

E. H. Gombrich, From Archaeology to Art History: Some Stages in the Rediscovery of the Romanesque, Icon to Cartoon: A Tribute to Sixten Ringbom (ed. M T Knapas & A Ringbom, *Konsthistorika Studier*, Vol. 16, 1990, pp.91-108 [Trapp no.1990B(ENG).1]

“In scholarship there are no reserved seats”. I had to think of this remark by Aby Warburg when I began to prepare this contribution to the memorial volume of my dear admired friend and former student Sixten Ringbom. Remembering his most interesting study *Stone, Style and Truth. The Vogue for Natural Stone in Nordic Architecture, 1880 – 1910*¹, in which the revival of the Romanesque style plays a not inconsiderable part, I proposed the above topic for my paper. I had first been led to the subject by the accident of an invitation asking me to celebrate the restoration of an old village church near the shores of the Lago Maggiore by giving a lecture on its architecture. I had to reply that I knew nothing about Medieval Lombard styles, but on being pressed to speak about the appreciation of the Romanesque through the centuries, a lecture that was even published as a pamphlet by Einaudi of Torino.² It was thus that I discovered how much the subject – as distinct from the topic of the Gothic Revival – had been neglected in the past. The main exception being the excellent contribution by Thomas Cocke on “the rediscovery of the Romanesque” printed in the Catalogue of the Great Exhibition of the English Romanesque held at the Hayward Gallery in 1986, which, however, is confined to the British Isles.

I don't know whether I was more gratified or dismayed when I discovered through the pages of the Burlington Magazine that a substantial book on that very topic has by now been published by the Cambridge University Press: *Romanesque Architectural Criticism, A Prehistory* by Tina Waldeier Bizzarro in 1992.³

My first impulse was, of course, to change the subject, but I had meanwhile done a little more work on it for a lecture in Cambridge⁴ and I found, on reflection, that some of my ideas might still deserve an airing. For however meritorious the new book may be, the author deals predominately with the concept and nomenclature of architectural style before the 19th century⁵, and through her last chapter is called “An Introduction to Latter-day Criticism” it barely mentions the German contributions, which, as I hope to show, was considerable.

It is a topic moreover that may permit us to reflect on the distinction between archaeology and Art History which is not made in that recent book. Yet it concerns a rather urgent problem in our studies. What is called the “New Art History” may, (as I have said elsewhere) turn out to be the old archaeology. By this I mean that the champions of the new trend frown on the so-called élitism of traditions art history and its canon of values, which they want to replace by objective social analysis. I agree with them, that art history is indeed concerned on the objective evidence which the relics of the past may offer to the historian or sociologist. I am able to exemplify this vital distinction right at the outset of my story, by quoting the very foundation document of our studies, Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Most Excellent Architects, Sculptors and Painters*, first published in Florence in 1550.⁶ Vasari's work is of course a celebration of what we still call the “Renaissance”, the rebirth of the arts after their demise or debasement during the Dark Ages, the “Middle Ages” that intervened between the glories of antiquity and their gradual recovery which began in the late 13th century. It goes without saying, that given this picture of the course of history, what we call the Romanesque could not have been considered art by Vasari. Its buildings did not follow the classical rules, its images were merely grotesque and barbaric. Yet Vasari, who is so frequently dismissed by modern art historians who cannot accept his attributions, was no fool. He shared the general opinion about the course of history that attributed the coming of the dark ages to the ruin of the Roman Empire, the invasion of the

barbarians and the coming of Christianity with its opposition to pagan culture, but looking at the sculpture of the Arch of Constantine which so obviously represented a decline from classical standards, he rightly asked himself whether these blanket explanations could be wholly correct? After all, the arch was erected after Constantine's victory over Maxentius in 312 AD, a good many years before these three factors could have taken effect, and yet it shows marks of decline. It was safer to say that the wheels of fortune had turned and so, to quote his words, "Sculpture, painting and architecture went from bad to worse until the arts were as good as lost". What there remained of the art of painting, in his view, was due to the "Greeks" who cultivated a clumsy and ugly manner, figures with staring eyes which looked like possessed, open palms and standing on tiptoe, which, as Vasari says, can be seen in any ancient church in Italy.

"Architecture" Vasari admits, "lost less of its former perfection . . . since it is necessary and useful for the health of the body" (p 228/9). Whoever takes the trouble to read the pages which Vasari devoted to Medieval architecture in the introduction of his work will come to agree that he looked at these buildings not as an art historian but as an archaeologist. He had consulted the *Historia Langbardorum* by Petrus Diaconus, and picked out points of historical interest, quoting some old inscriptions and listing buildings which, he admits are "great and magnificent though their architecture is very rude" (p 233/4). A series of murals at Monza near Milan interested him, because it shows that the old Lombards shaved the back of their heads, wore their hair thick in the front and that their shoes were open to the toes, etc. (p 234). In other words paintings wholly devoid of artistic merit in his eyes were still important as historical documents. But Vasari's aesthetic bias in favour of Vitruvian standards did not blind him to the quality of such monuments as San Marco in Venice and particularly the Cathedral of Pisa, for which he found eloquent praise, giving special credit to the "judgement or talent" of Buschetti, the architect, for having adjusted the size and shape of the many columns imported by the Pisans from various parts of the world, and most of all for contriving "with great ingenuity" to achieve a gradual reduction of their scale on the façade (p 237/8). What attracted Vasari's censure and ridicule was notoriously the style we still call Gothic (p 233) on 'which he had conferred that misleading name because he remembered the destruction of Rome at the hands of the Vandals and the Goths and identified the manner of the building that so blatantly contradicted the classical tradition with these Teutonic tribes. It was a fateful error, that was to linger on, for good or ill, through many centuries. What Vasari bequeathed to posterity, then, was the tendency to identify the styles domination the Middle Ages with two contrasting national traditions, the Goths and the Byzantines. For a long time, indeed up to the 19th century, any medieval building in Europe that lacked the characteristics of Gothic architecture, notably the pointed arch, was dubbed "Byzantine", thus masking the identity of the style we now call Romanesque.

