

# Max Dvořák and the History of Medieval Art

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**Figure 1 Max Dvořák (1874–1921)**

Max Dvořák (fig. 1) is known primarily for his book *Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte* as well as for his modernist interpretations of Tintoretto and El Greco which led to the rehabilitation of Mannerism. It may thus come as a surprise that, on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of his birth, his former assistant Karl Maria Swoboda remarked that Dvořák actually devoted his lifework not to the art of the sixteenth century, but above all to the 'universal-historical' interpretation of the Middle Ages.<sup>1</sup>

This essay was read at the Viennese Art Historiography Colloquium at the University of Glasgow (2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> October 2009) which was organized by Richard Woodfield. It was translated by Judith Rosenthal, Frankfurt am Main. To maintain the character of a lecture the notes have been limited to the absolutely necessary citations. A different and more extensive version of the essay (with full citations in German) will be published in the acts of the symposium 'Die Etablierung und Entwicklung des Faches Kunstgeschichte in Deutschland, Polen und Mitteleuropa' which has been held at Cracow in 2007.

<sup>1</sup> Karl Maria Swoboda, 'Vortrag zum 30. Todestag von Max Dvořák. Gehalten an der Universität Wien', *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Kunst und Denkmalpflege* XXVIII (1974), p. 76.

Dvořák's published writings do not seem to substantiate this assertion in the least. Naturally, we know that two of Dvořák's most extensive essays were concerned with the Middle Ages: *The Enigma of the Art of the Van Eyck Brothers*<sup>2</sup> and *Idealism and Naturalism in Gothic Sculpture and Painting*.<sup>3</sup> In the text on the Van Eycks, which was published in 1904, the young Dvořák undertook to test the evolutionist paradigm of the Viennese school of art history against a previously unparalleled historical rupture: the amazing naturalism practised by the early Netherlandish painters. However revolutionary the Eyckian paintings may appear, Dvořák explained them as the 'slowly ripened fruit of the entire, long, preceding development' of Gothic art<sup>4</sup>, which he described as being characterized by continual progress in the representation of the visible world. For Dvořák, Gothic art thus signified the decisive stage in the development of European art from Antiquity to the Naturalistic and Impressionist painting of his own time.

Naturally, this proposition still adheres entirely to the tradition of Riegl, and above all of Wickhoff. Fourteen years later, however, as you know, Dvořák broke with this tradition. In his essay on *Idealism and naturalism in Gothic sculpture and painting*, art is no longer an autonomous phenomenon, but the expression of a 'world view'. The history of art is no longer seen as an unbroken chain of development, but rather as a dialectic process impelled by the 'contrast between the ideational and the material' (*Gegensatz zwischen Geist und Materie*).<sup>5</sup> Now Dvořák assigned equal importance to naturalism and to its opposite, the fundamentally idealistic character of Gothic art, which he had still vehemently denied in 1904.

Between these two essays, Dvořák published nothing whatsoever on Medieval art. On the basis of his lectures of the intervening period, however – which are unpublished but extant in their entirety – it is possible to reconstruct his continuing deliberations on the history of Medieval art in virtually unbroken succession. In Vienna, Dvořák lectured on the 'History of Western art in the Middle Ages' no less than four times: in 1906/07 (fig. 2), 1910/11, 1913/14 and 1917/18 (fig. 3).<sup>6</sup> He completely reformulated every lecture every time, even when he analyzed monuments he had already addressed in previous lectures. The close succession of the lectures thus grants fascinating insight into the art historian's 'workshop' – while also explaining Swoboda's assertion of Dvořák's special affinity to the Middle Ages. The apparently

<sup>2</sup> Max Dvořák, *Das Rätsel der Kunst der Brüder Van Eyck*, Munich 1925.

<sup>3</sup> Max Dvořák, 'Idealismus und Naturalismus in der gotischen Skulptur und Malerei', in: Max Dvořák, *Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte*, Munich 1923, pp. 41–148.

<sup>4</sup> Dvořák, *Das Rätsel*, p. 237.

<sup>5</sup> See Max Dvořák, *Idealismus und Realismus in der Kunst der Neuzeit*, winter term 1915/16, manuscript (University of Vienna, Institute of Art History, Archives), p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Max Dvořák, *Geschichte der mittelalterlichen Kunst I*, winter term 1906/07, manuscript (University of Vienna, Institute for Art History, Archives – all other Dvořák manuscripts quoted here are deposited in the Vienna institute). – Max Dvořák, *Geschichte der mittelalterlichen Kunst II*, summer term 1907, manuscript. – Max Dvořák, *Geschichte der abendländischen Kunst im Mittelalter*, winter term 1910/11, manuscript. – Max Dvořák, *Geschichte der abendländischen Kunst im Mittelalter I*, winter term 1913/14, manuscript. – Max Dvořák, *Geschichte der abendländischen Kunst im Mittelalter II*, summer term 1914, manuscript. – Max Dvořák, *Geschichte der abendländischen Kunst im Mittelalter*, winter term 1917/18, manuscript.

