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THE RHETORIC OF ARTIFACTS AND
THE DECLINE OF CLASSICAL HUMANISM:
THE CASE OF JOSEF STRZYGOWSKI¹

SUZANNE L. MARCHAND

ABSTRACT

This essay argues that in overlooking the assault on the autonomy, unity, and tenacity of the classical world (and especially Rome) underway in Europe after 1880, historians have failed to appreciate an important element of historiographical reorientation at the *fin de siècle*. This second “revolution” in humanistic scholarship challenged the conviction of the educated elite that European culture was rooted exclusively in classical antiquity in part by introducing as evidence non-textual forms of evidence; the testimony of artifacts allowed writers to reach beyond romantic-nationalist histories toward the identification of cultural areas, defined by morphological similarities, and to disrupt the traditional categories of the civilized and the barbaric. The essay focuses on a relatively obscure Austrian art historian, Josef Strzygowski, whose insistence upon Europe’s dependence on Oriental forms and upon the superior historical value of material, over textual, evidence provided critics of philologically-based humanism with two important argumentative avenues. Strzygowski also represents a para-academic type, whose rise to power and prestige contributed to the so-called “decline of the German mandarins.” In sketching his career, the essay attempts to show how this “decline” is bound up with the waning institutional and popular status of Renaissance humanism—and a corresponding rise of biologicistic Germanophilia—in the two intellectual milieux Strzygowski inhabited (Germany and Austria). A final section suggests that this antihumanist crusade contributed not only to the articulation of racist historiography, but also to the eventual transference of politico-moral legitimacy to a non-elitist, anthropological definition of culture.

The vast quantities of ink poured out over the last several decades on the philosophical foundations of “the crisis of historicism” seem to have obscured another, equally important, aspect of the historiographical reorientation of the *fin de siècle*: the attack on the unity, autonomy, originality, and tenacity of the classical world. Long presumed to form the foundation of European culture and society, classical antiquity, at this century’s start, still represented the most

1. I would like to thank Peter Brown, Eva Giloi, Oleg Grabar, Sarah Humphreys, Thomas DaCosta Kauffmann, Franz Georg Maier, Margaret Olin, Victor Stater, and Kurt Weitzmann for their helpful comments on this essay. A summer research trip to Munich and Vienna was funded by a grant from the Princeton University Research Council.

venerable preoccupation of the historical profession, particularly in historicism's *Heimat*, German academia. Antiquity and its Renaissance revival similarly absorbed the attention of the majority of academic art historians; in 1892, the field was represented at the University of Berlin by two specialists in Italian painting and one classical archaeologist. If Austrian, Swiss, and southern German scholars were less committed to historicism and high classicism than the northerners, in these regions too the erudite man was expected to be thoroughly versed in classical languages, history, and art. By the 1880s, however, this aestheticizing, neohumanist worldview had become increasingly irrelevant and even repellent to a younger generation on the fringes of the academy. Pressed by their elders into the specialized pursuits of an increasingly positivistic historiography and frequently employed in the sub-professional tasks of cataloging, collecting, and authenticating, this German academic equivalent of "Grub Street" grew increasingly critical of the philological penchants and classicizing prejudices of their teachers.² Taking up the study of "forgotten" periods (for example, the prehistorical, Byzantine, late antique, and Baroque) and neglected regions (such as Eastern Germany, Mesopotamia, Syria, Turkestan), this battalion of para-academic outsiders exposed the fragility of Mediterranean civilization and the superficiality of its tenure. Ultimately, they were instrumental in undermining the narrow and aristocratic nineteenth-century conception of *Kultur* and preparing the way for the new, relativist *Kulturgeschichte* of the period after World War I.

To appreciate the significance of the collapse of antiquity's autonomy and originality to the historical profession as well as to German cultural life, it is vital that we understand the role played here by interpretations of the accomplishments and failings of the Roman Empire. One could look to the Reformation and beyond for the origins of German attempts to arrive at self-definition through rewriting Roman history.³ For our purposes, it is sufficient to note that a new chapter in this Roman-German encounter opened in the later eighteenth century as German *Aufklärer* and Romantics popularized Rome's association with aristocratic superficiality, ultramontane power politics, and the French. The increasing desire of antiquarians and scholars, in Arnaldo Momigliano's striking phrase, "to penetrate below the Roman surface of Western Europe,"⁴ soon resulted in the "discovery" of Germanic "prehistorical" culture as well as Near Eastern art forms, languages, and philosophies previously unknown or

2. I am borrowing the phrase "Grub Street" from Robert Darnton's well-known depiction of the underside of the French Enlightenment. See his *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982).

3. From different perspectives, Karl Christ and Klaus von See have shown the fruitfulness of such a quest. See Christ, *Römische Geschichte und deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft* (Munich, 1982); Klaus von See, *Die Ideen von 1789 und die Ideen von 1914: Völkisches Denken in Deutschland zwischen Französischer Revolution und Erstem Weltkrieg* (Frankfurt, 1975).

4. Arnaldo Momigliano, "Eighteenth-Century Prelude to Mr. Gibbon," (1976) in Momigliano, *Sesto Contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico* 1 (Rome, 1980), 257.

unappreciated. Finally, the elevation of secular over ecclesiastical historiography, the expansion of the study of comparative philology, and the advent of artistic and scholarly philhellenism in the Protestant North all contributed to the demotion of Rome and the uncoupling of the history of Europe from the history of Christianity. The new neohumanist consensus made the culture of pagan (or pre-Christian) Greece its ideal and its point of historiographical departure.

This revolution in humanistic scholarship, however, did not challenge the conviction of the educated elite that European culture was rooted in classical antiquity, and its result was not the abandonment of the text-critical methods pioneered by Renaissance scholars but their professionalization. At the close of the nineteenth century, by contrast, a series of domestic and international, intellectual and political, events combined to revive the issue of Rome's proper place in the history of European cultural development, in France, as well as in Germany and in Austria. Intertwined with disputations on the subject of modern "decadence," new racialized portraits of the decline of Rome by popular authors (Comte de Gobineau, Ernest Renan, Felix Dahn, H. S. Chamberlain) emphasized the debility and degeneracy of the late Roman Empire, contrasting it to the pure, if primitive, power of the Germanic tribes and the abiding, if undynamic, endurance of the Orient. The themes of these widely-read tracts paralleled and were complexly associated with new scholarly attempts to assess Rome's legacy, especially in the little-studied late antique era and the little-documented regions of Asia Minor and northern Europe. And this time, extensive new archaeological finds in Europe and the Orient coincided with the elaboration of a thoroughgoing critique of the elitism, impracticality, and lack of patriotism of classical scholarship and pedagogy. The stage was set for an all-out assault on classical humanism.

A major facilitating agent for the launching of this attack on traditional historiography, and on Rome, was the vast wave of archaeological, art historical, ethnographic, and folkloristic material which washed over Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century. Collected for a variety of reasons by missionaries, local antiquarians, connoisseurs, travelers, entrepreneurs, ethnographers, geographers, philologists, folklorists, colonial officials, and treasure hunters, this bountiful material has generally been dismissed as merely emblematic of imperialist lust for possession.⁵ Of course, exotic (and homely) artifacts did serve the purposes of nationalist exhibitionism, particularly for a Kaiserreich anxious to establish its credentials as *Kulturstaat*. But the catholicity of this frantic collecting, especially once state patronage was summoned to aid in grand "scientific" endeavors like archaeological excavation and polar exploration, also resulted in the discovery of vast territories of human history

5. Between 1875 and 1879, the dig at Olympia alone turned up 1328 stone sculptures, 7464 bronzes, 2094 terra cottas, 696 inscriptions, and 3035 coins. Georg Treu, "Die Ausgrabungen zu Olympia," report 37 (1879) in Merseberg, Zentrales Staatsarchiv, 2.2.1-20772, 58-61.

unaccounted for in biblical or classical chronologies. Artifacts not explained by the textual record thus held the power to expose the limits of traditional, philologically-based historiography. They enticed anthropologists and archaeologists to reach beyond romantic-nationalist cultural histories (based on shared languages) toward the identification of cultural areas, defined by morphological similarities, with their own secret histories and silent fates. Particularly in Germany and Austria, little influenced by the mid-century “revolution in ethnological time,”⁶ the rude intrusion of the pre- or proto-linguistic disrupted the traditional categories of the civilized and the barbaric, the artistic and the civilized, the knowable and the negligible.

