anwendung militärischer Gewalt. […] Die Italiener führten gegen unsere vornehmsten Kulturinstitute Krieg und drohten einen Handgranatenangriff auf Lebende und seit Jahrhunderten Tote an […] .'
[26] 'Entführung heimischer Kunstwerke', *Neue Freie Presse*, 16.2.1919, 1-3. See also 'Italiens Bilderraub', *Wiener Bilder*, 23.2.1919, 6-7.

holding bread to ransom, the Armistice Commission's own official statement once again underlined Italian generosity in the chartering of a fourth supply train.

> The wish of General Segrè for accommodation in the practical implementation of the requisition of pictures thus had a certain justification, insofar as he was able invoke his accommodation in the treatment of the food question. There was *no mention of a threat*.[27]

That is, the Italians expected 'accommodation' with the requisitions, tit for tat, in return for 'accommodation' on the food question. On the basis of the above statement, it is quite clear that the Italian government was indeed using the food deliveries as diplomatic leverage in its over-hasty attempt to retrieve lost cultural heritage.[28] As a recent study put it, 'under the threat of violence or a throttling of the food supply into an already starving Austria,' Italy 'simply took what it felt entitled to without even waiting out negotiations.'[29] Ministers had prevaricated in complying with Italian demands for as long as possible, but they were ultimately helpless under such pressure, and could only hope for a just settlement of the issue in Paris. Indeed, it seems the provisional government of German-Austria was quite willing to sacrifice its Habsburg heritage for the sake of the immediate material needs of the population.

This was but one of a number of acute problems that beset the Austrian Monument Office after the 1914-18 war, problems that Dvořák was forced to address. Moreover, the case of the Italian picture requisitions epitomizes a conflict of interests that runs like a thread through all of his writings on Denkmalpflege: the conflict between material and spiritual values.[30] Or, in this instance: food and art. The newspaper reports, taken as a whole, conveniently enumerate these values for us, and lend themselves nicely to tabulation:

[27] 'Lebensmittelzufuhr und Bilderbeschlagnahme', *Neue Freie Presse*, 15.2.1919, Abendblatt, 3. 'Der Wunsch des Generals Segrè nach Entgegenkommen bei der praktischen Durchführung der Bilderbeschlagnahme hatte also eine gewisse Berechtigung, insoferne er sich auf sein Entgegenkommen bei der Behandlung der Lebensmittelfrage berief. Von einer *Drohung war keine Rede*.' General Segrè was head of the Italian armistice commission.

[28] Hans Tietze, Austrian Commissar of State Collections and formerly a conservator at the Central Commission, recognised as much, citing the same passage in his *Die Entführung von Wiener Kunstwerke*, 12. '[Die italienische Mission] hat eine solche ideelle Verbindung zwischen Lebensmitteln und Kulturwerten unzweifelhaft hergestellt.'

[29] Frodl-Kraft, *Gefährdetes Erbe*, 23. 'Die unmittelbare Bedrohung aber kam vor allem von Italien, das Verhandlungen erst gar nicht abwartete, sondern sich das, worauf es Anspruch zu haben glaubte, unter Androhung von Gewalt bzw. einer Drosselung der Lebensmittelzufuhr in das verhungernde Österreich gleich selbst holte.'

[30] This opposition is also a principal concern of Dvořák's art history. See, for instance, *Idealism and Naturalism in Gothic Art*, trans. R. J. Klawiter, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967.