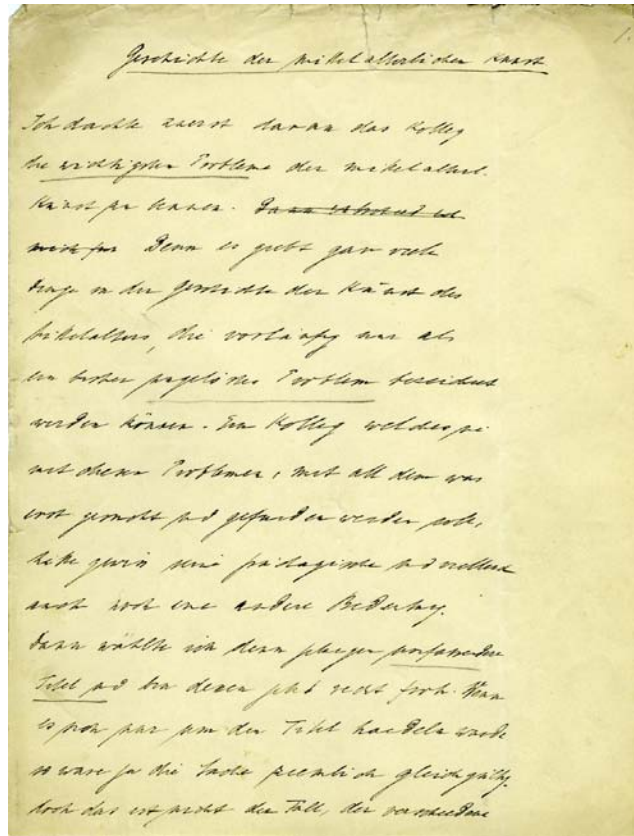


Figure 2 Max Dvořák, History of Medieval Art, I, winter term 1906/07, manuscript, p. 1

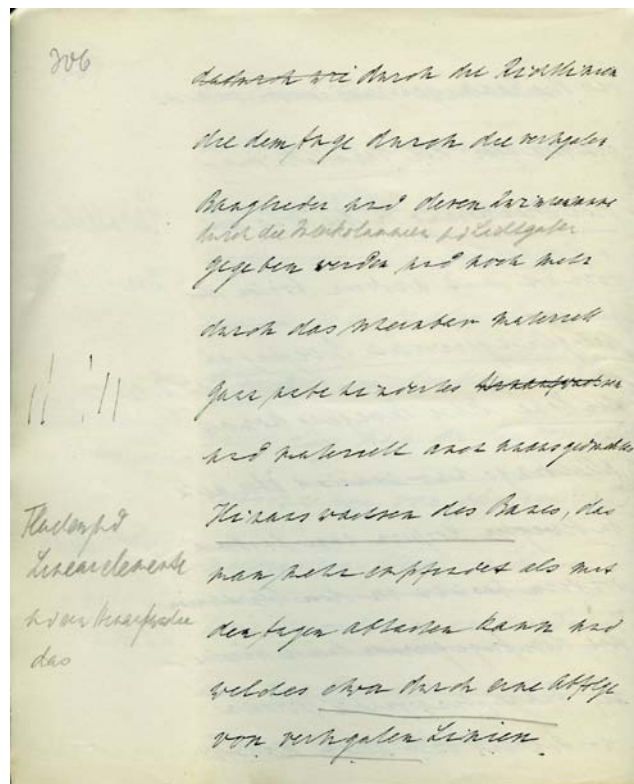


Figure 3 Max Dvořák, History of European Art in the Middle Ages, winter term 1917/18, manuscript, p. 306

unbridgeable gap between the essay on the Van Eycks and that on Gothic idealism, between formalism and *Geistesgeschichte*, now appears as a process in which Dvořák not only worked his way tirelessly through the interpretation of the actual works of art, but also thoroughly revised his methodological premises. In view of the 4,400 pages covered by the lecture manuscripts, you will certainly pardon me for calling attention to no more than a few important points in my talk to you today.

I would like to begin by sketching the radical transformation in Dvořák's evaluation categories on the basis of an example (a typically Viennese example): the interpretation of Early Christian art. Then I will go into two important and well-known aspects of Dvořák's scholarly orientation which demand to be viewed with a more discriminating eye following the perusal of the lecture manuscripts. That is the case, first of all, for the process by which historical art came to be reinterpreted and brought up to date from the perspective of contemporary art, an aspect of undoubtedly prime importance for Dvořák – but one not to be reduced to a one-sided apologia of the modern movement. Second of all, it applies to the categories at the basis of Dvořák's late work, for example 'spirit' and 'matter', which correspond to the intellectual trend of the period from 1910 to 1920, but can also be understood as responses to specific art-historical questions with which Dvořák had already been preoccupied previously.

### Reinterpreting Early Christian art

In 1906, at the beginning of his first lecture, Dvořák said: 'I cannot imagine that, between the uniform world style of antiquity and the uniform world style of modern art, there could – for an entire millennium – have been nothing but 'membra disiecta' of an art which had been overcome, without any overriding connective entity and without any causal, necessary relationship with what came about later.'<sup>7</sup> Unlike the two essays mentioned earlier, Dvořák's lectures are not concerned with the Late Middle Ages, but exclusively with the development from the third century to the beginnings of Gothic art in the twelfth. Here the focus is directed toward the long period of transition between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. By re-evaluating this period of supposed artistic decadence, Dvořák thus made his contribution to a typical Viennese proposition first formulated by Wickhoff in *The Vienna Genesis* (1895)<sup>8</sup> and by Riegl in *Late Roman Art Industry* (1901)<sup>9</sup>. In this present essay, I will not go into the manner in which Dvořák examined Josef Strzygowski (since 1909 his colleague) critically – Strzygowski having been a scholar who, beginning with his book *Orient or Rome*<sup>10</sup>, vehemently opposed Wickhoff's and Riegl's conception of a 'self-transformation' of Late Roman art, countering it with a model

<sup>7</sup> Dvořák, *Geschichte der mittelalterlichen Kunst I* 1906/07, pp. 14–15..