Vasari and a good many of those who followed him was somewhat confused about the chronology of these two unclassical styles of building which flourished in the dark ages, but the inconsistency of his terminology could not remain unnoticed for long. It was clear that the excesses of decoration which he blamed on the Gothic barbarians did not come into vogue till some five hundred years after the sack of Rome by Alaric. What happened in the preceding century, in other words in the period we now characterise as Romanesque?

It is the growing awareness of this problem in the 17th and 18th centuries that is indeed the main topic of Tina Waldeier Bizzarro's book. She rightly follows Paul Frankl's standard work on the Gothic⁷ in stressing the importance of Jean François Félibien who wrote in 1687 that there are "two sorts of Gothic buildings". "The oldest have nothing commendable except their solidity and the grandeur. As to the modern ones, they are of a taste so opposed to that of the ancient Gothic that one can say that

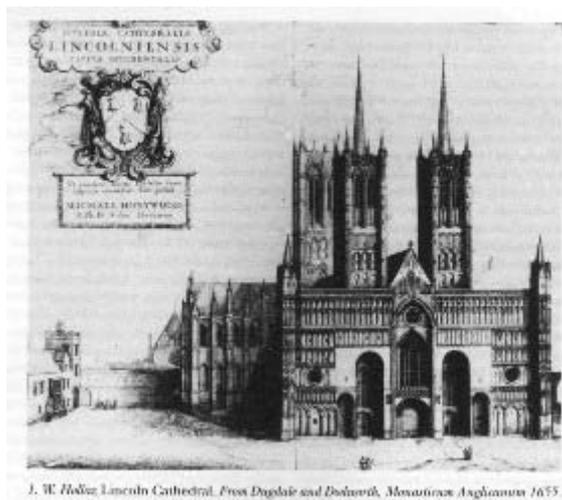
those who made them slipped into an equally great excess of delicacy as the others had into extreme heaviness and clumsiness ...”⁸

For more than a century the Romanesque style had thus to serve as a foil against which the growing appreciation of the Gothic Style could develop. A typical example (not previously noticed) is a Latin Treatise of 1764 by the Viennese Jesuit Christian Rieger. Rieger also makes the point that there are two types of Gothic, the ancient and the modern. The ancient building resembles monsters, since they only aimed at solidity regardless of beauty, while the modern ones commend themselves by the beauty of proportion and the skilled workmanship that can still be admired in the great cathedrals including St. Stephens in his native Vienna.⁹

Writing in 1768 the famous spokesman of the Neo-Classical taste in architecture. Francesco Milizia, still sided with Vasari in his dislike of the Gothic style, but he followed the great antiquarian Scipione Maffei who, in 1731, had dismissed the theory of the barbarian origin of medieval architecture as mere nonsense.¹⁰ Like Maffei, Milizia considers it a slander to speak of the bad style as “Gothic” since he knows that Theodoric, King of the Goths and of the Italians, was a highly civilised ruler who erected splendid buildings in Ravenna, Pavia and Verona in what was then the current style. “The Barbarians possessed no architecture, neither a good one nor a bad one. Our arrogance attributes to them that monstrous architecture that was born among ourselves because of our love of variety and caprice. When the Barbarians arrived, not much more was conserved in Italy of the Roman method (L'uso Romano) than had a bearing on solidity of construction and the general proportions, but as far as beauty was concerned, the proper taste (buon gusto) had already been lost before the Barbarian invasion.” According to Milizia it was three centuries after Charlemagne in the 10th and 11th century that a general effort was made to emerge from the state of ignorance and clumsiness, but with poor success. If architecture had formally been heavy and clumsy, one now went to the opposite extreme,¹¹ a contrast we have already encountered in the previous quotations. It seems to me more than likely that it was this passage in a famous standard work that ultimately led to the coinage that forms the core of Bizzarro’s book appears to confirm this hypothesis. Bizzarro is anxious to assign priority in this matter to the English antiquarian William Gunn (1750 – 1841), and Rector of Irstead in Norfolk and a close friend and correspondent of John Flaxman, the Neo-Classical sculptor. We learn (p. 139) that Gunn “was a Latinist, a Classicist, and aficionado of Italian culture”, who (like Flaxman) had resided in Rome for a time. Both of them were apparently particularly interested in “Rome’s glorious architecture” and its decline. He would no doubt have read Milizia. Bizzarro is able to demonstrate that Gunn’s treatise, “an Inquiry into the Origin and Influence of gothic Architecture”, though not published before 1819, must have been written more than six years earlier and it was there that the author introduced and justified the term “Romanesque”, having mentioned earlier in the treatise that the architects from Italy who erected stone churches after the conversion of the heathen built them “more et opere Romano” (140). We need not here follow our author in her account of the French architectural history, Arcisse ed Coumont (1802 – 73) and Charles Alexis Adrian Duhessier de Gerville (1769 – 1853). Suffice it to take note of the enthusiasm these writers displayed for the researches of English antiquarians.

In England, of course, medieval buildings with round arches had long been called “Norman” and continued to be so called till the coming of art historians from central Europe somewhat confused the issue, since they preferred the European term Romanesque. Indeed England may will claim priority in the systematic study of medieval art and architecture. Thomas Kendrick and other have shown to what extent this development that reaches back into the 16th century was connected with the unique social and political situation in this county.¹² The importance attached to charters and privileges going back to medieval times stimulated historical research and the trauma of the Reformation made a

recovery of this significant past more difficult and more urgent. It was here that archaeology, under the name of antiquarian studies was widely cultivated among amateurs leading ultimately to the foundation of the Society of Antiquaries 1707 which is still going strong. It may be said that here the road led directly from Muniment to the monument. The dates of tombstones and of the foundation of buildings became intensely relevant, not so much for the history of art as for history. A manuscript by John Aubrey of around 1650 entitled *Chronologia Architectonica* illustrates the characteristic details of Norman architecture.¹³ It was this interest also which led to the publication after 1660 of the truly monumental multi-volume *Monasticon Anglicanum* by W. Dugdale and R. Dodsworth, recording the monuments and convents in England which had been suppressed during the Reformation.¹⁴