Food (material values)	**Art (spiritual values)**
24 000 tons of grain 2 000 tons of fat 750 000 tins of condensed milk	Cima, *Madonna of the Orange Tree* Carpaccio, *Christ Adored by Angels* Vivarini, *Saint Ambrosius with Other Saints*
	Estimated monetary value: 8-10 million Kronen[31]

It was in the knowledge of this enforced exchange of basic necessities for things of 'eternal spiritual value' that Dvořák wrote his extraordinary 'Letter to Colleagues in Italy' (1919). It provided the polemical preface to a more sober legal argument put together by Hans Tietze, and the pamphlet was translated into English for consideration by delegates at the peace congress.[32] Given the purpose this booklet was to serve, i.e., convincing the Entente that Italy ought to return the Viennese pictures, the ferocity of Dvořák's rhetoric was incredibly ill-advised; one might have counselled a more conciliatory line. Instead, he launched a verbal attack on Italy, shot through with condescension and bitter animosity:

> I want to tell to you in all openness why your actions were unjust, not only according to the law – about this there can be no doubt – but also no less, as I would like to show, from the standpoint of those unwritten laws that are proper to a loyal and noble attitude, and which cultured nations hold up just as highly as the written ones.[33]

Already in this introductory sentence Dvořák implicitly accuses his Italian counterparts – if not the whole Italian nation – of disloyalty, ignobility, and a downright lack of culture. Even bearing in mind Italy's betrayal of the *Dreibund* in 1915, one doesn't expect such venom from the pen of an art historian.[34] This sense of

[31] *Reichspost*, 13.2.1919, 6; *Neue Freie Presse*, 16.2.1919, 1. The slightly uncanny occurrence of food-related words in the 'art' column here (orange, carpaccio, ambrosia) is purely coincidental, whilst the not so slight inconsistency of putting an exchange value on 'spirit' will not escape the attentive accountant.
[32] See above, note 22. Translated as *The Abduction of Austrian Works of Art to Italy. An Explanation of Our Legal Claims Preceded by a Public Letter to his Italian Fellow Students by Dr. Max Dvořák*, Vienna: Anton Schroll & Co., 1919. I have not been able to access this edition.
[33] Dvořák, 'Ein Brief an die Italienischen Fachgenossen', in Tietze, *Die Entführung von Wiener Kunstwerken*, 3. 'Und ich will Euch mit aller Offenheit sagen, warum Eure Handlung ein Unrecht war, nicht nur der Rechtslage nach, woran nicht gezweifelt werden kann, sondern nicht minder, wie ich darlegen möchte, vom Standpunkte jener ungeschriebenen Gesetze einer loyalen und vornehmen Gesinnung, die bei gebildeten Völkern ebenso hoch zu halten sind wie die geschriebenen.'
[34] Italy, having declared its neutrality in August 1914, thereby already contravening the terms of the Triple Alliance (1883), went on to declare war on Austria-Hungary in 1915. Arthur J. May, *The Passing of*

betrayal is transposed into the art-historical context with a pointed note of condescension and an echo of the inflated journalistic idioms encountered above: It is no exaggeration for me to assert that you have learnt and adopted much from us […]. You were not just our academic allies, but also our pupils, and now you throw hand-grenades that are to blow down the doors of our museums and libraries.'[35] Elsewhere, Dvořák openly denigrates Italian art scholarship as provincial in comparison to Austrian historiography, which, according to him, had contributed far more to the world's understanding of Italian art. Nor are the other allied nations spared the mud-slinging: Britain and America had supposedly robbed Italy of far more valuable artistic treasures over the years than had Austria. And if Italy saw fit to demand the return of its cultural heritage from Austria, why did it not also lay claim, for instance, to the Leonardo manuscripts in France? Finally, Dvořák brings his explosive rearguard action to a close with a rather weak claim to having won the moral victory: Austria might have lost the war, but Italy, in renouncing the spiritual bonds of art and science that once tied the two states together, had lost far a more important spiritual battle: 'That this spirit has been lost to you, gentlemen, means not victory, but defeat.'[36]

If, solely on the basis of the 'Letter to Colleagues in Italy', one were to form an impression of its author—as an embittered and trenchant Habsburg patriot, for instance—it would necessarily be deficient. For this text clearly only represents a small fraction of Dvořák's output; it was a unique response to a highly controversial issue, written at an extremely difficult *moment* in Austrian history. By the same token, though, if one were to assess his contribution to the theory and practice of monument preservation on the basis of the many laudatory obituaries, commemorative lectures, and biographical outlines that have been published—the majority of them from within institutions of which he himself was director—one would come away with just as distorted an image.[37] The rather flattering received

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the Hapsburg Monarchy: 1914-1918, 2 vols, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1966, vol. 1, 79.