<sup>8</sup> Franz Wickhoff, *Römische Kunst (Die Wiener Genesis)*, Berlin 1912.

<sup>9</sup> Alois Riegl, *Spätromische Kunstindustrie*, Vienna 1927.

<sup>10</sup> Josef Strzygowski, *Orient oder Rom. Beiträge zur Geschichte der spätmittelalterlichen und frühchristlichen Kunst*, Leipzig 1901.

according to which antique culture was essentially overpowered and supplanted by Eastern influences.

In the passage cited a few moments ago, Dvořák spoke of a 'causal, necessary relationship'. For Dvořák, as well as for Riegl, such a relationship presupposed an autonomous development of art. In contrast, all other historical factors (material, technique, function, iconography) continued to be defined as external factors – even Christianity. In 1906, for example, Dvořák explicitly negated the possibility that the new religion had brought about a change of style. Accordingly, he initially rejected the term 'Early Christian art'. Even if Christianity had introduced new contents to art, the art of the post-Constantine era was nevertheless not 'Christian art', but merely 'the last and ripest fruit of the continual antique development'.<sup>11</sup> Ten years later, in 1917, Dvořák would acknowledge unequivocally that this view had been wrong. Now he considered the essence of Medieval art to consist precisely in the new 'spiritual content' introduced by Christianity.<sup>12</sup>



**Figure 4 The Three Youths in the Fiery Furnace, Rome, Catacomb of Priscilla**

This 'Christianization' of Dvořák's image of the Middle Ages is particularly evident in his re-evaluation of catacomb painting (fig. 4). It was not until 1910 – following the publication of Wilpert's fundamental work on the subject<sup>13</sup> – that Dvořák took this art form into account at all, and he initially disqualified it as being completely overrated. Just three years later, however, he described how illusionist techniques of Late Antiquity had been adapted here as a means of visualizing transcendental motifs.<sup>14</sup> Finally, in 1917 Dvořák defined the catacomb paintings as the true inception of a genuinely Christian style – whose spiritualistic anti-materialism already anticipated fundamental phenomena of Medieval art.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Dvořák, *Geschichte der mittelalterlichen Kunst I* (1906/07), p. 29.

<sup>12</sup> Dvořák, *Geschichte der abendländischen Kunst im Mittelalter* (1917/18), pp. 370–475..

<sup>13</sup> Josef Wilpert, *Die Malereien der Katakomben Roms*, Freiburg 1903.

<sup>14</sup> Dvořák, *Geschichte der abendländischen Kunst im Mittelalter I* (1913/14), pp. 53–86.

<sup>15</sup> Dvořák, *Geschichte der abendländischen Kunst im Mittelalter* (1917/18), pp. 370–475.

KATAKOMBENMALEREIEN  
DIE ANFÄNGE DER CHRISTLICHEN KUNST

Wer von den Rompilgern versäumte es, die eine oder andere Katakombe zu besuchen! Der Eindruck war mehr bizarr als erhehend. Der Stimmung standen das Fremdenverkehrsmäßige der Veranstaltung und der restaurierte Zustand der ihres kostbaren Inhaltes längst beraubten Gruftgänge entgegen, einer eingehenden Betrachtung das schlechte Licht und die drängende Hast des Cicerone. Und so haben auch die Gemälde, mit denen die Wände dieser unterirdischen Nekropole geschmückt sind, in der Regel kaum ein lebhafteres Interesse hervorgerufen. Sie waren wohl für die altchristlichen Archäologen eine Fundgrube antiquarischer Tatsachen, doch ihre künstlerische und kunstgeschichtliche Bedeutung wurde wenig beachtet und untersucht, da die Originale schwer zugänglich, einem näheren Studium schwer erreichbar und die Reproduktionen ganz unzureichend waren. Erst Wilperts große Publikation<sup>1</sup> hat eine eingehendere Beschäftigung mit diesen merkwürdigen Zeugnissen des Kristallisationsprozesses einer neuen Religion, Kunst und Weltanschauung erleichtert. Sie lehrt uns — wie ich glaube — manches, was den altchristlichen Archäologen bisher entging und was den Gemälden des unterirdischen Pompeji in der römischen Campagna eine nicht geringere historische Wichtigkeit verleiht, als sie dem Wandschmuck der durch eine Elementarkatastrophe am Fuße des Vesuv entstandenen Stadt der Toten längst beigemessen wird.

I

Da die altchristliche Kunst meist, zum mindesten früher, den Gegenstand einer Spezialwissenschaft gebildet hat und getrennt sowohl von der

<sup>1</sup> Die Malereien der Katakomben Roms, herausgegeben von Joseph Wilpert. Freiburg i. B. 1903.