J. W. Hollar: Lincoln Cathedral. From Dugdale and Dodsworth, *Monasticon Anglicanum* 1655.

The authors were lucky enough to find an illustrator worthy of this subject, the Bohemian engraver Wenceslas Hollar whose view of Lincoln Cathedral (fig. 1) exemplifies the care and accuracy with which he portrayed both the Norman and the Gothic elements of that magnificent building. But over this and other important English publications mentioned in Thomas Coker's study we must not forget or neglect the most spectacular archaeological work of the period, I refer to the great French scholar Bernard de Montfaucon who must have employed a large team of draughtsmen and engravers first to record the monuments of classical antiquity in a famous standard work, and then to turn the monuments of the French monarchy in a five volume work published in Paris between 1729 and 1733.¹⁵ The plates of this work have preserved for us the aspects of many monuments now lost, notably the sculptures of the abbey of St Denis of the 12th century which he included in his survey because it was believed that they represented Kings of France rather than Old Testament prophets. Unhappily it was precisely this erroneous interpretation that led to their doom. They were destroyed during the French Revolution as a symbol of a hated past. This eruption of a fanatical vandalism is relevant to our theme, since it provoked, in its turn, a strong reaction on the part of historians. One of them, Alexandre Lenoir rushed to the defence of the royal tombs in the Abbey of St Denis which were attacked by the revolutionary crowds. It was he who proposed to the revolutionary government that these precious relics should be assembled in a museum that might illustrate the history of France in a sequence of rooms extending from the early Middle Ages to the great period of François I.¹⁶ We know that this heroic Samaritan saw himself as an archaeologist rather than a guardian of works of art. However much he was interested in medieval monuments he regarded them as symptoms of the Dark Ages and the debasement of art, much as Vasari had done.

The same prejudice pervades even the first attempts to write a history of medieval art from the end of the Roman Empire to the Renaissance. Its author was another learned Frenchman Count Seroux d'Agincourt, who was originally inspired to undertake this enormous task by Winckelmann's History of Ancient Art published in 1764. It was his intention to write a continuation of that work covering the thousand years from 400 – 1400. He had assembled a large team of artists in Italy which he employed to contribute to the plates of that ambitious enterprise which was however not published before the second decade of the 19th century, since the French Revolution had delayed its completion.¹⁷ A glance at the captions of these plates suffices to show that the author considered the works he recorded as belonging to what he calls "the period of decadence". Some of the passages in the text referring to sculpture still reflect the traditions of Vasari: "The state of barbarism into which these arts declined is demonstrated by the works produced at the time, which must be considered the absolute decadence of the arts".



Naturally the author was referring here to works of the figurative arts rather than to architecture. The images produced in the Romanesque period were universally found to be rather childish and even repellent. There is no more striking evidence of this attitude than the fact that the first history of caricature ever written, J. Malcolm's book of 1813,¹⁸ opens with a chapter illustrating the arts of "savages" and of the early Middle Ages. For the author the magnificent Anglo-Saxon pen drawing in a codex of the Psalms in the British Museum (Fig. 2) shows in his words "The near relationship between caricaturing and the first drawing of genius ... the artist has given a gigantic Christ with a back almost doubled, releasing comparatively pygmy persons from the jaws of a monster, figurative of the prison for souls: sufficiently terrific for the imagination of a Calmuck or a South American Indian" (p. 12).

The comparison is by no means isolated : in his Academy lectures on sculpture (published in 1829, but written earlier)¹⁹ John Flaxman refers to the early phases of sculpture: "We find, in most countries , attempts to copy the human figure in early time equally barbarous, whether they were the production of India, Babylon, Germany, Mexico or Otaheite. They equally partake in the common deformities of great heads, monstrous faces, diminutive and misshapen bodies and limbs" (p. 201).

The fact is that any distortion of the human figure was considered grotesque and repellent and automatically removed the image concerned from the realm of art into that of archaeology.



The duality to which I alluded is reflected in the title of a journal published by Johann Wolfgang Goethe in Weimar in the 1820's, he called it *Aus Kunst und Alterum*, ("concerning art and antiquity"). One of the articles from Goethe's own hand²⁰ illustrates, almost to perfection, the transition between the documentary and the aesthetic. Goethe was writing about a Romanesque relief carved in the rock (Fig. 3) near a place called Horn which had recently been copied and published in a lithograph.

The erudition expended by Goethe on the interpretation of this monument is a characteristic as it was misguided. The period was obsessed with the idea of oriental influences governing the art and symbolism of the Dark Ages and Goethe surmised that the figures of the sun and moon flanking the cross (which actually allude to the eclipse reported in the Bible) symbolised the dualism of good and evil attributed to the Manicheans. He referred not only to a plate from d'Agincourt but also to two publications about Mithras, since the cult images of the Persian religion also regularly show the sun and the moon.

Contemplating the lithographic reproduction due to the sculptor Christian Rauch, Goethe rightly could not resist the suspicion that the execution of the design was pervaded by a "faint whiff" of 19th century taste, but he did not hesitate to attribute the merits of the composition to the original relief.

He had no doubt about the sources of these merits: He fully accepted Vasari's construction according to which the arts had wholly disappeared from Western Europe and only survived in ever diminishing strength among the Byzantines. However, we know from earlier essay by Goethe in the same Journal²¹ that he attached more value to that tradition than Vasari had done. He was convinced that it was among these artists that the skills of composition had survived from antiquity. Interestingly enough, he also postulated that the "monkish artists" responsible for the relief in question, who may have belonged to the conquering court of Charlemagne, must have carried pattern books with them, which they followed all the more faithfully, since the very repetition of its figures would confirm their truthfulness. Thus Goethe did not hesitate to attribute to the composition in question the merit of "simplicity and nobility".