[35] Dvořák, 'Ein Brief an die Italienischen Fachgenossen', 7. 'Es ist nicht Überhebung, wenn ich behaupte, daß Ihr viel von uns gelernt und übernommen habt […] Wissenschaftlich seid Ihr nicht nur unsere Bundesgenossen, sondern auch unsere Schüler gewesen und nun setzt Ihr Handgranaten in Bewegung, die die Türen unserer Museen und Bibliotheken sprengen sollen.'

[36] Dvořák, 'Ein Brief an die Italienischen Fachgenossen', 9. 'Euch, meine Herren, ist dieser Geist verloren gegangen und das bedeutet nicht Sieg, sondern Niederlage.' The correspondent of the *Neue Freie Presse* had expressed similar sentiments: 'Die Schlacht, die Professor Fogolari hier gewonnen hat, ist kein Sieg, um den wir Italien beneiden.' *Neue Freie Presse*, 12.2.1919, Morgenblatt, 3.

[37] For basic biographical details see Theodor Brückler & Ulrike Nimeth, *Personenlexikon zur Österreichischen Denkmalpflege (1850-1990)*, Vienna: Bundesdenkmalamt, 2001, 54-55; and Karl M. Swoboda, 'Max Dvorak', in *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1959, vol. 4, 209-210. For obituaries see 'Kleine Chronik', *Neue Freie Presse*, 9.2.1921, 5; Karl Lanckoronski, 'Max Dvorak', *Neue Freie Presse*, 11.2.1921, 7; 'Max Dvorak †', *Reichspost*, 9.2.1921, 6; J. Kohte, 'Max Dvořák †', *Die Denkmalpflege*, 23: 5, 20.4.1922, 40; and Campbell Dodgson, 'Max Dvorak', *Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, 38: 217, April 1921, 205. For more extensive commemorative and biographical essays see Josef Weingartner, *Ein Gedenkblatt zur Trauerfeier für Max Dvořák*, Vienna: Editionen Hölzel, 1921; Dagobert Frey, 'Max Dvořáks Stellung in der Kunstgeschichte', *Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, 15: 1, 1921/22, 1-21; Karl M. Swoboda, 'Vortrag zum 30. Todestag von Max Dvořák, Gehalten an der Universität Wien', *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Kunst und Denkmalpflege*, 28: 3, 1974, 74-81; Otto Benesch, 'Max Dvořák (1874-1921)', in *Neue Österreichische Biographie ab 1815: Grosse Österreicher*, Vienna: Amalthea-Verlag, 1957, vol. 10, 189-198.

picture of Max Dvořák as a cosmopolitan, humanist art historian is in need of revision. As a conservationist at least, his unflagging concern for the ideal spiritual values of historic art, coupled with a pronounced anti-materialism inherited from Riegl, culminated in a patriotically charged elitism that valued monuments over men and art over life. To my mind, the loss of this spirit is no great loss at all.

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Figs 6-7. Source: *Wiener Bilder*, 23.2.1919, 6. Permission courtesy of the Austrian National Library.

Appendix:

Max Dvořák
A Letter to Colleagues in Italy (1919)[38]

Translated by Jonathan Blower

It was no fine impulse, gentlemen, that moved you to demand the Viennese pictures and codices. The spiritual motivation for this requisition of foreign cultural goods originates with you; your government would hardly have arrived at the idea of abusing its power in this way without your advice. And I want to tell to you in all openness why your actions were unjust, not only according to the law – about this there can be no doubt – but also no less, as I would like to show, from the standpoint of those unwritten laws that are proper to a loyal and noble attitude, and which cultured nations hold up just as highly as the written ones.