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Figure 5 Dvořák *Anfänge der christlichen Kunst*

Dvořák's essay on *The beginnings of Christian art*, written in 1919, shortly before his death, was likewise based on this idea (fig. 5).<sup>16</sup> The second part on architecture was left unwritten, but can now be reconstructed quite well with the help of the lecture of 1917. At the time, in the margin of his manuscript (fig. 3), Dvořák sketched the rhythm of the axes of the columns and clerestory windows in the nave of a typical Early Christian basilica (e. g. fig. 6). He spoke of a 'succession of vertical lines, which could continue on into infinity'. This 'ideal upward striving', he went on, represented 'the outgrowth of the building, to which no apparent material limits are set, and which one senses more than one can scan them with the eye'.<sup>17</sup> The combination of passionate emphasis and terminological abstraction found in this lecture was typical of Dvořák's style; here it served to transform the basilica into an allegory of Christian existence which transcends matter. It is a directly perceivable allegory: According to Dvořák, the basilica evokes a virtually psychagogical atmosphere. The beholder is transplanted into a 'realm which is not of this world and in which there are no boundaries and all physical gravity seems to have been eliminated'.<sup>18</sup> The interior of

<sup>16</sup> Max Dvořák, 'Katakombenmalereien. Die Anfänge der christlichen Kunst', in *Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte. Studien zur abendländischen Kunstentwicklung*, Munich 1923, pp. 1–40.

<sup>17</sup> Dvořák, *Geschichte der abendländischen Kunst im Mittelalter (1917/18)*, pp. 306–308..

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 299, 281, 279–280..

the basilica – isolated, as it is, from the outside world – has its orientation towards the heights as well as towards spatial depth, while at the same time finding its point of rest in the apse. To borrow a poetical metaphor by Rilke, it becomes a *Weltinnenraum*, a “world interior” of the human soul, experienced in the infinite space which is God. Naturally, that sounds very nebulous. It is to be pointed out, however, that Dvořák’s speculation always persists in a purely conceptual level of this kind – that is, it never claims a simple mimetic relationship in the manner of later interpretations of the Early Christian basilica as a ‘realistic’ reproduction of the celestial city by such scholars as Sedlmayr, Lothar Kutschelt or Alfred Stange.<sup>19</sup>



**Figure 6 Sant’Apollinare in Classe, Ravenna, interior**

The later Dvořák’s spiritualistic interpretation of the Christian basilica was the consequence of a similarly astounding re-evaluation of the kind I described a little while ago in connection with catacomb painting. For Dvořák as well, the basilica was naturally constitutive for the overall development of Western sacred architecture, which he recounted – like Georg Dehio before him<sup>20</sup> – as a major confrontation between the longitudinal and the centrally-oriented floor plan. All the more

<sup>19</sup> Lothar Kutschelt, *Die frühchristliche Basilika als Darstellung des himmlischen Jerusalem*, Munich 1938. – Alfred Stange, *Das frühchristliche Kirchengebäude als Bild des Himmels*, Cologne 1950. – Hans Sedlmayr, *Die Entstehung der Kathedrale*, Zurich 1950 (Sedlmayr had formulated his thesis already in his inaugural lecture at the University of Vienna on 5th november 1936. See Hans H. Aurenhammer, ‘Zäsur oder Kontinuität. Das Wiener Institut für Kunstgeschichte im Ständestaat und im Nationalsozialismus’, *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 53 [2004]), pp. 11–54; n. 78.

<sup>20</sup> Georg Dehio, *Die kirchliche Baukunst des Abendlandes*. 1884–1901.

astonishing, therefore, is the fact that Dvořák was still disparaging the basilica – as late as 1906 – as a ‘temporary shed’ (literally *ein provisorischer Schupfen*, quoting an expression in Austrian dialect)<sup>21</sup>, as an ephemeral functional building entirely lacking artistic relevance, structures he characteristically compared with the railway station concourses of his own day (fig. 7). For the young Dvořák, Sant’ Apollinare in Classe in Ravenna (fig. 8) was a ‘dreary’ building, more like a ‘big barn’ than ‘a monumental work of architecture’.<sup>22</sup> In fact, he considered only centralized, vaulted structures such as the Hagia Sophia to be true ‘architecture’.



Figure 7 Frankfurt am Main, railway station



Figure 8 Sant’ Apollinare in Classe, Ravenna, exterior

<sup>21</sup> Dvořák, *Geschichte der mittelalterlichen Kunst I* (1906/07), p. 63.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 371.