"The man who lowers the body of the dead Christ appears to have stepped on a small tree which bends under his weight, and thus there is no need for showing a ladder which is always awkward ... but what we must praise in particular, is the thought of showing the head of the Saviour leaning

against the face of His mother who stands on the right and even gently presses it with her hand – a beautiful and dignified motif that we have encountered nowhere else even though it befits so exalted a mother. Later representations show her convulsed in sorrow, fainting among her women, till finally Daniele da Volterra shows her lying in an undignified way on her back”. “Probably”, Goethe continues his reflection, “artists never found their way out of this horizontal accent because they needed it as contrast to the upright stem of the cross”. There could be not better proof than these comparisons to show that Goethe approached this early relief not only as an archaeologist but also as a sensitive lover of art.

To appreciate the full significance of Goethe's exercise in “the formal analysis” of an early medieval monument, we must also consider the date and context of the essay. By the time of its appearance the Romantic Movement in Germany was in full flood, and enthusiasm for the Middle Ages, “The Age of Faith”, had challenged the Classical Tradition with which Goethe was identified. He had made many enemies by his resistance to the exaggerated bias of the medievalisers and their gushing reaction to early works. All the more he may have wanted to demonstrate that a cool appraisal need not stand in the way of the appreciation of genuine artistic achievement. Much to the disappointment of his friends, the brothers Boisserée, he had put this conviction to the test in his discussion of the gains and losses resulting from the innovations of the Van Eycks,²² and his approach triumphed again in this essay that ranked an early medieval relief higher than the famous composition of one of Michelangelo's followers.

There was one consequence of the Romantic Movement which neither Goethe nor any other Art lover could disapprove of: the increasing concern for the preservation and restoration of ancient monuments. Spurred, no doubt, by the vandalism of the French Revolution and the neglect of earlier generations, this growing concern manifested itself on both sides of the Rhine by voluntary, and soon also legislative, efforts to save what could still be saved of the architectural heritage of the past.²³

In France it was Prosper Mérimée, best remembered today as a creator of the figure of Carmen, who in his capacity as Inspector of Ancient Monuments, acquired immense merits both as a conservator and a historian of medieval art. In 1837 he published a perceptive essay on the religious architecture of the Middle Ages²⁴ in which he attempted a concise characteristic both of Romanesque and the Gothic style, singling out the contrast between massive solidity and lightness of structure, between the emphasis on the horizontal and the vertical. Essentially, of course, these contrasts go back to the formulations of Félibien, but Mérimée was more original in claiming that each of these autonomous styles followed the same inherent law of development from tentative beginnings to maturity and to inevitable decadence, when the structure became smothered in decoration. That interpretation still influenced the great French art historian Henri Focillon in our century.



†. God appears to Abraham, Jacob in the church of Saint-Savin-sur-Gartempe (Vienne), XIIth century

Merimée's greatest merit, however, was his discovery and rescue of the murals of the church of Saint-Savin-sur-Gartempe near Vienne, dating from the 11th and 12th centuries (fig. 4), on which he wrote a report to the Ministry in 1831 and published a monograph in 1845 that still repays reading:

At first sight the paintings of Saint-Savin strike on by the faults of their design and the coarseness of their execution, in one word by the ignorance and lack of skill of the artists. But looking at them more attentively one will recognise a certain grandeur which works of more recent periods completely lack. Compare for instance one of the compositions in the nave with a painting by Jan van Eyck: the latter is certainly more correct, more exact, much closer to nature, but its style is low and bourgeois, to use an expression of the studios. The murals of Saint-Savin with all their myriad failings exhibit something of that nobility that is so impressive in the works of classical antiquity (p. 112).

Like Goethe, Merimée attributes these reminiscences of classical art to the influence of the Byzantines, thus essentially accepting Vasari's construct, but unlike Goethe he does not mainly see the influence in the skill of composition, but rightly concentrates on such details as the methods of painting drapery, showing the limbs and their movements underneath. Thus Merimée must be counted among the first who paved the way to a proper historical appreciation of Romanesque painting. It was Prosper Merimée who became the mentor and predecessor of the most learned medievalist architect of the 19th century, Viollet-le-Duc, one of those super-human personalities of the past whose energy and industry must inspire us with awe.²⁵ His name is of course associated with his advocacy of Gothic which he interpreted as the ideally functional style, but from the beginning his activities as a restorer as well as an architect also brought him into contact with Romanesque buildings. It was Merimée who commissioned him to restore the Abbey of Vézelay which was in danger of collapse. Here as elsewhere we may regret Viollet-le-Duc's lack of caution in refashioning an ancient building, but we cannot deny him the credit of having preserved and recorded so much of the French medieval heritage. His Dictionary of Architecture became a standard work and it was he who inspired the first museum of plaster casts of medieval sculpture, the Trocadéro in Paris, which opened its doors to the public in 1882 and marked an epoch, by making so many of the monuments from distant sites known for the first time.

But for all the importance of these developments in France, we still must look to Germany for the decisive transition from archaeology to art history and its effects on the appreciation of the Romanesque. It is well known that it was the German historian Carl Friedrich von Rumohr who first cleared the ground by his sober and critical approach to traditional notions. The chapter of the *Italienische Forschungen* entitled "On the common origin of the architectural schools of the Middle Ages"²⁶ takes its starting point from a dissection of Vasari's assertions, which leads him to reject both the terms 'gothic' and that of 'byzantine' for building styles so described by Vasari originated obviously many centuries after the Gothic invasion of Italy, the second because genuine Byzantine influence was rare indeed in the West. For the first, he proposes the name 'germanic architecture' since the term 'german', that had been used, was too narrow to embrace the varieties of the style in France and in England (p.594); for the second he settles finally for the term "pre-germanic", not a very happy coinage, since Rumohr himself showed himself particularly interested in the monuments of Lombard Italy such as Pavia.