Yet, despite the reorientations necessitated by Schliemann’s digs at Troy and Mycenae, the mapping and surveying undertaken by the *Reichslimeskommission* in southern and western Germany, the work of Aurel Stein and Albert von le Coq in Chinese Turkestan, Flinders Petrie’s explorations in Egypt and Palestine, and the excavations of prehistoric sites undertaken by numerous local historical associations in England and Central Europe, it must be confessed that such rethinking proved a slow and halting affair. Until the 1920s, real changes in the interpretation of the past generally resulted from discoveries of inscriptions and manuscripts, rather than from the bulk of the finds, that is, unsigned, undated artifacts. The lavish illustrations, and especially the detailed discussions of artifacts in Mikhail Rostovtzeff’s 1926 *Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*, Arnaldo Momigliano remembered, impressed the book’s first readers; students of the day, Momigliano wrote, “were accustomed to books on ancient history where the archaeological evidence, if used at all, was never presented and explained to the reader.”⁷

In fact, long into the twentieth century, archaeologists as well as treasure hunters recognized an unwritten order of significance for their finds, as applicable in the Mediterranean as in Babylon or Tun-huang: 1. manuscripts and inscriptions; 2. monumental sculpture; 3. wall paintings or mosaics; 4. pottery; 5. figurines, articles of daily life, and so on. This order was partly dictated by official patrons—the academies of science demanded manuscripts, the national museums pursued monumental sculpture—but even most of those devoted to the recovery of the material life of the past, it seems, shared the historians’ presumption that only texts could generate legitimate scholarly interpretations, while artifacts supplied at best indirect, ambiguous proofs. Initially, it seems, Heinrich Schliemann had believed that he would need to find inscriptions to prove that he had discovered the remains of ancient Troy at Hissarlik. In a

6. See Thomas R. Trautmann, “The Revolution in Ethnological Time,” in *Man* 2 (1992), 379–397.

7. Arnaldo Momigliano, “M. I. Rostovtzeff,” in *Contributo alla storia degli studi classici* (Rome, 1955), 341. “For me,” wrote Rostovtzeff in 1922, “archaeology is not a source of illustration for written texts, but an independent source of historical information, no less valuable and important, sometimes more important, than the written sources. We must learn and we are gradually learning how to write history with the help of archaeology.” Rostovtzeff, *Iranians and Greeks in South Russia* (New York, 1922), viii.

personal letter of 1872, he wrote: “Even if I uncover the palaces of Priam, Hector, and Paris, I will not be credited with having solved the Troy question. Inscriptions are what is desired, and I must and will find inscriptions of that age; I will find them if I have to dig fifty feet deeper. . . .”⁸ “The prehistorian,” wrote Moriz Hoernes in 1893, “is like a doctor, who treats a child and must diagnose its condition, without being able to speak to the patient.”⁹ Both Hoernes and Schliemann hoped that by borrowing methods from the natural sciences, they might develop a systematic means for the study of primitive culture; but both also recognized that in their day, material evidence was, as it remains today, an inferior sort of historical testimony.

This poses two problems: the social and intellectual context in which artifacts were transformed from objects of aesthetic contemplation into barometers of cultural evolution and fossilized records of daily life; and the appropriate evidentiary status of material remains. This article will primarily address the former question, examining first the evolution of the interpretation of artifacts in classical and oriental studies, and then turning to a case study of the career of Josef Strzygowski. Pan-German in his politics and antihumanist in his scholarship, Strzygowski was instrumental in launching a critique of the nineteenth-century portrait of the passing of the classical world and the origins of the culture of medieval Europe. A German-speaker from Austria’s ethnic borderlands, born into the commercial middle class (*Besitzbürgertum*), but aspiring to loftier categorization with the educated middle class (*Bildungsbürgertum*), this quintessential “Grub Street” academic possessed a probably unprecedented knowledge of “decadent” – late antique Near Eastern and Byzantine – art, which he parlayed into important teaching positions, first at the University of Graz (1892–1909) and then at the University of Vienna (1909–1934). Strzygowski’s career spans a crucial period in the study of antiquity, during which numerous previously unknown or despised “primitive” groups were added to the official annals, and sometimes even made more heroic than the “civilized” peoples.¹⁰ Strzygowski, who became a great champion of the unsung artists of the Orient and the North against the “power art” of Rome and Renaissance Italy, played an important role in this transvaluation of values.

By concentrating my attention on this relatively obscure Austrian art historian, I hope to show how the late nineteenth-century critique of the classical world was linked to new, equally positivistic and *völkisch*, patterns of collecting artifacts, and to growing interest, both within the academy and outside it, in periods and places known only (or primarily) by their material remains. Strzygowski was certainly not the first to try to create cultural chronologies on

8. Schliemann to Justizrat Plato, 27 January 1872, in *Heinrich Schliemann: Briefwechsel*, vol. 1 (1842–1875), ed. Ernst Meyer (Berlin, 1953), 200–201.

9. Moriz Hoernes, “Grundlinien einer Systematik der prähistorischen Archäologie,” in *Zeitschrift für Ethnographie* 25 (1893), 53.

10. On the transformation of ancient history writing between about 1890 and 1925, see Victor Ehrenberg, “Eduard Meyer,” in *Historische Zeitschrift* (hereafter *HZ*) 143 (1931), 503.

the basis of artifacts alone. Over the course of the nineteenth century, those on the receiving end of Europe's great treasure-trawling endeavors (museum curators, catalogers, librarians, dealers, antiquarians, and, at last, professional scholars) had devised a number of strategies to convert linguistic, material, and mythological remnants into historical data. Prehistorians and archaeologists had developed stratigraphic and stylistic modes of analysis to date their finds; mythographers, following the Grimm brothers, had applied comparative philological methods to trace the evolution of myths through successive transformations of language and folklore; and art historians with interests beyond their discipline's classical and Renaissance favorites had learned to apply paleographic and iconographic analysis to manuscript illustrations, sculptural fragments, and other anonymous works of art. But Strzygowski was one of the first to insist upon the primary importance of oriental, Slavic, Germanic, and prehistorical material evidence to the understanding of European history, and one of the first to convert the study of artifacts into a full-scale attack on the philological narrow-mindedness and classicizing elitism of the establishment. For better or for worse, his *Orient oder Rom?* exposed the Eurocentrism and exhaustion of Renaissance humanism.

Strzygowski, here, is also meant to represent a type, which I characterized above as the German academic equivalent of the "Grub Street" publicists described by Robert Darnton. Though this parallel is by no means exact, it does, I think, capture something of the competitive anxieties and anti-establishment hostilities of this world, and it stands to reason that if aspirants to cultural prestige in France sought their fortunes in belles lettres and journalism, in the German-speaking world, the same type would look to the universities for cultural legitimation. This intellectual underworld of the 1890s, long ago roused by Fritz Stern but since left to wallow in its own *ressentiment* and obscurity, was populated by many Strzygowskis, most leading para-academic existences in libraries, museums, and minor bureaucratic posts.¹¹ Importantly, these academic outsiders generally spoke to rather large popular audiences composed of educated laypeople and local elites,¹² evinced sympathy for the natural sciences, and, usually working in areas less than attractive to the classicizing professorate (such as Indology, Germanic prehistory, and Near Eastern Studies), drew popular attention to the insularity and obsolescence of neohumanist academe. It is part of this essay's purpose to suggest that it was the rise to modest institutional power and considerable popular prestige of these sorts of men,

11. Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair* (Berkeley, 1961). A list of these "Strzygowskis" would certainly include men like Gustav Kossinna, Paul Deussen, Leopold von Schroeder, Hugo Winckler, H. S. Chamberlain, Felix Dahn, and later, Oswald Spengler, Leo Frobenius, and Ludwig Klages, some more, some less, intellectually respectable.

12. Popular participation in historical associations and museum building soared in the fourth quarter of the nineteenth century. In 1927, there were 146 local museums (and probably an equal number of locally-produced journals) devoted to antiquities in the German Republic. See Karl Schumacher, "Das Römisch-Germanische Central Museum von 1901-1926," in *Festschrift zur Feier des 75 jährigen Bestehens des Römisch-Germanischen Centralmuseums zu Mainz 1927* (Mainz, 1927), 64. For an in-depth study of one region, see Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley, 1990).

rather than the so-called “decline of the German mandarins” which transformed German intellectual life between about 1890 and 1914.¹³ As a recent biographer of another, even less respectable, inhabitant of this underworld, has argued, this “decline” was less the result of academia’s retreat from the idiocies of the modern world into specialized scholarship than the product of an important expansion of the audience for non-specialist “historical” works; the new mass appeal of pseudo-scholarly works like Houston Stewart Chamberlain’s *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* made the professoriate less consequential producers of accounts of the past.¹⁴ At present, histories of historiography and of intellectual life generally fail to take into account the extremely significant threat to the prestige of the professoriate posed by this shift in its audience’s interests. Though much work remains to be done here, perhaps the time has come to begin to rethink the multiple crises in German intellectual life at the fin de siècle from the bottom up.