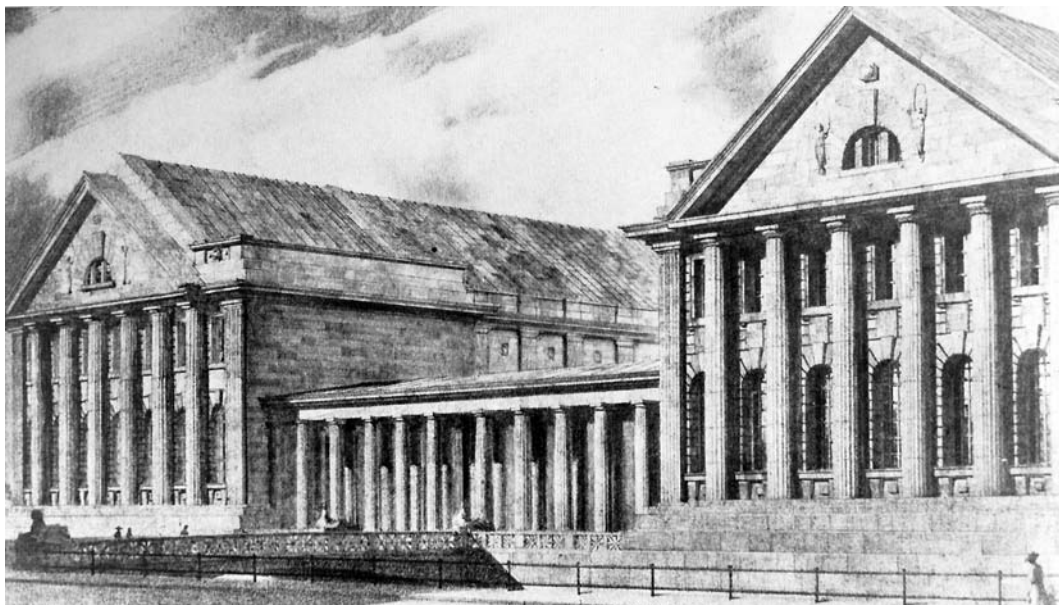


Figure 9 Alfred Messel, Pergamon Museum, Berlin

As we know from the lecture *The last renaissance* of 1912, Dvořák regarded the monumental, neo-Classical 'reform architecture' of such German architects as Bruno Schmitz or Alfred Messel (fig. 9) to be more in keeping with the times than the structures created by engineers. He therefore rejected modern architecture which had been developed out of the new technical means of construction, as represented in Vienna by Otto Wagner.<sup>23</sup> One could cite here the main teller hall of Wagner's post-office savings bank to give an example of a modern 'basilica' wrought in glass and iron (fig. 10; 1904/06). Jože Plečnik's audacious parish church on the Schmelz in Vienna (fig. 11; 1910) built with reinforced concrete is another contemporary example for a 'technical' interpretation of the basilica typology (a basilica without colonnades) which Dvořák presumably would not have liked.

Dvořák's initial reticence with regard to the basilicas' sober 'functionalism' thus projected his own architectural ideal onto Late Antiquity. This ideal of a linking of tradition and modernity was more in keeping with the contemporary buildings by Josef Hoffmann, but also Adolf Loos, whose extremely radical approach did not keep him from clinging to the classical ideal.<sup>24</sup> It was not until later on that Dvořák, as shown earlier, acknowledged the specific aesthetic qualities of the Early Christian basilicas as well, which were ultimately forerunners to the Gothic basilica. He is certain to have been inspired in this context by August Schmarsow's and Wilhelm Pinder's analyses of the spatial rhythmic of Medieval architecture.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Max Dvořák, 'Die letzte Renaissance (1912)', ed. Hans H. Aurenhammer, *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 50 (1997), pp. 9–22. See Hans H. Aurenhammer, 'Max Dvořák und die moderne Architektur. Bemerkungen zum Vortrag 'Die letzte Renaissance' (1912)', *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 50 (1997), pp. 23–40.

<sup>24</sup> See Adolf Loos, 'Die alte und die neue Richtung in der Baukunst. Eine Parallele mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die Wiener Kunstverhältnisse', *Der Architekt. Wiener Monatshefte für Bauwesen und decorative Kunst* IV (1898), p. 31.

<sup>25</sup> August Schmarsow, *Grundbegriffe der Kunstwissenschaft am Übergang vom Altertum zum*



Figure 10 Otto Wagner, Postsparkasse, Vienna, teller hall, 1904/06



Figure 11 Jože Plečnik, Parish church of the Holy Spirit, Vienna, 1910

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*Mittelalter, kritisch erörtert und in systematischem Zusammenhange dargestellt, Leipzig 1905. – Wilhelm Pinder, Einleitende Voruntersuchung zu einer Rhythmik romanischer Innenräume in der Normandie, Strasbourg 1903.*

### 'Elective affinities': Art History and Modern Art

It was by 1913 at the latest that Dvořák took leave of the parameters which had demarcated his interpretations until that time – naturalism and continuity of development as the aim of all art. In that year he began his lecture on Medieval art with a programmatic diagnosis of his own time: the nineteenth century's positivist faith in progress, materialism and idolatry of technology had meanwhile become as obsolete as their artistic equivalents, Naturalism and Impressionism. The project of a universal history of Naturalism – which Dvořák had taken over from his teacher Wickhoff – was accordingly passé.<sup>26</sup> Here Dvořák was naturally processing the experience of the most recent developments in modern art (for example the *Blauer Reiter*, with which his friend Hans Tietze had acquainted him<sup>27</sup>). He came to the conclusion that: 'What all of the new movements in painting have in common is the transcendence of simple observation of nature by means of artistic abstraction and construction – style in the true sense of the word.'<sup>28</sup> Already here, the fact that he contrasts abstraction and the imitation of nature shows the extent to which Dvořák was also indebted to Wilhelm Worringer's *Abstraction and Empathy* of 1907 (however much he also distanced himself from the latter). This so very influential paper, which can be read as a clever montage of Riegl's concept of the autonomous 'will to form' on the one hand and Theodor Lipps's 'aesthetic of empathy' on the other, thus virtually makes its reappearance here in the discourse of the 'Viennese school of art history'.<sup>29</sup>