Whether or not Rumohr's interesting pages should be classed as archaeology or art history may be a moot point. Unlike his chapters on painting his approach to architecture is purely factual. Yet it was in the very years that Rumohr worked, that a new approach to the testimonies of the past developed in Germany that finally effected this transition. I refer to the philosophy of history propounded by George Friedrich Hegel in his university courses in Berlin in the 1820's. In his grand metaphysical

scheme intended to account for the progress of mankind, Hegel assigned every nation a providential role in the march of the divine spirit through history and taught his hearers to look at every style of the past as a manifestation of that spirit. I have tried to show elsewhere to what extent the majority of German scholars who were to lay the foundation of art historical studies had imbibed this heady doctrine.²⁷ Thus Karl Schaase, the author of a six volume history of art which appeared between 1843 and 1864, had attended Hegel's lectures and wrote in his first work on his travels in the Netherlands²⁸ of 1834 that architecture could never be anything but the creation of the national spirit (p. 369).

It was Franz Kugler, one of the most learned and prolific pioneers of art history, who stole a march on Schnaase by publishing the first ever hand-book of art history in 1842 covering the whole panorama from ancient America to 19th century Europe.²⁹ The 13th chapter, that takes up 97 pages, is entitled "The Art of the Romanesque Style". The author explains in the opening pages why he has adopted this novel term, following the use of linguistics in which the languages deriving from Latin are called Romanisch. A footnote (p.416) explains why the author has preferred this term to that of the Byzantine style which he himself had used in the past.

This very derivation of terms, however, appears to have presented something of an intellectual problem to Kugler. Following the Hegelian scheme he wished to represent the Romanesque as a stag on the road of progress towards the Gothic, which he called the Germanic style. "In the beginning of the Romanesque era", we read, "the new Germanic Volkgeist could only announce its presence in a semi-barbarous and fantastic manner. In the second half of the 11th century, the style, while heavy and limited in expression, had acquired an independent physiognomy, that gradually, in the 12th century and early 13th century, approximated the classical style" (p. 417). Yet – Kugler continues- this return to classical antiquity contradicted the mentality of the nation and thus provoked the Germanic Volkgeist to oppose it in the form of the truly Germanic – the Gothic Style. Kugler's handbook is not illustrated, but there is no denying its merits in having listed and described a large number of monuments of the period. His failures, of course, are due to his fanatical bias which shows itself at its least attractive in his attempts to belittle the art of other nations, particularly those of Italy: "it was the Germanic Volkgeist through which these independent artistic strivings came to life and the merit of having achieved most in this respect belongs to Germany ... Italy appears throughout most of the period to have been incapable of truly artistic creations and only towards its end we encounter magnificent artistic achievement – no doubt due to German influence" (p. 484). The allusion is to the art of Nicolò Pisano whom Vasari had singled out as the harbinger of the Renaissance and whose "miraculous" innovations Kugler seeks to explain by postulating the influence of German sculptors like those who had created the Goldene Pforte at Freiberg (p.501).

It is ironic to recall that Kugler became the mentor and close collaborator of Jakob Burckhardt whose *Civiltà* of 1855 contributed so vitally to the appreciation of Italian art (including Romanesque monuments) among the German public. True, Burckhardt had testified earlier in his career to his admiration of medieval architecture in the North, but as a Swiss he was relatively free of nationalist bias.

In any case it so happened that Kugler's insistence on the essential German character of the Gothic style had become unsustainable immediately after his book came out. In 1843 a German architectural historian who had spent some time in Paris, Franz Mertens, published his findings that the style had actually originated in the Isle de France, with the designs of Abbot Suger for St. Denis.³⁰

Not that pet ideas can so easily be changed by awkward facts. The discovery may even have contributed to pushing German chauvinists closer to racialism. Thus Wilhelm Lübke wrote in the

introduction of his long and scholarly chapter on the Romanesque of his *History of Architecture* of 1855.³¹ “The fact that the German element was the essential creative one, the active principle in the development of the new building style, emerges most clearly from a cursory geographic survey. This survey demonstrates that the most lively architectural activity is to be found among the predominately Germanic people, the Germans, the English, the Northern French and North Italians with their largely Germanised tribes”(p.252).

This idea became something like an article of faith in German art historical writing. Anton Springer (who was actually critical of Hegel’s metaphysics)³² defined in his *Letters on Art History*³³ the Romanesque style as “the Roman manner modified by Germanic elements” and explained the high vitality of North Italian art by the “indelible remnants of Germanic ideas, “due to the presence of Germanic tribes in these regions”. Not that this obsession can wholly detract from the vital contribution which that generation of German art historians made to our knowledge of Romanesque architecture. In 1858 Kugler let his handbook be followed by a multi-volume history of architecture in which he devoted almost six hundred pages to the Romanesque style.³⁴ In the same year Lübke’s *History of Architecture* appeared in a second expanded edition even more profusely illustrated with woodcuts than the first edition had been. Yet it may be said that for these authors the study of Romanesque monuments was still somewhat closer to archaeology than to the history of art. Their love, and that of the reading public was generally reserved for the efflorescence of the Gothic style, the true expression of the Age of Faith.

It hardly needs emphasising that Germany shared this enthusiasm with the rest of Europe, especially France and England. It was a bias that had tangible consequence in the practice of architects and the preferences of their patrons who followed the lead of Viollet-le-Duc in France and of Pugin and Ruskin in England.

Indeed, turning the pages of J.Mordaunt Crook’s recent book *The Dilemma of Style*³⁵ we find that the Romanesque style was scarcely an option seriously considered by British architects – the exception being the Natural History Museum by Alfred Waterhouse in London (1873-81). It turns out, however, that the architect originally wanted to use the Gothic style, but by the time when he was called in, there was already an elaborate plan for a Renaissance building by Captain Fawke that proved easier to convert into “German Romanesque” than into Gothic.³⁶

Nineteenth century architects have regularly been criticised for their eclectic attitudes to style, but this criticism had frequently obscured the ideological motivation of their choice. The basic dilemma here was between the Renaissance idiom symbolising a progressive attitude that its enemies considered a viable option for the architect, because the general public would not have associated that style with any particular ideology. Even so, exceptions to this rule occurred and are relevant to our context: As early as 1828 the German architect Heinrich Hübsch published a lengthy manifesto with the significant title “In what Style should we build?”.³⁷

The answer to this rhetorical question turns out to be in the “Rundbogenstil”. Characteristically he avoids all ideological commitments and confines himself to rational considerations. True, by way of introduction he thanks his fellow artists for “having rid the arts of their enslavement to classical antiquity”, which does not prevent him, however, from paying tribute to the architecture of Classical Greece, that is only found wanting, because it is inapplicable to the social and climatic conditions of Northern Europe. The Roman style fares less well, because of its excess of decoration and the same, we learn later, also rules out the Gothic style. It is here that the Romanesque shows so many advantages because of its solidity, simplicity and capacity to vault large spaces. The monastic church

of Maria Laach in Germany is singled out as an almost perfect building, and while the author nowhere advocates a slavish imitation, his deductions culminate in the recommendation of developing this style for modern conditions: "these buildings will no longer exhibit a historical-conventional character ... but will be true and natural so that the layman will react to them precisely like the learned artist."