The second problem, concerning the proper evidentiary status of material remains, is not easily solved by a text-centered historian such as myself, still beholden, Strzygowski would have said, to the “humanist faction.”¹⁵ It is perhaps inevitably the case that interpretations of the meanings or origins of objects are less susceptible to general agreement than similar analyses of texts; at least in the world of logical thought (as opposed to the world of sentient being), we know better how to establish origination, intention, and influence in the realm of words than in the realm of things. Yet artifacts allow us to enter otherwise inaccessible realms—from the very ancient cultures of the steppes to the everyday worlds of women in early modern Europe—which are often of great historiographical interest, particularly to social and economic historians. And it is certainly the case that in Germany and Austria, where a traditional division of labor had reserved textual interpretation for professional scholars, while the collection and interpretation of artifacts had remained the provenance of antiquarians,¹⁶ the early twentieth century marked a gradual elevation in the status of artifacts and their interpreters, and the opening of a new era of research on previously neglected or spurned epochs and places. Perhaps in coming to understand something about the social and cultural context under which this modest transformation took place we will begin to comprehend the conditions under which such historiographical changes occur, as well as highlight both the liberating and the perilous aspects of writing history without texts.

13. Cf. Fritz K. Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890–1933* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969).

14. Geoffrey G. Field, *Evangelist of Race: The Germanic Vision of Houston Stewart Chamberlain* (New York, 1981), 179; see also 225–240.

15. For an archaeologist’s discussion of the complexities of “reading” material culture, see Ian Hodder, *Reading the Past: Current Approaches to Interpretation in Archaeology*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Eng., 1991).

16. See Hermann Heimpel, “Geschichtsvereine einst und jetzt,” in *Geschichtswissenschaft und Vereinswesen im 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. Hartmut Boockmann et al. (Göttingen, 1972), 63, n. 41. For a wider view, see Arnaldo Momigliano, “Ancient History and the Antiquarian,” in *Studies in Historiography* (London, 1966), 1–39.

I. OF WORDS AND THINGS: ORIENTALISM, CLASSICISM,
AND GERMANOPHILIA FROM EXEGESIS TO EXCAVATION

Of vital importance to the understanding of the sacred history of Adam's heirs as well as to the profane history of the progress of nations, European study of the Orient entered the era of hyper-imperialism boasting a long and venerable record of philological and exegetical achievements.¹⁷ Until the late eighteenth century, "oriental" studies (*Orientalistik*) generally meant study of semitic texts; as was the case in classical studies, material remains (especially coins) helped to establish dates and rulers, but otherwise played a very minor, auxiliary role. Even more so than in the case of the classics, *Orientalistik* was limited to language training and was linked either to the training of travelers (missionaries, entrepreneurs, officials) or to theological pursuits. Until the eighteenth century, students wishing to pursue Arabic, Persian, or Hebrew left the Holy Roman Empire to do so, journeying to England, Holland, Switzerland, or Constantinople, or hired private tutors, as did the Reformation era cabalist Johannes Reuchlin.¹⁸

The Enlightenment and the decline of the Turkish threat opened a period of new historical consideration (as opposed to theological vilification) of Islamic culture in the West; oriental *Realien*¹⁹ were drawn into the purview of scholars with the publication of Barthélemy d'Herbelot's *Bibliothèque orientale* in 1697.²⁰ Göttingen developed an important school of "oriental" philology and biblical criticism under J. Michaelis and J. G. Eichhorn in the later eighteenth century, while an Imperial-Royal Academy of Oriental Languages was opened in Vienna in 1753, primarily in order to provide insightful diplomats and reliable translators for the Austrian state.²¹ During the Romantic era, interest in and knowledge of India and the East surged, opening an era Raymond Schwab has rightly characterized as an "oriental Renaissance." Herder celebrated the Orient as the cradle of mankind; the Schlegel brothers learned Sanskrit; the aging philhellene Wilhelm von Humboldt thanked God he had lived to see the translation of the *Bhagavad Gita*.²² Inspired by the prospect of using the new study of comparative philology to comprehend man's nature and history, the Romantic generation ransacked the oriental mind in search of itself.

17. See Paolo Rossi, *The Dark Abyss of Time: The History of the Earth and the History of Nations from Hooke to Vico*, transl. Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago, 1984); Anthony Grafton, *Defenders of the Text: The Tradition of Scholarship in an Age of Science, 1450–1800* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991).

18. Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680–1880*, transl. Gene Patterson-Black and Victor Reinking (New York, 1984), 21.

19. This word is extremely difficult to translate. In nineteenth-century usage, it indicated scholarly subject matter which was not strictly grammatical, linguistic, or philosophical; thus, a *Realphilolog* (or sometimes *Sachphilolog*) might study geographical, historical, ethnographic, archaeological, religious, or biographical details of ancient culture.

20. Johann Fück, *Die Arabischen Studien in Europa bis in den Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig, 1955), 103; Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978), 63–67.

21. Karl Roider, "The Oriental Academy in the *Theresienzeit*," in *Topic: A Journal of the Liberal Arts* 34 (Fall 1980), 19–28.

22. Schwab, *Oriental Renaissance*, 59.

Romantic interest in the Orient, however, had chiefly confined itself to the literary products of the East. In part, technical constraints had barred the appreciation of oriental artifacts to these writers; they were deterred not only by the costliness and subjectivity of pre-photographic representations, but also by the difficulty of travel and transport before the arrival of railroads, and the expense and danger of voyages into the exotic (or enemy-colonized) *Morgenland*. But partly, too, the European eye, trained in Rome, Paris, Vienna, and even in backwater Berlin to appreciate Renaissance paintings and classical sculpture could assimilate only with difficulty the repertoire of the Orient. “Oriental” art – characterized by Hegel as bizarre, grandiose, and purely symbolic – was held in low esteem. This was especially true of Indian art, but Near Eastern, Islamic, and even Byzantine styles were late to acquire museum space and the attentions of art historians and connoisseurs. In excavating Asia Minor, nineteenth-century archaeologists of all nationalities blithely destroyed post-classical settlements in order to burrow down to the Greek or Roman remains below.

Three related factors contributed to the particularly halting reception of oriental *Realien* in German-speaking Europe after 1830. First, the lack of colonial activity and relative poverty of the Austrians and Germans (until after 1871) prevented them from joining the British and French in rapacious collecting in the East. Second, the rise to prominence and progressive specialization of classical philology in Prussian universities and secondary schools marked the advent of a new Mediterranean-centeredness and the decline of universal histories which juxtaposed oriental and occidental cultures. The Prussian classicists of the mid-century combined a highly meticulous method of source criticism with a keen desire to rid higher education of clerical influence, contributing to the progressive historicization and secularization of classical studies. By virtue of its sacred subject matter, its usual practitioners (the clergy), and its long heritage, oriental studies could not easily imitate this change of perspective. Though the field did attempt to shore up its declining social prominence by borrowing ideas and material from the emerging science of comparative philology, *Orientalistik* was unable to follow the institutional upward trail of the classicists. While the latter could generally find jobs in the prestigious secondary schools (*Gymnasien*), the former had little future outside the university theological faculties. State funding for research on things oriental – especially secular or material things – remained very low until the last years of the century. Even Egyptology, a field full of talented philologists, remained socially, culturally, and monetarily far behind classical studies.²³

Finally, Prussian scholarship’s predominance diminished the visibility and prestige of less historicist, less specialized, and less classicizing research un-

23. See Georg Ebers, “Die Ausgrabungen in Aegypten und die deutsche Aegyptologie” [1895], in *Idem, Aegyptische Studien und Verwandtes* (Stuttgart, 1900), 124–135.

derway in southern Germany, Switzerland, and Austria. In these areas, both the Graecophilia of the *Goethezeit* and the Humboltian “research imperative” made slower headway and never gained full institutional hegemony.²⁴ And here, as in France and Italy, the continuities between the Roman Empire and the medieval world—a growing area of interest—were never discounted. Anthony Grafton’s description of the classicists at the University of Munich could also be applied to Viennese scholars at work after 1850; here historicism made few inroads, and the study of antiquity continued to include the study of Europe’s classical heritage and the afterlife of antiquity.²⁵ When the Berliners returned to these fields in the final two decades of the century, the Bavarians and Austrians had really never abandoned this area of interest. They simply had been slow in developing the institutions, collections, and expertise to systematize and professionalize this knowledge.

With the rise to prominence of the Institut für österreichische Geschichtsforschung in Vienna and especially its art-historical offshoot, the Kunsthistorisches Institut, in the 1880s, however, this intellectual imbalance of power began to change. Established in 1853 explicitly to foster the study of the multinational empire’s historical underpinnings, the IföG was modeled in part on the French *École des chartes*, which emphasized painstaking paleographic and philological training and severely discounted philosophical speculation. The students and scholars connected to the IföG tended to specialize in older, empirical and “practical” disciplines—for example, numismatics, heraldry, iconography—and many were expected to use these specialized skills in nonacademic employment in archives, libraries, and museums. This was one way in which the IföG could serve the Empire; the historians, and especially the art historians, as Margaret Olin has shown, soon found another means to turn their talents to the defense of their polyglot world, increasingly threatened by the rise of separatist nationalisms. Proud of their double Roman (and Catholic) and Germanic heritage, Viennese scholars like Alois Riegl, Franz Wickhoff, and Engelbert Mühlbacher depicted the transition from the classical to the Carolingian world as a continuous series of modulations in the same basic forms; in addressing the late Roman world, in particular, these men emphasized the international character of European cultural development. Their Herbartian, rather than Hegelian, philosophical stance helped to sustain this syncretic, rather than historicist, interpretation of the past, while their interest in mixed or shared styles drew them increasingly eastward, toward the study of the hellenistic Orient and the Byzantine world (which was also extremely popular with scholars at the University of Munich).²⁶

24. For an example of Swiss divergence from Prussian practices, see Lionel Gossman, *Orpheus Philologus: Bachofen versus Mommsen on the Study of Antiquity* (Philadelphia, 1983).