Figure 12 Book of St. Chad, Lichfield Cathedral (detail)

indeed, in the lecture of 1917 – in the middle of the World War – Dvořák drew a bold comparison between the 'abstract linear phantasy' (*abstrakte Linienphantastik*) of insular manuscripts of the eighth century (e. g. fig. 12) and his own 'fateful' era. According to Dvořák, the latter was in the throes of a disastrous upheaval comparable to the early Middle Ages and, following the collapse of all values, informed by a

In 1913 – entirely in keeping with the demonstrative counterpoising of historical and modern art, reflected, for example, in the layout of the illustrations in the *Blauer Reiter* Almanach – Dvořák spoke of an 'elective affinity' between Medieval art and that of his own time.<sup>30</sup> We accordingly expect a new accent on specifically 'modernist' phenomena in his university lectures. And

<sup>26</sup> Dvořák, *Geschichte der abendländischen Kunst im Mittelalter I* (1913/14), pp. 3–14.

<sup>27</sup> Hans Tietze, *Lebendige Kunstwissenschaft. Texte 1910–1954*, ed. Almut Krapf-Weiler, Vienna 2007, p. 38–44.

<sup>28</sup> Dvořák, *Geschichte der abendländischen Kunst im Mittelalter I* (1913/14), p. 11.

<sup>29</sup> Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*, Munich 1909.

<sup>30</sup> Dvořák, *Geschichte der abendländischen Kunst im Mittelalter I* (1913/14), p. 14.

similar 'yearning for the absolute'. Contemporary art accordingly based itself solely on the authority of the 'spirit of inner experience' (*Geist der inneren Erfahrung*).<sup>31</sup> To be sure, Dvořák appears here quite in the role with which we associate him – as the apologist of the Expressionism of the early twentieth century. But that would be doing him an injustice. Dvořák was not simply concerned with the fashionable drawing of parallels like the contemporary critics of the Austrian Expressionists (think of Egon Schiele, whom Artur Roessler described as a 'neo-Gothic' in 1911', or of Wilhelm Hausenstein who baptized Oppenheimer and Kokoschka – and even Klimt – as the 'neo-gothic Austrians'<sup>32</sup>). Rather, what we have here is an arbitrary 'ancestral construction for the purpose of historical legitimation', to quote Tietze's 1911 criticism of the ideology of the *Blauer Reiter*.<sup>33</sup> I think that Dvořák would have agreed with Tietze in this regard.

Dvořák was naturally fascinated by the endless, confusing convolutions of insular ornament, which he analyzed in the manner of an 'abstract expressionism'.<sup>34</sup> There was nothing fundamentally new about that approach. Worringer had already enthusiastically described the 'Nordic ornament' in 1911 in *Form Problems of the Gothic*.<sup>35</sup> (Incidentally, Dvořák had taken his term *Linienphantastik* from Worringer). However, for Worringer, insular book illumination was representative of a metahistorical 'secret Gothic' as the purest expression of the Germanic *Kunstwollen*. Dvořák, for his part, emphatically rejected Worringer's psychology of ethnicities and races – he had been lamenting the nationalist narrowing of the scholarly investigation of Medieval art since his first lecture – and insisted on the complexity of a historical reality which defied retracing to a single cause like nation or race). Above all, however, Dvořák was not content with the current ideal of pure abstraction. In great detail, he described how, in the stylistic phases following the Early Middle Ages – from the Carolingian Renaissance to the Early Gothic – the abstract idea and the imitation of nature had once again been reconciled, or, as he stressed, had had to be reconciled to keep the cultural achievements of antiquity from falling completely into oblivion.<sup>36</sup>

This avoidance of extremes was also characteristic of Dvořák's own artistic preferences, as is already seen in his predilection for German reform architects. In 1912, for example, he referred not to his contemporaries such as Kandinsky or Picasso, but to German painters of the nineteenth century such as Anselm Feuerbach and Hans von Marées as exponents of the modern tendency towards formal abstraction<sup>37</sup> (in this

<sup>31</sup> Dvořák, *Geschichte der abendländischen Kunst im Mittelalter* (1917/18), pp. 742–752.

<sup>32</sup> Arthur Roessler, 'Egon Schiele', *Bildende Künstler. Monatsschrift für Künstler und Kunstfreunde*, Vienna / Leipzig 1911, 3, pp. 104–118; 114. – Wilhelm Hausenstein, *Die bildende Kunst der Gegenwart. Malerei, Plastik, Zeichnung*, Stuttgart / Berlin 1914, p. 9. – See Robert Fuchs, *Apologie und Diffamierung des österreichischen Expressionismus'. Begriffs- und Rezeptionsgeschichte der österreichischen Malerei 1908 bis 1938*, Vienna / Cologne 1991, pp. 67, 106.

<sup>33</sup> Tietze, *Lebendige Kunstwissenschaft*, p. 38.

<sup>34</sup> Dvořák, *Geschichte der abendländischen Kunst im Mittelalter* (1917/18), p. 755.

<sup>35</sup> Wilhelm Worringer, *Formprobleme der Gotik*, Munich 1911.

<sup>36</sup> Dvořák, *Geschichte der abendländischen Kunst im Mittelalter* (1917/18), p. 869.