'Alla terra madre d'Italia' – so ran the dedication with which an Austrian academic headed up his critical edition of Lorenzo Ghiberti's *Commentaries* shortly before the war, giving expression to sentiments that have bound us to Italian art for many decades and for which your homeland has much to be grateful.

From its very beginnings, since Winckelmann and Rumohr, the utmost goal of German art history – insofar as it was not concerned with Greek monuments – has been to investigate the content and historical meaning of the evolution of Italian art, even when this was to the detriment of indigenous art.

You know this, gentlemen, as well as I do, but I would nevertheless like to remind you of a few facts; facts that help to show up your actions in their true light.

In the past, a Neapolitan monastery gave a series of manuscripts to the Imperial Court as a gift, because they were no longer of any value to their owners. Later on, a number of paintings were brought to Vienna from the dilapidated and barely supervised picture depots of Venice, from which, as Ludwig informs us, so much had disappeared without a trace. These are the artworks you now demand back. At that time your country was poorly equipped to research its historic art and to understand the significance of its former efflorescence. The solitary slender volume that still connected you to that efflorescence was a mere provincial history, rooted in the traditions of seventeenth and eighteenth-century art literature, uncritical and lacking any sort of higher perspective. And the best art-historical work of that period in Italy, Lanzi's *History of Painting in Italy*, was likewise hardly anything more than a collection of such provincial histories. The idea of the Italian Renaissance as both a high point and a turning point in the intellectual history of mankind did not attain its significance for historical thought because of those sorry epigones of Vasari and the other old vitae writers. You have the German intellectual Jacob Burckhardt to thank for restoring your historic art to its former glory.[39]

38 Source: Max Dvořák, 'Ein Brief an die Italienischen Fachgenossen' in Hans Tietze, *Die Entführung von Wiener Kunstwerke nach Italien: eine Darlegung unseres Rechtsstandpunktes, mit einem offenen Brief an die italienischen Fachgenossen von Dr. Max Dvořák*, Vienna: Anton Schroll & Co., 1919, 3-9.
39 Trans. note. Jacob Burckhardt (1818-1897) was of course Swiss.

It was only in the second half of the past century, after the influence of Burckhardt's writings had directly or indirectly set in everywhere, that people started to take interest in the history of Renaissance art, although characteristic differences can be observed here. As such, the French were always above all concerned with the glory of their own past, and the efforts of French art historians – if we exclude the archival research of the likes of Eugen Müntz – were first and foremost directed toward taking sole credit for the renewal of art after the waning of classical antiquity. It was above all Louis Courajod, the most important of French art academics, who tried to posit the Renaissance as a creation of French genius, and his teachings have been maintained by his students and successors up to the present day.

The English and American relationship to Italian art, while apparently more congenial, was actually far more one-sided and self-interested. Like the French, the English also laid claim to Italian art; not for the English past – this was clearly not possible – but very much so for the English present. It became the source of a refined enjoyment of art, either that which Ruskin preached to the travelling public, or that which the bustling merchants converted into so many commodities; into wares, whereby, thanks to economic superiority, the fruits of a foreign artistic culture could be transplanted into English castles and palaces. This was subsequently emulated by the Americans, though their financial means were greater still. The ignominy of our times developed as a result of it: the appalling art trade, whose costs had to be borne above all by the artistic heritage of Italy.