25. Anthony Grafton, “The Origins of Scholarship,” *American Scholar* 48 (Spring, 1979), 242–246.

26. On the Viennese school, see Margaret Olin, *Forms of Representation in Alois Riegl’s Theory of Art* (University Park, Penn., 1992), 4–24; Julius Schlosser, “Die Wiener Schule der Kunstgeschichte,” in *Mitteilungen des österreichischen Instituts für Geschichtsforschung*, Ergänzungsband 13, Heft 2 (1934), 145–228; and Alphons Lhotsky, *Österreichische Historiographie* (Vienna, 1962), 158–164.

Ultimately, if Strzygowski shared his contempt for Rome with the northern Germans, it was from the Viennese that he learned to appreciate the interdependence of oriental and occidental culture.

By the century's close, however, in both North and South, specialization had exacerbated the demands made by philological "higher criticism" for the collection of all possible remnants of past civilizations. Excavations were begun by the Germans in Palestine, Babylon, and Miletus; by the Austrians at Ephesos. A raft of new editions and translations of ancient Semitic, Coptic, and Islamic "classics" descended on the academic world, as the new archaeological forays into lesser known epochs filled museum basements. As the evidence multiplied, it became more and more clear that no single researcher, locked in a dank study, could possibly embrace the entirety of the ancient Occident and Orient — Eduard Meyer, as one elegist wrote, may have been the first and last to try.²⁷ An overview of artifacts, in particular, appeared a distant hope; abetted by the development of railways and the cheapening of photographic reproduction, the scramble to acquire novelties and "originals" had such success in the relatively unexplored Orient that acquisition ran far ahead of interpretation and exhibition. Travelers and on-site archaeologists had little inclination or time to devote to the comparative analysis of artifacts, and museum assistants were not expected to develop the synthetic and linguistic skills of the professional historian. The hierarchical system of interpretation had vastly expanded at the bottom levels without a corresponding increase of credentialed synthesizers. When at last special exhibitions — like the Munich Mohammedan Exposition of 1910 — were mounted, their vast expanse (eighty rooms) and their scholarly air impeded their popular appeal. Even here, a columnist for the *Berliner Tageblatt* complained, a western-oriented, aristocratic view of the Orient prevailed.²⁸ Still more curiosities than objects of aesthetic appreciation or historical understanding, oriental artifacts had not yet found faithful advocates or worthy audiences.

It is precisely in this era of rapid acquisition and postponed exhibition and analysis — a practice the art critic Karl Scheffler identified as "*Anhäufungspolitik*," or the policy of heaping things up — that Josef Strzygowski enters our story. An art historian alienated from the traditional pursuits of German humanistic scholarship and Viennese religious antiquarianism as a result of his *besitzbürgerlich* upbringing, exotic travels, and odious personality, Strzygowski represents a revolt not so much against positivism as against the aesthetic predilections and academic hierarchies which prevented its full flowering. Seen in the context of German philhellenism's ebbing cultural centrality and the political crises of the Austrian Empire, his veneration of the Orient, against both Greece and Rome, is indicative of the birth of a new, antihumanist, age.

27. Ehrenberg, "Eduard Meyer," 503.

28. Felix Stahl, "Mohammedanische Kunst," in *Berliner Tageblatt* (11 June 1910), no. 291; evening edition, in Munich, Hauptstaatsarchiv, MH/9286.

II. JOSEF STRZYGOWSKI: THE UNDERWORLD COMES OF AGE

Josef Strzygowski was born in 1862 in Biala in Austrian Silesia, a German enclave surrounded by Polish-speaking peasants. The son of a cloth manufacturer, Strzygowski's early life conformed more to the pattern of the applied scientist than that of the typical art historian. At age 18 he was packed off to a large weaving plant to learn the entrepreneurial and technical skills he would require to succeed his father. But in 1882, Strzygowski suddenly abandoned the world of production for that of humanistic scholarship, matriculating initially at the University of Vienna. He soon transferred to the University of Munich, where he completed a dissertation on representations of the baptism of Christ for the two Graecophilic art historians Heinrich Brunn and Carl Robert.²⁹ Having received a scholarship from the German Archaeological Institute (DAI), Strzygowski then spent the next three years in Rome, principally consorting with German scholars. Rather than returning home after this exodus, he then undertook a lengthy journey to see and study Byzantine monuments, visiting Salonica, Mt. Athos, St. Petersburg, and Moscow – at the time a rare feat. Like his *Taufe Christi*, his 1887 book *Cimabue und Rom* emphasized Christian themes and Byzantine sources for western forms, but retained the orthodox tone and prefatory source criticism typical of contemporary professionals in the field. Original in his interests, modest in his claims, the young art historian seemed poised on the brink of a successful career.

Strzygowski would later claim that already at the time of writing *Cimabue* he had posed to himself the question that would frame his life's work: "What is Rome, what, in reality, is Italian and European art?"³⁰ But if he had discovered the question by 1887, it was undoubtedly his trip to Egypt in 1894–1895 which suggested to him his startling (and ever more dogmatically defended) answer. In Egypt, his autobiography notes, the young art historian discovered huge early Christian and Islamic realms untouched by the influence of classical art,³¹ and here, in all likelihood, he began his rejection of the "Romzentrismus" of the Austrian Catholic humanists. Yet if Egypt served as catalyst, it was certainly personal antagonisms, in addition to professional concerns and political conditions in Austria which made Strzygowski not merely an admirer of the Orient, but its partisan.

Importantly, it was in compiling a catalog of Coptic art from the Cairo museum that Strzygowski first experienced the thrill of breaking new art historical ground; we should not underestimate the appeal of the uncharted Orient to a student confronting increasing competition for positions and pressures for discovering fresh subjects of inquiry.³² After his travels, Strzygowski turned his attention almost exclusively to oriental and Byzantine art forms, producing

29. Josef Strzygowski, *Ikonographie der Taufe Christi* (Munich, 1885); Strzygowski dedicated this volume to Anton Springer and to Brunn, who, some years earlier, had also been mentor (and friend) to Julius Langbehn. Stern, *Politics of Cultural Despair*, 100–101.

30. Josef Strzygowski, *Europas Machtkunst im Rahmen des Erdkreises*, 3rd ed. (Vienna, 1943), xiv. 31. See Josef Strzygowski, *Aufgang des Nordens: Lebenskampf eines Kunstforschers um ein deutsches Weltbild* (Leipzig, 1936), 13.

32. Cf. Cornelia Essner, *Deutsche Afrikareisende im neunzehnten Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 1985).

by 1903 an astonishing total of seventy-one articles on the subject.³³ In these essays, he emphasized the novelty of his march into art-historical terra incognita by playing up the transformative power of travel to exotic locales; having seen Byzantine art in Constantinople and Coptic art in Egypt, Strzygowski could claim a novel, non-western understanding of ancient Christian and oriental art. Of course, Strzygowski did not take up the study of oriental art merely to establish his intellectual dominance in an uncharted area; but neither was this highly self-conscious scholar unaware of the professional advantages of the firstcomer. He was the first of his colleagues to congratulate himself on opening new areas for art historical inquiry,³⁴ and the first to depart for new territory when rival experts appeared to challenge his preeminence.

Strzygowski also legitimized his efforts by underscoring the anonymity of the objects he described, their failure to divert the multitude of sheeplike art historians and archaeologists from their traditional classicizing pursuits, and the lack of textual documentation to explain their origins and appearances.³⁵ These peculiar privileges — anonymity of the objects, lack of relevant documentation, superior comprehension of the eyewitness — permitted Strzygowski to address himself wholly to the morphological clues inherent in the objects and to the “fundamental” conditions — the date, origin, and authorship — of their existence. In this, Strzygowski did not much differ from the efforts of contemporary archaeologists or art historians, intent on solving “puzzles” using Giovanni Morelli’s physiognomic method of stylistic decoding.³⁶ Strzygowski, however, aspired to grander results; he hoped to solve the big “puzzle” of the (non-Roman) origins of medieval art rather than the lesser riddles posed by individual artifacts. This aspiration, together with the paucity of textual evidence (and his lack of interest in locating it) induced Strzygowski to adopt approaches current in ethnographic and prehistorical circles, where questions of cultural origination and diffusion received wide attention.³⁷

Strzygowski seems never to have been accepted into the circle of late antiquity specialists who congregated around the IföG in Vienna,³⁸ and though impressed by Heinrich Schliemann and Wilhelm Dörpfeld, whom he met in Athens during

33. Allan Marquand, “Strzygowski and his Theory of Early Christian Art,” *Harvard Theological Review* 3 (July, 1910), 359.