<sup>37</sup> Dvořák, *Die letzte Renaissance*.

context, incidentally, his personal predilections were very similar to Worringer's<sup>38</sup>). It was in this manner that, in 1921, in his last lecture series – which was never carried to completion because of his death – after having been the very first to perceive the positive qualities of Mannerism, Dvořák recognized in the latter a danger which had had to be overcome by the Baroque.<sup>39</sup> And in the same year, in his introduction to Oskar Kokoschka's graphic cycle *The Concert*, he prophesied that this Austrian Expressionist would likewise go on to develop a new 'ideal style'<sup>40</sup> (it was the same year that Worringer had established the failure of Expressionism<sup>41</sup>). However idealistically oriented he was, in the 'eternal struggle between matter (*Materie*) and spirit (*Geist*)'<sup>42</sup> on which the late Dvořák insisted, he thus sympathized above all with the periods of the reconciliation of opposites.

### Artistic Form as 'Weltanschauung'

Dvořák's turn to art history as *Geistesgeschichte* from 1912/13 onward would naturally have been inconceivable without the contemporary cultural-pessimist and spiritualist ideologies. Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* is just one example.<sup>43</sup> As I already pointed out earlier, the contrast developed by Worringer between naturalistic empathy and abstraction undoubtedly played an important role, even if Dvořák repudiated Worringer's unhistorical hypostatization of concepts. Thinking in terms of diametrically opposed stylistic terms was very popular at the time, as is seen in the work of Paul Fechter, an Expressionist theorist who, not unlike Dvořák – if abbreviated in woodcut-like manner – had already in 1914 endeavoured to view the entire history of art as a constant alternation between 'style' and 'naturalism', corresponding to a more metaphysical and a more this-worldly mentality, respectively.<sup>44</sup> (Here Worringer's metahistorical, synchronic categories were applied to a diachrony of history.) Dvořák's intellectual transformation after 1912, however, is more than a mere superficial adoption of current ideas; otherwise it would hardly be very interesting. As I would like to outline in conclusion, with his new pair of categories – *Geist* vs. *Materie* – the art historian was seeking an answer to questions he had already found himself confronted with since his first lectures on the Middle Ages. His chief categories, namely, are the result of a process which Dvořák described as

<sup>38</sup> Wilhelm Worringer, 'Die Marées-Ausstellung der Münchner Sezession', *Kunst und Künstler* 7 (1909), 231ff. – See Magdalena Bushart, *Der Geist der Gotik und die expressionistische Kunst. Kunstgeschichte und Kunsttheorie 1911–1925*, Munich 1990.

<sup>39</sup> Max Dvořák, *Geschichte der italienischen Kunst im Zeitalter der Renaissance*. Akademische Vorlesungen, Munich 1927, II, p. 199.

<sup>40</sup> Max Dvořák, *Oskar Kokoschka. Variationen über ein Thema. Vorwort zur Lichtdruckmappe*, Vienna 1921. See Hans H. Aurenhammer, 'Max Dvořák über Oskar Kokoschka: eine handschriftliche Fassung des Vorworts zu 'Variationen über ein Thema' (1920/21)', in: Patrick Werkner (ed.), *Oskar Kokoschka – aktuelle Perspektiven*, Vienna 1998, pp. 34–40

<sup>41</sup> Wilhelm Worringer, *Künstlerische Zeitfragen*, Munich 1921.

<sup>42</sup> Max Dvořák, 'Über Greco und den Manierismus', in: *Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte*, Munich 1923, pp. 276.

<sup>43</sup> Wassilij Kandinsky, *Das Geistige in der Kunst*, Munich 1911.

<sup>44</sup> Paul Fechter, *Expressionismus*, Munich 1914.

follows (if in a different context): ‘the transposition of material forms into the expressive means of an abstract conception’.<sup>45</sup>

Already as early as 1906, a chief element of Dvořák’s interpretation of Gothic architecture was the repudiation of Georg Dehio’s well-known ‘constructivist’ model which explained the structure of the cathedral ultimately as the solution to a ‘technical problem’ – the vaulting of the basilica. According to Dvořák, Gothic architecture did not evolve merely from the diagonal rib, the pointed arch and the flying buttress, but from the ‘underlying artistic meaning’ (*künstlerischer Sinn*) of these forms.<sup>46</sup> Here, of course, he was indebted to Riegl’s criticism of Gottfried Semper’s materialism, and probably also remembered Carl Schnaase’s romantic interpretation – already formulated in 1834 in the *Niederländische Briefe* – of a Gothic architecture determined primarily by ‘spiritual need’.<sup>47</sup> Dvořák, for his part, anticipated the ‘aesthetic’ criticism of Dehio – which only developed in full later on, being first apodictically claimed in Worringer’s *Form Problems* (1911), then developed from concrete analysis in Ernst Gall’s 1915 dissertation.<sup>48</sup>

Already the early Dvořák equated the ‘underlying artistic meaning’ of the Gothic construction with such phenomena as the dissolution of the wall, the enhancement of the depth-height orientation, but above all the overcoming of the tectonic load by means of ‘organic growth as the negation of the antique balance of forces’. He already found these principles – which he considered specifically Medieval – in the Late Antique basilica, which, as you will remember, he analyzed in a very similar manner. Yet he found them as well in major works of architecture which conveyed a sense of weightlessness, such as San Vitale in Ravenna (fig. 13).<sup>49</sup> In the



Figure 13 San Vitale, Ravenna

following architectural development – and here he naturally agrees again with Dehio – Dvořák sees first the loss, but then the restoration of the ‘tectonic’ values. This is followed by increasing segmentation and rational arrangement and, finally, by the most extreme dematerialization in the Gothic cathedral (fig. 14).