That which made its way to Austria is hardly worth mentioning in comparison to what the English and the Americans abducted. In Vienna, though, they strove all the more to expand the scientific understanding of Italian art. It is certainly no coincidence that Wickhoff's history of Roman art and Riegl's considerations on the development of the Italian Baroque, works which represent the pinnacle of Austrian art scholarship, demonstrated Italy's contribution to the universal evolution of art in periods whose significance had not even been recognized by the Italians themselves up to that point. Whereas the old archaeology took the artworks of Roman antiquity for mere imitations of Greek models, it was Wickhoff who, for the first time, demonstrated the force and brilliance with which new artistic ideas had broken through in the creations of Imperial Rome. And whilst the Italian Baroque may well have attracted interest beforehand now and then, it was nevertheless only through Riegl's studies that it was permanently won over for the present and the future, as a fruit of Italian artistic development that was just as valid as all of those that preceded it. I give these examples because they are representative of a number of other cases. It was in Austria, at Eitelberger's suggestion, that they began systematically publishing the old Italian authors again; it was in Austria that the false theory on the backwardness of Italian art in the middle ages was initially contested; and that the first scholarly catalogue of a collection of Italian drawings was published. We have an Austrian to thank for a monumental six-volume corpus on early Christian and medieval Roman wall paintings and, just before the war, a large-scale undertaking was established by Austrian academics for the publication of collected archival materials and written sources on the history of Baroque art in Rome. And for the rest, for more than half a century the efforts of almost all our Austrian colleagues have been concentrated more or less on that which ought to

have been your task. Many names and studies could be enumerated here. But the above is quite enough – as painful as it may be to you, I want only to touch upon one more issue.

This is that of your works.

The understanding of problems and the methods underlying your work have far more in common with Austrian art-historical research than with that of the French or the English. This is no coincidence, but can be explained by the close ties that once bound us together. It is no exaggeration for me to assert that you have learnt and adopted much from us, not just in terms of scientific results but of the entire organization of art-historical work. You were not just our academic allies, but also our pupils, and now you throw hand-grenades that are to blow down the doors of our museums and libraries.

You can hardly appeal to any sort of principles here, for it never occurred to you to demand the return, for example, of the precious Leonardo manuscripts from the French; that which was stolen by Napoleon and is your lawful property.

Nor can your actions be excused with reference to patriotic duty, for the pictures you have taken from us mean nothing or very little to you. The majority of them will only find their way back to the vaults of a picture storage magazine. You have better Cimas, Tintorettos, and Paolos than the ones you have stolen. But to us they are irreplaceable. One is tempted to believe that you, the official representatives of historic art, have become the advocates and prophets of that group of your artists who see any admiration of old masters as an aberration.[40] They expect the redemption of art to come from the destruction of such works, and now it seems you want to try out their program on us.

No, there are no grounds on which you can base your argument, neither legal nor ideal. It was the opportunity itself, pure and simple, that tempted you to recommend to your government a course of action that one would generally tend to designate as plundering.

It is true that there was also plundering in your towns in Fruili. It is quite a different thing, though, for poor, half starved soldiers, in contravention of discipline and orders, to take basic necessities from abandoned private houses in order to prolong their lives, than it is for intellectuals, who ought to embody the conscience and the noblest characteristics of the nation, to use official force to compel a defenceless nation to hand over artworks, causing artistic and cultural damage out of vanity or in order to pander to the rowdy mob.

While we were on your territory nothing could have been further from us than the idea of exploiting our successes in this way. In this respect I know the attitudes of art historians and friends of art in Austria quite precisely, and I know that there was not a single one among them who would even for a moment have thought of laying a hand on your artistic heritage; not one who would not always have taken the position that your artworks were to be protected from any damage and export with every available means, and just as much as our own. In your books and essays you showered us with defamation and slander during the war, whilst we never carried out a campaign against your art, culture or science. We kept to the

[40] Trans. note. This is presumably a reference to the Italian Futurists.

spirit of one of your greatest sons, the politician and art historian Morelli,[41] when he expressed himself in the following fine words: 'The German and the Italian nations seem – and more so than other nations – divinely appointed to sublime art and pure science, and remained unified in respect to one another even in times when the desolate machinations of the powerful found it expedient to hurl the bloody firebrand of discord between them.'

That this spirit has been lost to you, gentlemen, means not victory, but defeat.

Prof. Dr. Max Dvořák
Professor of Art History at the University of Vienna

[41] Trans. note. Interestingly, Giovanni Morelli (1816-1891), best known for his eponymous method of painting attribution, was himself involved in the drafting of legislation to prohibit the export of Italian works of art.