34. Anticipated in his earlier work, this claim is made explicitly (and endlessly) in his 1903 *Kleinasiens: Ein Neuland der Kunstgeschichte* (Leipzig, 1903). To cite just one contemporary and one modern tribute to Strzygowski’s pioneering work: Karl Roth, review of Strzygowski’s *Die Baukunst der Armenier in Europa*, 2 vols. (1918) in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 24 (1923–1924), 392–397; Udo Kultermann, *Geschichte der Kunstgeschichte: Der Weg einer Wissenschaft* (Munich, 1990), 156–158.

35. See, for example, “Die Byzantinische Kunst,” in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* (hereafter *BZ*) 1 (1892), 62–63.

36. See Carlo Ginzburg, “Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm,” in Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, transl. John and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore, 1989), 96–125; also my “Professionalizing the Senses: Art and Music History in Vienna, 1880–1920,” *Austrian History Yearbook* 21 (1985), 23–57.

37. See Woodruff Smith, *Politics and the Sciences of Culture in Germany, 1840–1920* (Oxford, 1991), 140ff.; Herbert Kühn, *Geschichte der Vorgeschichtsforschung* (Berlin, 1976).

38. The aristocratic Julius von Schlosser, later Strzygowski’s arch rival, describing the latter’s

his early travels, Strzygowski's interests diverged considerably from those of the typical German classicist.³⁹ But Strzygowski's early work did not display the polemical astringency of his later writings, and it was only in the chaotic years at the century's close that he began his crusade against the classical biases and blindspots of his former teachers and colleagues. The title of the first of these onslaughts, *Orient oder Rom?* (1901), both announced his independence from the academy and suggested his commonalities with the radical pan-German faction lead by Georg von Schönerer, which had recently adopted a German Lutheran plan to proselytize in Austria (known as the *Los von Rom* movement).⁴⁰ With the publication of this volume, Strzygowski had begun to earn the moniker later conferred on him by Bernard Berenson: "the Attila of art history."⁴¹

In *Orient oder Rom?* Strzygowski berated both scholars of classical art who emphasized the Orient's dependence on Greek forms and Christian archaeologists who constructed evolutionary trajectories linking Byzantine and medieval forms to late Roman developments. Both parties, he argued, had failed to give the Orient sufficient credit for its independent inventions and creative power. Even his mentors Wickhoff and Riegl, Strzygowski regretted, had not appreciated the anti-hellenistic oriental reaction that overwhelmed the "pure, perfumed Psyche of Hellas" and engulfed the Mediterranean in the early Christian era.⁴² Wickhoff's important analysis of a fourth-century manuscript (*Wiener Genesis*) had attributed the development of a new, proto-medieval illusionistic style to Rome without a second thought, while the true origin of the style lay more likely in the encaustic portraiture indigenous to the lower classes of hellenistic

Cimabue, disparaged the author's "total unfamiliarity with the methods that are customary in the philological-historical sciences." Schlosser quoted in Eva Frodl-Kraft, "Eine Aporie und der Versuch ihrer Deutung: Josef Strzygowski—Julius von Schlosser," in *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 42 (1989), 17. See also Dvořák's uncomplimentary review in *Göttingische Gelehrte Anzeigen* 164 (1902), in which he concludes (p. 711) that the question: *Orient oder Rom?* "has no actual or scientific significance."

39. Strzygowski, *Aufgang des Nordens*, 11–12. Neither Schliemann nor Dörpfeld, it should be noted, were entirely respectable in the eyes of the classical philologists back in Berlin.

40. Although I have found no decisive proof that Strzygowski sympathized with this movement, (and he later denied it; Strzygowski, *Aufgang des Nordens*, 57), circumstantial evidence suggests that this is an appropriate context in which to understand the radicalization of his work. The movement had its greatest successes in the ethnic borderlands of the Austrian Empire, where German Protestants had grown to resent the Catholic majority populations around them, and at the University of Vienna, where despite the obvious and unappealing political and professional consequences, a relatively large number of students (400–500) declared their conversion to Catholicism. Strzygowski, a Germanophile native of Silesia who continually insisted that he could not speak Polish, surely would have known about this movement (student riots broke out at the University of Graz as well), and it is hard to believe that his exactly contemporary attack on the hegemonic power of Roman art was not in some way related to the pan-German conversion campaign. On the "Los von Rom" movement, see Andrew G. Whiteside, *The Socialism of Fools: Georg Ritter von Schönerer and Austrian Pan-Germanism* (Berkeley, 1975), 205–210; 243–262.

41. Quoted in Kultermann, *Geschichte der Kunstgeschichte*, 157.

42. Strzygowski, "Hellas in des Orients Umarmung," Sonderabdruck aus der Beilage zur *Allgemeinen Zeitung* (Munich) nos. 40, 41 (18, 19 February 1902), 10, 16; See also Strzygowski, *Orient oder Rom: Beiträge zur Geschichte der Spätantiken und Frühchristlichen Kunst* (Leipzig, 1901).

Egypt.⁴³ In a succeeding volume entitled *Kleinasien: Ein Neuland der Kunstgeschichte*, Strzygowski argued that Greek and Roman culture had had relatively little impact on Asia, where local traditions had persevered; the dogmatic insistence on the universal dominance of the classical, he explained, was a product of the Renaissance, whose speculative illusions had become accepted fact.⁴⁴ Finally, in a short piece drawn from his toils in Cairo, Strzygowski linked his oriental studies to an explanation of the nonclassical origins of medieval art. Identifying morphological similarities between ivory reliefs he had seen in Charlemagne's chapel in Aachen and Alexandrine sculptural forms, Strzygowski claimed that these similarities suggested a close relationship between the hellenistic-oriental and the Carolingian styles, mediated by Marseilles, not Rome.⁴⁵ Coptic Egypt had exerted a deeper formative influence on Europe than had the continent's putative classical ancestors.

Strzygowski's intuitive, morphological method as well as his belligerence and arrogance made him something of a pariah among humanists and connoisseurs.⁴⁶ But the breadth of his knowledge and his remarkable productivity won him a chair at the University of Graz in 1894, and many offers from other universities—including Breslau, Halle, and Bryn Mawr—as well as the confidence of the Berlin Museums' Director Wilhelm von Bode, himself a collector of oriental carpets and early Christian art. Thus when the University of Vienna sought to fill both its art-historical chairs in 1909, Strzygowski was a leading candidate in spite of the humanists' objections that "his style of inquiry, which delights in making erratic combinations without the requisite critical sorting of the individual facts, departs too radically from the path of prudent method and source criticism [Kritik] which should be the first responsibility of our young art historians."⁴⁷ Defeated in the first rounds, his proponents prepared a rebuttal, in which the breadth of Strzygowski's interests and his appeal as a lecturer were adduced. It is possible that Archduke Franz Ferdinand had a hand in promoting Strzygowski's candidacy; the former's dislike of classical and modern art, and preference for Germanic folk art, would have made him a perfect patron for Strzygowski.⁴⁸ In any event, a compromise was eventually reached, and both Strzygowski and Max Dvořák were offered chairs.⁴⁹

43. Strzygowski, *Orient oder Rom?*, 7.

44. Strzygowski, *Kleinasien*, 234.

45. Josef Strzygowski, *Hellenische und Koptische Kunst in Alexandria* (Vienna, 1902), 69.

46. Virtually every writer who mentions Strzygowski's name describes his obstreperous personality; recently Ernst Gombrich described Strzygowski, whose lectures he attended at the University of Vienna, as a "a kind of rabble-rouser." "I found him very egotistic, very conceited, and I was rather repelled by his approach," Gombrich recalled. See E. H. Gombrich, "An Autobiographical Sketch," in Gombrich, *Topics of Our Time* (Berkeley, 1991), 14.

47. "Bericht der Kommission zur Wiederbesetzung der durch den Tod Hofr. Wickhoffs erledigten Lehrkanzel für Kunstgeschichte," 3 July 1909, in Vienna, Universitätsarchiv, records of the Philosophische Fakultät, Mappe Strzygowski.

48. See Gerd Holler, *Franz Ferdinand von österreich-Este* (Vienna, 1982), 40. Strzygowski mentions Franz Ferdinand's ratification of his appointment in his privately published *Das Ordinariat für Kunstgeschichte und das damit verbundene I. Kunsthistorische Institut der Universität Wien* (Horn, Austria, 1933), 3.

49. Schlosser, "Wiener Schule," 194–195; "Minoritäts Notum," 3 July 1909, in Vienna, Universi-

While Dvořák's position remained linked to the Institut für Geschichtsforschung, Strzygowski divested himself of his intellectual heritage and began to write and lecture about, among other things, Armenian, Byzantine, Carolingian, Coptic, Slavic, Syrian, and Serbian art.⁵⁰ A sort of division of labor prevented the Institut art historians and the Strzygowski circle from continual clashes; Strzygowski spoke to a larger, less-academically inclined public on nontraditional and Germanophile subjects, while Dvořák and Julius Schlosser taught medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque art history to many of the profession's later leaders. The mutual antagonism between the Byzantinist and the other Viennese scholars created two hostile camps in the capital of the declining Austrian Empire, which has resulted in Strzygowski's frequent omission from histories of art-historical thought. Despicable though he was, however, Strzygowski does not deserve oblivion, for his long tenure (twenty-three years) and popularity at the University of Vienna, as well as his innovative researches, gave him a significant role in shaping modern art-historical pedagogy and scholarship.