Already as early as 1911, Worringer wrote: ‘To dematerialize stone means to spiritualize it.’<sup>50</sup> If we attribute the emphasis on the tectonic principles and on material to a materialistic approach, but ascribe their negation – the dissolution of the wall – to a contrary, ‘spiritual’, principle, then we run the great risk of simply equating categories of architectural form with typical world views. It was precisely this step

<sup>45</sup> Dvořák, *Geschichte der abendländischen Kunst im Mittelalter* (1917/18), p. 325.

<sup>46</sup> See for example Dvořák, *Geschichte der mittelalterlichen Kunst II* (1907), p. 218.

<sup>47</sup> Karl Schnaase, *Niederländische Briefe*, Stuttgart / Tübingen 1834, pp. 157–174, 188–218.

<sup>48</sup> Ernst Gall, *Niederrheinische und normännische Architektur im Zeitalter der Frühgotik. Teil I: Die niederrheinischen Apsidengliederungen und normännischen Vorbilder*, Berlin 1915.

<sup>49</sup> Dvořák, *Geschichte der abendländischen Kunst im Mittelalter* (1910/11), pp. 1233, 1214, 1234.

<sup>50</sup> Worringer, *Formprobleme*, p. 69.



**Figure 14 Amiens, cathedral**

which Dvořák took in 1913/4 when he declared stylistic history the arena of the constant 'struggle between matter and spirit' (notes taken verbatim even provide evidence that, in the lecture hall, he used the words 'fight between God and the devil'<sup>51</sup>). According to Dvořák, this dualism was expressed in the visual arts in the alternation between naturalistic and abstract tendencies, while being reflected in architecture in the contrast between mass and structure<sup>52</sup>. Using this simple, binary schema as a foundation, Dvořák then went on to build his extremely speculative

<sup>51</sup> Max Dvořák, *Geschichte der abendländischen Kunst im Mittelalter I and II*, winter term 1913/14, summer term 1914, type-script by Carola Bielohlawek, p. 229.

<sup>52</sup> Dvořák, *Geschichte der abendländischen Kunst im Mittelalter I* (1913/14), pp. 207–209.

construction of the history of Medieval art. Naturally, its structure was much more highly differentiated than I can convey within the context of this lecture.

In 1913, Dvořák announced: 'Works of art are not only artistic formation, but also world views, explorations of the relationship between man and nature, man and faith, man and science.'<sup>53</sup> At first sight, this statement appears to be a return to the nineteenth-century approaches to cultural history which the early Dvořák had strictly rejected – in keeping with the Viennese dogma of the autonomy of art history (and thus of the discipline of art history), and presumably also on account of the stigmatization of cultural history in the 'methodological debate' over Karl Lamprecht. And indeed, the late Dvořák lauded not only the German romanticists, but also Karl Schnaase, whose *History of the visual arts* (1834-1865) he had once sneered at.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, as before, Dvořák's concern was not with pointing out specific relationships to the mentality of the time, and not with iconographic contents. Even the late Dvořák essentially remained a formalist in his effort to recognize the underlying idea, *Geist*, directly from the 'artistic form'.<sup>55</sup> This is also seen in his concepts of world view, which simply transliterate art-historical categories.

I would like to close with a very characteristic Dvořák passage from his last lecture on the Middle Ages. In 1918, he began the chapter on the architecture of the eleventh century with a fundamental reflection on the analysis of floor plans. He rejected the approach of viewing them solely from the perspective of their 'convenience', since that would correspond with the economic and intellectual egotism which had led to the disastrous world war of his own time. On the contrary, the floor plan of Medieval churches was an expression of ideas, and the study of that floor plan 'grants insight into the most sublime spiritual prerequisites and aims'.<sup>56</sup> Dvořák then goes on to cite specific examples as a means of developing the dialectical structure of Romanesque architecture – boldly towering one abstract term on top of the other, as always. Essentially, the Romanesque style places the emphasis on matter. In contrast, however, an abstract and rational order asserted itself increasingly, as seen, for example, in the segmentation in bays. The limitations of Dvořák's interpretations – and, as German art history would show often enough in the decades that followed, the danger they presented – lay in the illusion of a directly accessible 'mirroring of the essence' (*Wesensschau*). His consistently pursued approach of connecting proximity to the work of art with a historical-philosophical perspective, however, combined with his constant willingness to subject his own standpoints to critical revision, has lost nothing of its topicality.

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<sup>53</sup> Dvořák / Bielohlawek *Geschichte der abendländischen Kunst im Mittelalter I* (1913/14), p. 19.

<sup>54</sup> Dvořák, *Geschichte der abendländischen Kunst im Mittelalter* (1917/18), p. 13.

<sup>55</sup> For this methodological principle see the fundamental study by Regine Prange, 'Die erzwungene Unmittelbarkeit. Panofsky und der Expressionismus', *Idea X* (1991), pp. 221–251.

<sup>56</sup> Dvořák, *Geschichte der abendländischen Kunst im Mittelalter* (1917/18), pp. 1028–1029.



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