The buildings Hübsch designed show that he practised what he preached: Like his Munich contemporary Friedrich von Gärtner, he used round arches, but generally avoided the heaviness of the genuine Romanesque.

The success of these buildings appears to have provoked the publication of a little manual in 1837, that bears the amusing title *Der Kleine Byzantiner* (The little Byzantine) and is intended as a guide to the Romanesque style³⁸. The author, C. Heideloff, was apparently quite impartial vis-à-vis the dilemma of styles, having published an earlier manual of classical forms and promising yet another for lovers of Gothic. But though the history of the "Byzantine" style he offers on two pages, is somewhat confused, he displays a genuine appreciation of its aesthetic value: "Their character is serious, solemn, majestic and sublime, which explains why medieval churches have so marked an effect on the emotions of the faithful, something in which more recent Christian buildings have been less successful". Though the success of both these writings was strictly limited, it is worth noting that both Kugler and Lübke in the concluding chapters of their histories refer in passing to certain tendencies of adapting the Romanesque style to modern conditions, the latter mentioning in particular certain "praiseworthy" buildings in Berlin.

Even so, when one of the greatest subsequent historians of the German Romanesque, Georg Dehio, turned to the problems of the present in an article of 1886³⁹, he deplored the predominance of Gothic design and the neglect of the "overwhelming treasures of Romanesque architecture" by his contemporaries. "So far not experiments of any importance have been attempted to find out how far it might be possible and profitable to revive this style". He suggests that the imminent task of designing a Cathedral for Berlin should provide an opportunity to test this choice. In fact, as we know, the Kaiser Wilhelm Gedächtniskirche was built in the Romanesque style. It is noteworthy that Dehio was apparently unaware of the fact that a revival of the Romanesque style had been under way for some time in what was then "distant America". It was in particular in Pittsburgh that H. H. Richardson championed a style of building that not only displayed the "round arches" of Romanesque but also profited from the example of its solid stonework.⁴⁰ It is at this point I must return to Sixten Ringbom's masterly account of the spread of these ideas in Scandinavia and Finland, mentioned at the outset of this study. In fact the title of his book "Stone, Style and Truth" may also offer a pointer to the ideology that was at last to lead to the rehabilitation of Romanesque sculpture and – by extension – Romanesque painting.

The transition from archaeology to the history of art that forms the subject of this study occurred indeed much later in relation to the figurative arts than it had done in relation to architecture.

The reason is not far to seek. It still lies in the treatment of the human figure. The arbitrary proportions which do violence to the organic structure of the body presented an obstacle to the general public that regarded such figures as merely grotesque.



5. The Sacrifice of Isaac. Bronze relief from the door of S. Zeno, Verona, XIII century.

One of the most glaring examples of this contrast between the appreciation of Romanesque architecture and the dismissal of some of the figurative monuments of the early Middle Ages is represented by a passage from the History of Art by Karl Schnaase.⁴¹ Commenting on the famous bronze doors of S. Zeno of Verona from the 11th century (fig. 5), he calls them “the extreme of shapelessness and ugliness”. “One would think these hideous abominations were primitive toys or idols of some barbaric tribe from the North Pole —if one did not recognise the scared subject” (pp. 698f). Even the assumption that the sculptors wanted to scare us by “this excess of ugliness, the misshapen dwarfish bodies, the huge heads, the gaping mouths and the staring eyes” dose not suffice as an explanation, since even the most venerable figures and the most appealing episodes are treated in the same way. Schnaase goes on the express his indignation at this blasphemy, though, characteristically, he tells us elsewhere that the superior German spirit would never have sunk so low.

This may be an extreme example, but the acceptance of distortion as a means of art can be shown to have needed the intermediary stage of decoration and ornament. As I have shown in my book *The Sense of Order*⁴² the rejection of the imitation of nature became something of an article of faith in the Victorian theory of ornament. The decoration of a flat surface should never deceive the eye by simulating depth but should remain honestly and emphatically two-dimensional. Simplifications of organic forms became known as ‘stylised’, and stylised flowers or animals proved popular for wallpapers or textiles. It was to be expected that this bias could not halt forever at the human figure. Even Ruskin, the dedicated champion of fidelity to nature, came to admit that no perfect representation of animal forms is right in architectural decoration. Both he and Viollet-le-Duc emphasised in their writings that the medieval artists showed superior tact in avoiding crude naturalism in stained glass windows or in murals because such images would have disrupted the decorative unity of the whole.

Thus the sculptures of the porches of Romanesque cathedrals also began to be seen with new eyes. Were the stretched proportions of those prophets and saints really just the product of ignorance? Were they not rather the consequence of their aesthetic function within their architectural setting? This was the conclusion arrived at by Wilhelm Vöge, the German art historian and teacher of Panofsky, in his seminal book of 1894, *The Beginning of the Monumental Style in the Middle Ages*.⁴³ For Vöge the status of Chartres which resemble columns, embody the happy union between architecture and the figurative art, since the stonemason did not attempt to represent a human figure but rather to animate an architectural element. The term “monumental” used by Vöge in his title is significant. “Monumental” was the notion used by the critics of art who opposed the naturalism of the Impressionists at that time and called for a return to formal discipline. The result of this demand were certainly not always very pleasant, witness the monument of Bismarck by Hugo Lederer in Hamburg

from the end of the 19th century with its obtrusive simplification of form. But it has to be admitted that even Aby Warburg hailed it in his youth as a splendid counter to the trivial naturalism of public monuments seen in the streets of our cities.⁴⁴ All this, of course, was a symptom of the crisis of realism towards the end of the century that led to the birth of the modern movement. It was this reversal of artistic aims also that contributed at last to the rehabilitation of Romanesque sculpture and painting.