Strzygowski's public consisted partly, but not solely, of radical, pan-German students and sycophants, of whom two to three hundred might be present on any given day for his lectures.⁵¹ The Austrian scholar was merely the eldest and most aggressive of a new generation of art historians who had begun to discover the valleys between the traditional connoisseurs' aesthetic peaks. Ernst Kühnel, Ernst Herzfeld, Friedrich Sarre in Islamic art, Otto Kümmel in East Asian art, Paul Clemen and Adolf Goldschmidt in Carolingian art: all came of age between about 1890 and 1900, eager to become cicerone to undiscovered artistic epochs. The offspring of entrepreneurial families, these well-traveled men displayed the liberal nationalist conviction that the improvement of Germany's international influence depended heavily on her knowledge of world affairs — though less in the ephemeral sense of her familiarity with current political and social conditions than in the static, eighteenth-century academic sense of her knowledge of *Realien*. All owed their acceptance at the margins of academia in large part to the specialization of humanistic scholarship and the vast masses of material collected in its drive to fill up the gaps in historical development, but all felt, to varying degrees, alienated from traditional academe, and all embraced, on the basis of very little and rather dubious material evidence Strzygowski's positing of a previously unknown oriental reaction to Greek culture and Roman rule.

Early specialists in Byzantine and Islamic studies also shared this "realistic" outlook and critical stance toward the humanistic tradition in which they had been trained, but whose stranglehold on official cultural institutions seemed to

tätsarchiv, records of the Philosophische Fakultät, Mappe Strzygowski. The two professors who signed the minority petition were Rudolf Wegscheider, a prominent chemist, and Leopold von Schroeder, an Indologist and passionate Pan-German and Wagnerite.

50. Strzygowski, *Aufgang des Nordens*, 67.

51. I owe this information to Professor Kurt Weitzmann, who attended some of Strzygowski's lectures at the University of Vienna in the 1920s.

destine them to marginal posts. Particularly in the period before 1914, Strzygowski contributed regularly to the *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, a journal founded in 1892 to explore the previously almost uncharted social, cultural, and political world of Byzantium. Graecophiles of a more modern stripe, the contributors to *BZ* emphasized the Slavic and oriental elements of the post-classical Greek-speaking world and often cast disparaging glances at the Berlin-centered classicist establishment.⁵² Though *BZ*'s reviewers frequently admonished Strzygowski for his low dates and summary judgments,⁵³ all praised the acuity of his insights, the novelty of his materials, and the signal importance of the questions he posed, as did many Islamicists, particularly those around C. H. Becker and his journal *Der Islam*. Even after suffering a series of ad hominem attacks from Strzygowski, Becker could still praise the Austrian art historian for pointing up the contributions of the East; the orientalist editor of *Der Islam*, however, was clearly tiring of Strzygowski's increasing vituperativeness and his tendency to simply intuit cultural connections, "which he frequently defends more as a prophet than as an exact scientist."⁵⁴

Precisely this status as prophet, not philologist, may explain another aspect of Strzygowski's appeal. One review described his work as a kind of "art historical 'transvaluation of all values,'" suggesting a parallel between Nietzsche's mocking of pedestrian Christianity and Strzygowski's role in undermining the widespread "romzentrisch" view of artistic diffusion.⁵⁵ Throughout his later career, Strzygowski fulminated against the supposed cliché of Rome's vast creative power — rather disingenuously, for as Max Dvořák was perfectly justified in pointing out, this was not at all an art-historical orthodoxy but was in fact a novel thesis proposed by the Viennese against the century-long supposition that Rome had borrowed all its artistic prowess from the Greeks.⁵⁶ The revolutionary *frisson* offered by *Orient oder Rom?* lay in its self-portrayal as the manifesto of the outsider, struggling to combat the aesthetic prejudices and narrow mindset of the establishment. Similarly, Strzygowski's 1907 *Die bildende Kunst der Gegenwart* denounced the artistic fashions and tasteless patrons of his day (including the German Kaiser). Writing for a popular audience, he yearned for a new German artist—"hero" who would shrug off the artistic obsessions bequeathed by the Renaissance. The art of the future, wrote the admirer of Richard Wagner and Arnold Böcklin, would abandon the vapid, insignificant

52. August Heisenberg and Paul Marc, "Karl Krumbacher," in *BZ* 19 (1910), iii-vi; also August Heisenberg, *Der Philhellenismus Einst und Jetzt* (Munich, 1913).

53. See, for example, O. Wulff's long review of Strzygowski's *Kleinasien* in *BZ* 13 (1904), 552-574.

54. C. H. Becker, "Das Amida-Werk" [1911], reprinted in Becker, *Islamstudien* (Leipzig, 1924), I, 317.

55. Anton Baumstark, review of Strzygowski, *Die Miniaturen des serbischen Psalters*, in *BZ* 16 (1907), 645.

56. Dvořák, review of *Orient oder Rom?* (see note 39, above); see also Hellmut Sichtermann, "Römische Kunst und ihre Nachwirkung," in *Latein und Europa: Traditionen und Renaissanceen*, ed. Karl Büchner (Stuttgart, 1978), 282-312.

human form in favor of the power and vitality of the natural world.⁵⁷ Ever calling attention to his disdain for academic authority and received opinion, Strzygowski self-consciously anticipated a new generation's accession to cultural, as well as political, dominance.

This prophetic function and anti-establishment message should not be separated from Strzygowski's art-historical method. His impressive command of the material sources—in itself a testimony to the voluminous production of *Orientforschung's* Grub Street, for Strzygowski did not by any means see at first hand all the artifacts he employed in arguments—seemed to offer a means to bypass the painstaking philological reconstructions of conventional historians and the aristocratic limitations imposed on students of literature. In regions and epochs so rich in languages, religions, and political forms, but so poor in straightforward historical evidence, the tracing of morphological analogies seemed a promising means to untangle and identify *Kulturkreisen*. Particularly in his postwar work, Strzygowski used his specialized knowledge of artifacts to attack humanism's Mediterranean fetish and preoccupation with literary remains and linguistic divisions. Artistic forms traveled different routes and at different speeds than did languages, Strzygowski argued, and it was necessary for the art historian to suit his method to the particularities of his material rather than to the dictates of literary developments.⁵⁸ Concentration on written records, the art historian contended a few years later, distorted our picture of historical conditions, for writing had largely been a pursuit of elites, while artistic movements reflected much more closely the actual life of the *Volk*.⁵⁹ The art historian's reach, then, extended much farther into a culture's history than that of the philologist, for the visual arts were also much older than the art of writing.⁶⁰ In staking claims to knowledge of a more fundamental stratum of human development, the student of the material world could at last seize the moral high ground.

One signal example should suffice to indicate Strzygowski's position in the reorientation of cultural analysis at the century's opening. The monumental remains of an ornamental gateway discovered in the Syrian desert and known as Mschatta ("winter quarters") provided the material for Strzygowski's most ambitious application of his antiphilological method. The enormous gateway, brought to Berlin in 1904 as a gift from the Ottoman Sultan to the German Kaiser, quickly became, as Ernst Herzfeld described, "a true *crux interpretum* for art historians."⁶¹ Lacking inscriptions or familiar symbols and located in

57. Josef Strzygowski, *Die bildende Kunst der Gegenwart: Ein Büchlein für Jedermann* (Leipzig, 1907).

58. Josef Strzygowski, "Vergleichende Kunstforschung auf geographischer Grundlage," in *Mitteilungen der Geographischen Gesellschaft in Wien* 61, Heft 1/2 (January 1918), 34.

59. Strzygowski, "Die Stellung des Islam zum Geistigen Aufbau Europas," *Acta Academiae Aboensis Humaniora* (Abo, 1922), III:3, 22–23.

60. See, e.g., Josef Strzygowski, "Entwicklungsgeschichte der Bildenden Kunst," in *Forschung und Fortschritte* 15, no. 12 (20 April 1939), 153.

61. Ernst Herzfeld, "Die Genesis der islamischen Kunst und das Mschatta-Problem," *Der Islam* 1 (1910), 106.

a waterless area beyond the bounds of settled territory (but near the pilgrimage route to Medina and Mecca), the structure foxed initial attempts to determine its origins and ethnicity.⁶² As one of those responsible for the monument's acquisition and best versed in the late hellenistic art of Asia Minor, Strzygowski was first to publish a thorough study of the structure. Comparing architectural plans from far-flung Asiatic sites, Strzygowski deemed Mschatta a palace, rather than a fort or church; he then illustrated the decorative similarities between Mschatta's ornamentation and designs original to Sassanid Persia. His painstaking typological comparisons led him to the conclusion that the creative center for Mschatta's forms, as well as those of the Islamic and Langobardian cultures, might lie at the Seleukid center Ktesiphon on the Tigris, where Babylonian, Indian, Persian, Syrian, Mesopotamian, and Armenian streams ran together.⁶³ This implied an early date of fourth to sixth century AD, making the Byzantine solution improbable and the early Islamic answer impossible. Strzygowski concluded his long essay with a quotation from the medievalist Konrad Burdach to the effect that the oriental, and especially Persian elements of the Middle Ages, identified by Jakob Grimm and Karl Müllenhoff, had long been overlooked;⁶⁴ Mschatta provided the key not only to the origins of the Islamic ornamental style, but also to the non-Roman culture of the German tribes.

As an orientalist trained in the traditional manner, that is, initially as a theologian, Carl Becker could not easily refute Strzygowski's claims. His review of Strzygowski's "Mschatta" praised the Byzantinist's rehabilitation of Persia as an important source for late Hellenistic cultural forms, and noted the implication of this, namely that the decline of hellenism in the Orient had not been a consequence of the rise of Islam but rather its prerequisite.⁶⁵ Becker would later transform this observation into an explanation of the swiftly achieved unity of the Islamic world (in his famous formulation, "Ohne Alexander den Grossen, kein islamische Zivilisation!"⁶⁶), but here he remained rather guarded in his speculations. As even the admiring reviewer in the *BZ* reported, the essay's thesis and approach were so new and so wide-ranging, it was impossible to determine what aspects of Strzygowski's thesis would become accepted components of art-historical scholarship, and which would be eliminated by the impending critical deluge.⁶⁷

Debate on the gate's origins raged on for the better part of the next decade. Six separate hypotheses as to its origin were advanced by oriental specialists: many identified it as Byzantine, or Ghassanid; Riegl believed it late antique,

62. See Bruno Schulz, "Mschatta I: Bericht über die Aufnahme der Ruine," in *Jahrbuch der königlich Preussischen Kunstsammlung* (hereafter *JdkPK*) 25 (1904), 205-224.

63. Josef Strzygowski, "Mschatta II: Kunstwissenschaftliche Untersuchung," in *JdkPK* 25 (1904), 261.

64. *Ibid.*, 373.

65. C. H. Becker's review of "Mschatta II" [1904], in Becker, *Islamstudien* (under title "Archäologische Probleme"), 278.

66. C. H. Becker, "Islam als Problem" [1910], in *Ibid.*, 1:16.

67. Rudolf Ameseder, review of Strzygowski, "Mschatta," in *BZ* 14 (1904), 629.

while Swiss philologist Max van Berchem thought it Lakhmid; Strzygowski was convinced it was Sassanid (post-Parthian Persia), while Becker, the Jesuit scholar Father Henri Lammens, and the German Arabists Theodor Nöldeke and Enno Littman determined its source as Umayyad (early Islamic).⁶⁸ All but the final two hypotheses were rapidly discounted, but no date could be established nor any decision between the two made without playing to Strzygowski's strengths; as Ernst Herzfeld confessed when he took up the "Mschatta problem" in 1910, "the historian's approach is not capable of solving this puzzle. Becker and Lammens' contentions cannot convince a defender of Strzygowski's theory, van Berchem's argument cannot win over a supporter of the Umayyad hypothesis."⁶⁹ Because finding a solution depended upon the identification of morphological similarities between monuments whose dates were known and those of undetermined age and origin, the visual evidence had to be persuasive, or the argument fell to the ground.

Herzfeld's remarkable article, published in Becker's journal *Der Islam*, synthesized economic, technical, and art-historical evidence to prove Mschatta's Umayyad origin. Despite the author's recognition that the art-historical argument would require top billing, ultimately, the economic and technical arguments overtook the inventive but debatable artistic one. Herzfeld attributed the ornamental pattern to a single master from the Mesopotamian province of Diyarbakr, the building of the structure to Syrian workers, and the brickwork to Iraqi sources; and following the early Strzygowski, he traced the origin of this synthetic style back to Coptic Egypt. This very heterogeneity of stylistic elements represented in the gate's architecture and ornamentation proved it an eighth-century Islamic piece, Herzfeld insisted; the almost purely Iranian structure at Muwaqqar (dated 720–724) and the homogeneously Syrian site of 'Amra (712–715) necessitated a later date for the mixed-style Mschatta.⁷⁰

Herzfeld, as Becker recognized, had probably been the only living scholar able to beat Strzygowski at his own game — a defeat, it should be noted, that the Austrian never recognized and bitterly resented.⁷¹ Convinced of the monument's Persian origin, the embittered Strzygowski continued to pursue the roots of this proto-Islamic and ur-medieval *Formenkreis* ever eastward. As one admiring reviewer noted, Strzygowski's "incontestable service" in demonstrating the West's dependence on the East had forced him further and further down these buried paths. "Once this tireless scholar had found the trail, he had to push the boundary posts step by step further eastward; there was no stopping, if one wanted to find the actual, original home of all development."⁷² Ultimately, he discovered such a home in Iran, and proceeded to elaborate further the Persian-Germanic artistic axis already implicit in some of his early work. That this was not a

68. Herzfeld, "Mschatta-Problem," 106.

69. *Ibid.*, 108.

70. *Ibid.*, 130–131.

71. See Becker, "Das Amida-Werk."

72. Karl Roth, review of Strzygowski's *Die Baukunst der Armenier und Europa*, 393 (see note 35).

completely untenable, purely Germanophile argument is demonstrated by the similar claims made in Rostovtzeff's 1922 *Iranians and Greeks in South Russia* (for example, page 14); but for Strzygowski, uncovering this linkage became fundamental both to the justification of his early partiality for the Orient and to the legitimation of his ever more fanatical pan-German persecution complex.⁷³

In the postwar period, Strzygowski became increasingly hostile toward the "humanist faction" he believed responsible for deceiving the public about the innovative role of the Orient. He condemned as traitors sympathetic orientalists who failed to embrace his grand diffusionist schema, accusing Becker and Herzfeld, for example, of throwing sand in the public's eyes and selling out, scientifically, "by their confession of the humanist creed."⁷⁴ He continued to play a role in debates within Byzantine and Islamic studies, thanks to his striking morphological observations and unique familiarity with out-of-the-way material.⁷⁵ But, as more specialists entered these fields, the instability of his intuitions had become a liability, as had his vituperation and pan-German proselytizing. His participation in professional journals like *BZ* dwindled, and his publications were increasingly directed to a popular audience.⁷⁶

Yet Strzygowski, in the 1920s, did not entirely disappear into the Aryan ether. He undertook several lecture tours, including one to the United States, where he composed *Die Krisis der Geisteswissenschaften*, a book intended in part to warn Americans against the manifold failings of humanistic scholarship in Europe.⁷⁷ But perhaps his most symptomatic reappearance occurred during what has come to be called "the museum wars," the series of great battles over the style, disposition, and contents of the Pergamon museum (begun 1907; opened to the public 1929). In 1922, Strzygowski attacked Becker (now Under Secretary at the Prussian Cultural Ministry) and his fellow humanists, charging them with making a deliberate attempt to obscure the relationship of northern and oriental art in order to glorify the Mediterranean world.⁷⁸ This tirade appeared in a minor academic journal and had little chance of reaching a wider audience; in 1926, however, the Viennese professor expressed his disapprobation for Cultural Ministry museum policy in the influential *Preußische Jahrbücher*. An obsolete worldview held unrelated items together and prohibited

73. After 1918, he turned his attention to northern art, partly, he claimed, because postwar poverty prevented him from taking frequent jaunts to the East to extend his perceptual cognizance of oriental forms (Strzygowski, *Asiens Bildende Kunst in Stichproben, ihr Wesen und ihre Entwicklung* [Augsburg, 1930], xv), but it is also evident that the dismal end of the First World War caused Strzygowski, like many other Austrians, to express his Germanophilia in ever more explicit terms.

74. Josef Strzygowski, "Das Schicksal der Berliner Museen," in *Preussische Jahrbücher* 203 (March 1926), 175.

75. See, e.g., Norman Baynes, "Idolatry and the Early Church" (1930) in Baynes, *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (Westport, Conn., 1955), 116–143; also Hans Lietzmann, "Das Problem der Spätantike," in *Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* Phil.-Hist.Kl (1927), 342–358.