It is worth noting in this context that the first art historian who cast doubt on Vasari's view of late antique art as decadent and barbaric came to the history of art from the study of ornament and decoration. I refer to Alois Riegl and his book on late Roman art published in Vienna in 1901⁴⁵ where he went so far as to deny outright that technical or manual skill was ever a decisive element in the history of the visual arts. For him art can never be the product of technical skill, it is always the outcome of artistic will, *Kunstwollen*. Not even the sculptures of the arch of Constantine which represented for Vasari the symptom of the decline of art could be so interpreted, they rather signalled a new direction in the conception of sculptural forms which was to triumph in the Middle Ages. It is not too hard for us today to understand the motive underlying this new anti-classical and anti-naturalistic doctrine and its close link with the revolutionary aesthetics of the early years of the 20th century. Only in that new perspective could the visual arts of the Romanesque style lose the stigma of decadence and barbarism and acquire the character of an autonomous and much admired family of forms. It is sufficient to recall the strong reaction of many 20th century sculptors against the mastery of naturalism represented by Rodin. Brancusi, Epstein or Mestrovitch are names that immediately come to mind for their stark simplifications and their respect for the shape of the 'block',



6. The Woman clothed with the Sun (Bavarian XII). From the Bamberg Apocalypse c. 1000, after Wajffm.

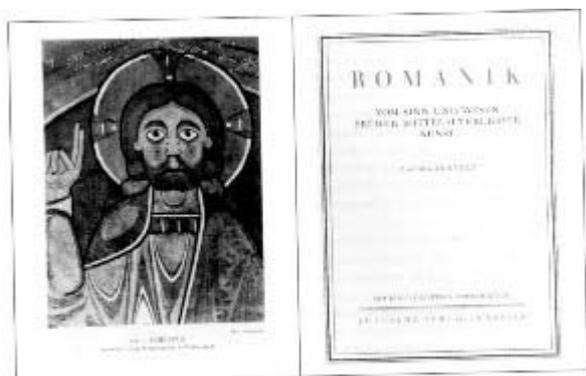
another manifestation of the ideal of “Stone, Style and Truth”.

To the artist and critic of the first decades of our century, this discovery of non-naturalistic styles including that of African sculpture came like a revelation of new values. Romanesque art was counted among the ancestors of contemporary movements. Even those historians of art whose intellectual formation reached back to more traditionalist periods were converted to these new tendencies. Nothing is more telling in this context than the example of Heinrich Wölfflin, the great Swiss art historian, author of the famous book on the High Renaissance called *Classic Art*. In the sixth decade of his life, in the year 1918, Wölfflin contributed a preface to a publication of the Bamberg Apocalypse (Fig.6) dating from about 1000.⁴⁶ “In recent times” he writes, “our opinion of early medieval art has essentially changed.” Referring to earlier verdicts recalling that Schnaase on the San Zeno doors, Wölfflin refers to the analogous movement in modern painting which permitted one to appreciate the positive aspects of the so-called rigidity of these images and to understand the intention that gave rise to them. “It is misguided to criticise distorted proportions where the departure from nature is intentional and serves the purpose of emphasis.” Despite its archaic character, Wölfflin concludes, this art is not primitive but the outcome of a long tradition. Prosper Mérimée had said

something similar, but, by now, Wölfflin was giving voice to an opinion which was generally shared by art lovers.

The younger generation, of course, went much further. The Romanesque period embodied the ideal of a world almost lost, but one that had to be retrieved, the ideal of a communal and anti-individualistic culture that gave rise to that solemn and anonymous art that was felt to be so superior to our suffering age. This is the message of a book called *Romanik* by Otto Beyer of 1923⁴⁷ that represents a manifesto in favour of the Romanesque which certainly impressed many artists of the time.

The expressionist almost hymnical style of the author makes his book difficult to summarise, but it is clear that he wants to take issue with another expressionist interpretation of medieval art, that of Wilhelm Worringer who had celebrated the Gothic style yet once more as a truly Germanic manifestation.⁴⁸ For Beyer, however, it is the Romanesque that represents the only true Christian art, in fact the only analogy in Europe of the great religious styles of the Orient: “We are confronted with a mysteriously stark, remote, alien and yet essentially infinitely familiar world. Here is the ultimate depth of creativity, where we touch the heart of the figurative urge, the awareness of the Divine mystery” (p.24).



7. Titlepages of *Otto Beyer, Romanik*, Berlin 1923.

The message is reinforced by a skilful choice of illustrations in which Romanesque images and churches are strangely transformed into 20th century art (Fig. 7). No account of the rediscovery of Romanesque images should omit the share which certain photographic techniques have had in this metamorphosis.

One critic was fully aware of this effect: André Malraux, who knew very well how modern photography succeeded in transforming somewhat primitive or crude Romanesque sculpture into images reminiscent of modern Expressionism. Yet in his famous book *Le Musée Imaginaire*, translated as *The Museum without Walls*,⁴⁹ he argued that this transformation served to prove, that all art history merely projects the tendencies of a period into the past. As Croce put it, “All history is contemporary history”. For Malraux even more than for Croce, historical truth is a utopian idea, everything is subjective and relative.

I do not think that Malraux is still much read, which is a pity because he was certainly a persuasive and interesting writer. He was not even quite wrong, as we have seen: The taste and the value of art historians has never been wholly independent of the outlook and the art of their own time. Even so, I believe that this relativistic position does violence to the fact. For if art history can be prone to the dangers of subjectivism there is, after all, a corrective close at hand, I mean, of course, archaeology. The archaeologist is trained to disregard his personal taste and to concentrate on objective evidence.