76. See, e.g., Strzygowski, *Asiens Bildende Kunst*.

77. Josef Strzygowski, *L'ancien art chrétien de Syrie* (Paris, 1936), 184.

78. See Strzygowski, "Stellung des Islam."

the uniting of truly similar objects; Asiatic art, divided between five museums, had been misdistributed and incorrectly categorized as ethnographic material rather than as the expression of a great civilization, equal to that of the Mediterranean. Strzygowski could not help but use his opportunity to apply the lash to humanism, whose biases he saw apotheosized in the Pergamon plan, and to attack what he clearly saw as treason on the part of Becker, who was, after all, an orientalist. In making the concluding, shocking suggestion that if the Pergamon Altar and Mschatta Gate were to remain in Berlin only to serve Mediterranean delusions, the monuments should be shipped back to the East,⁷⁹ Strzygowski portended Grub Street's final renunciation of neohumanist institutions and professional scholarship. It was but a short step from here to his 1933 diatribe, in which he explicitly denounced the seditious "objectivity" of both the Viennese school and German humanistic scholarship: "The ossified humanist, obstinately clinging to his Mediterranean creed, has today become unnecessary. Moreover, he is now the avowed enemy of the German *Volk*, for [the *Volk*] has the right to its northern standpoint in scholarship, just as the Latin races have [the right] to the Mediterranean creed."⁸⁰ He and his *völkisch* followers would have to remake German scholarship and culture from the ground up.

III. ORIENTALISM, THE DECLINE OF THE WEST, AND THE MATERIAL WORLD

I want now to turn to a short consideration of the context in which Strzygowski's insights into the fragility of the classical world and the material remains of those previously considered "barbarians," shipped home by a multitude of collectors and processed by the academic underworld, became commonly accepted elements of historical thinking and writing. As has frequently been noted, few of the Weimar era's innovative intellectual currents were not already presaged in the prewar era. As we have seen, in the work of Strzygowski and his colleagues, all the elements of a thoroughgoing critique of the classical, rational, and unitary origins of European culture were present long before 1914. But antihumanism required not only modernization, which sped the collection and representation of artifacts, but also the war's crippling lesson in the vanity of scientific progress, to flourish. In the 1920s, a new pessimism about Europe's future influence and integrity permitted the unleashing of a great flood of speculations about the coherence and originality of Mediterranean culture; nations cut free from their imperial political and aristocratic cultural moorings began the search for deeper kinds of fixity.

Popular hostility to "pure intellectualism" and scientific "skepticism" had already been widespread at the war's start. But in the years after 1918, the scapegoating of "specialists" for the purported "soullessness" of modern culture

79. See *Ibid.*, 181–184.

80. Strzygowski, *Ordinariat für Kunstgeschichte*, 14.

increasingly imperiled the social and cultural status of the humanist professoriate and secondary school teaching corps.⁸¹ The philologist, long exemplary of pedantic obscurantism, became a particularly glaring menace in an era hungry for heroes, prophets, and strong men. Finally, at a time of relative national isolation in which most scholars felt themselves longing, as Ernst Troeltsch put it, “to become more German than we have been,”⁸² pure concentration on the classics came to appear suspiciously unpatriotic. Notwithstanding Werner Jaeger’s attempt to launch a classicizing “Third Humanism,” the study of the ancient Mediterranean waned in both its social normativity and its academic centrality.

What, then, took its place? Two directions can be discerned, both the result, in one way or another, of the positivistic typologies created by “Grub Street” and the anticlassical predilections of prewar orientalist, Byzantinist, Germanist, and prehistorians. One major expression of the postwar search for deeper fixities was the development of a number of spatially-defined areas of study, whose theoretical underpinnings were deeply indebted to prewar and wartime geopolitical thinking. Here political boundaries no longer posed limits to the imagination; “Today we think in continents,” wrote Oswald Spengler in 1919. “Only our philosophers and historians have not yet learned that.”⁸³ Fields with names like *Ostforschung*, *Sudostforschung*, *Nordforschung*, and even *Weltpolitik-Wissenschaft* retained the imperialist designs of prewar sciences like *Anthropo-Geographie* and *Kolonialwissenschaft*, substituting geographical delimitations for the disciplinary specialization so criticized by proponents of *Leben*.⁸⁴ If constructed from nineteenth-century imperialist ideas and propelled by criticism of scientific specialization, this Weimar upsurge in discussion of *Raum* owed a great debt to the vast number of prewar studies of the distribution of linguistic, stylistic, and racial traits. Thanks to the work of men like Strzygowski and the nationalist prehistorian Gustav Kossinna, space could be given its own history and racial groups accorded title to property without written documents or continuous occupation; racial “right” to the soil and hunger for space, coupled with the older expansionist “right” to exploit raw materials and

81. For a fascinating discussion of the role played by this antiscientific climate in Weimar natural-scientific circles, see Paul Forman, “Weimar Culture, Causality, and Quantum Theory, 1918–1927: Adaptation by German Physicists and Mathematicians to a Hostile Intellectual Environment,” in *Historical Studies in the Physical Sciences*, ed. Russell McCormmach (Philadelphia, 1971), III, 1–115.

82. Ernst Troeltsch, *Humanismus und Nationalismus in unserem Bildungswesen* (Berlin, 1917), 42.

83. Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes: Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte* (Munich, 1921), I, 30.

84. See e.g. Walter Schotte’s criticism of specialization in his essay “Weltpolitik als Wissenschaft,” in *Weltpolitische Bildungsarbeit an Preußischen Hochschulen* (Festschrift C. H. Becker) (Berlin, 1926), 182–188. Geoffrey Parker argues that while European geopolitical thinking in this era gradually abandoned imperialist designs for a wider, internationalist orientation, German *Geopolitik* moved in the opposite direction. See Geoffrey Parker, *Western Geopolitical Thought in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1985), 83.

new markets formed the red thread of Weimar geopolitical thinking and the intrusive political backdrop for the *völkisch* historiography of the 1920s.

The other, much more respectable vogue of the 1920s elaborated the prewar discovery of the uniqueness and autonomy of the Byzantine, Carolingian, Egyptian, Baroque Germanic, medieval Slavonic, and early Islamic worlds. Scholars such as Konrad Burdach, Alfons Dopsch, August Heisenberg, Albert Brackmann, and Walter Otto, now publishing in the *Historische Zeitschrift* and occupying high intellectual offices, evoked forgotten cultures with details drawn from prewar monographs, rarely missing the chance to emphasize the frailty of the ancients.⁸⁵ Hellenism and its demise became a favorite theme. The despairing mood of the time was captured most poignantly in Eduard Meyer's "Blüte und Niedergang des Hellenismus in Asien," in which hellenism's celebrated conquests, like those of European culture in the nineteenth century, prove both pyrrhic and fleeting.⁸⁶ If Strzygowski's true heirs were nationalist fanatics and art historians working in the specialized fields he pioneered (early Islamic art, Byzantine architecture, the art of Armenia and the Balkans), there are echoes of his *Orient oder Rom?* in all of the above authors. Despairing of the West's prospects to save itself from impending barbarism, scholars turned their attention to the manifold local cultures which had resisted, outlasted, and overwhelmed Europe's classical heritage, and found that "Grub Street" had preceded them there. The footnotes of this quasi-historicist *Kulturgeschichte* testify to its debt to the scholarly underworld of the Kaiserreich.

But there is another side to this cultural pessimism, and even to the anticlassicism of the orientalists and *Nordforscher* described above. The redefinition of culture—against philological scholarship and classicist hegemony—as an organic entity possessed by the nonliterate as well as the literate depended precisely upon the rise to power and prominence of those outside what Strzygowski called "the humanist faction"; from the prehistorians, *Ostforscher*, orientalists, and romantic ethnographers came the call to consider ill-treated others as equal aspirants to the title of *Kulturvölker*. The emphasis here on the coincidence of cultural, linguistic, and racial borders undoubtedly made some of these nonhumanists the forerunners of "Aryan" historiography. But these celebrants of primitive culture, and critics of European "civilization," can also be seen as harbingers of UNESCO universalism, both in the sense that the latter would not have been possible without the ridiculous excesses of their biological

85. See, for example, August Heisenberg's "Das Problem der Renaissance in Byzanz," in *HZ* 133 (1926), 393–412; Alfons Dopsch, *Der Wiederaufbau Europas nach dem Untergang der alten Welt* (Rektorrede, University of Vienna, 26 October 1920) (Vienna, 1920).

86. Meyer's original essay appeared in 1925. For a reprint, see *Der Hellenismus in Mittelasien*, ed. Franz Altheim and Joachim Rehork (Darmstadt, 1969), 19–72. It was neither Jakob Burckhardt nor Max Weber but the swiftly expanding archaeological and prehistorical work in the Orient and on the continent that forced Eduard Meyer to completely rewrite his *Geschichte des Altertums* two decades after its original appearance (1884). See Karl Christ, "Eduard Meyer," in Christ, *Von Gibbon zu Rostovtzeff* (Darmstadt, 1972), 294. On Weber's lack of influence on Meyer, see Jürgen Deininger, "Eduard Meyer und Max Weber," in *Eduard Meyer: Leben und Leistung eines Universalhistorikers*, ed. William M. Calder and Alexander Demandt (Leiden, 1990), 132–157.

theories, and that the post-1945 transference of politico-moral legitimacy to a non-elitist, anthropological definition of culture was prepared in part by the underworld's attacks on classical humanism. As objectionable as the claim may seem, we are in many ways Strzygowski's heirs.

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