It is true, that in doing so, he may be blind to those values which are the life of art, neither discipline can prosper without the other.

The rediscovery of the Romanesque style offers instructive examples for the need of this collaboration, nowhere more than in the practice of restoration. In the second half of our century the appreciation of Romanesque interiors certainly reflected the enthusiasm for functionalism in modern architecture. The strength and simplicity of these ancient buildings so appealed to modern restorers, particularly in Italy, that they stripped these churches of all later accretions, leaving us just the stark bare bones of the structure to contemplate and admire. Here, too, I think archaeologist could point to the traces of colour just as the historian could document the existence of furnishings which surely transformed these interiors. I believe Prosper Merimée, himself an eminent archaeologist, was right when he concluded that the artists of these periods always had before their eyes the image of the heavenly Jerusalem all resplendent with gold and with rubies.⁵⁰

1 Sixten Ringbom, *Stone, Style and Truth. The Vogue for Natural Stone in Nordic Architecture 1880-1910*, Finska Fornminnesforeningens Tidskrift 91, Helsinki 1987.

2 E. H. Gombrich, *Dall' Archaeologia alla Storia dell'Arte: Tappe della Fortuna Critica dello Stile Romanico*, (Torino: Einaudi Editore, 1990)

3 Tina Waldeier Bizzarro, *Romanesque Architectural Criticism, a Prehistory*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992)

4 I am greatly indebted to Dr. Susi Lang, who drew my attention to much additional material, more indeed, than I was able to use in this paper.

5 The thrust of Bizzarro's book is directed against what she calls the Neo-Platonic conception of Style that postulates an ideal permanent pattern. In contrast to this approach, shared by many German art historians, she stresses the vagueness of our nomenclatures. One can easily agree with the author, without denying the usefulness of almost any type of terminology that can always remain subject to revisions and qualifications.

6 Giorgio Vasari, *Le Vite de' piu Eccellenti Pittori Scultori e Architettori* ed. G. Milanesi (Florence: Sansoni, 1878 ff)

7 Paul Frankl, *The Gothic: Literary Sources and Interpretations through Eight Centuries* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1960).

8 Jean-François Felibien, *Recueil historique de la vie et des ouvrages des plus celebres architectes*, (Paris: Sebastien Malre- Cramoisy, 1687) pp. 5-6.

9 Christian Rieger, S. J. *Universae Architecturae Civilis Elementa* (Vienna, Prague and Trieste: Thomas Trattner, 1756).

10 See Francis Haskell, *History and its Images: Art and the Interpretation of the Past* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993) p. 174 and note.

11 Francesco Milizia, *Le Vite de' piu celebri architetti* (Rome: Paolo G. Komare, 1768) p. 3.

- 12 Thomas D. Kendrick, *British Antiquity* (London: Methuen, 1950).
- 13 See Thomas H. Cocke in the Catalogue of *English Romanesque Art (1066-1200)*, Hayward Gallery London, April 5- July 8th 1984, mentioned above.
- 14 William Dugdale and Roger Dodsworth, *Monasticum Anglicanum* (1655, 6 volumes), revised edition (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees etc., 1817-30).
- 15 Bernard de Montfaucon, O.S.B., *Les monumens de la monarchie Française* (Paris: Gandouis, 1729-31); see also Francis Haskell, *op. cit.* pp.131-142.
- 16 For a splendid chapter on Lenoir, see Haskell, *op. cit.* pp. 236-252.
- 17 B. Seroux d'Agincourt, *Histoire de l'art par les monumens ...*, 6 vols. Paris: Treuttel and Würtz, 1823, see also G. Previtali, *La Fortuna dei Primitivi*, (Torino: G. Einaudi, 1964) pp. 164-184.
- 18 James P. Malcolm, *Historical Sketch of the Art of Caricaturing* (London: Longman etc., 1813). See also F. Haskell, *op.cit.* pp. 368 f.
- 19 John Flaxman, *Lectures on Sculpture* (London: John Murray, 1829)
- 20 J. W. Goethe, "Die Externsteine" *Aus Kunst und Altertum*, V.1. 1824 cf. *Goethes Werke*, XII, (Hamburg: Christian Wagner, 1953) pp. 206-209.
- 21 see my chapter, "Goethe und die Kunstsammlung der Bruder Boisserée" in *Gastspiele*, (Vienna: Bohlau, 1992) 69-88.
- 22 see *Gastspiele*, *loc. cit.*
- 23 see my chapter "The Conservation of our Cities" in *Topics of our Time*, (London: Phaidon, 1991) especially pp. 84 f.
- 24 Prosper Mérimée, *Etudes sur les Arts du Moyen Age*, ed. Pierre Josserand, (Paris: Flammarion, 1967).
- 25 On Viollet-le-Duc, see the *Catalogue of the Exhibition in the Grand Palais* in Paris, ed. B. Foucard, 1980.
- 26 C. Fr. von Rumohr, *Italienische Forschungen*, ed. Julius von Schlosser, (Frankfurt am Main: Frankfurter Verlags- Anstalt, 1920) pp. 586-629.
- 27 see my "In Search of Cultural History" in *Ideals and Idols* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1979) and "Hegel as the Father of Art History" in *Tributes* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1984).
- 28 Karl Schnaase, *Niederländische Briefe* (Stuttgart and Tübingen: Cotta, 1834).
- 29 Franz Kugler, *Handbuch der Kunstgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Ebner und Seubert, 1842). Informative chapters on the authors mentioned in the subsequent paragraphs can be found in Wilhelm Waetzoldt, *Deutsche Kunsthistorikervol. II*, (Leipzig: E. A. Seemann, 1924).

- 30 Paul Frankl, *op. cit.*
- 31 Wilhelm Lubke, *Geschichte der Architektur*, (Leipzig: E. A. Seemann, 1855).
- 32 Michael Podro, *The Critical Historians of Art*, (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).
- 33 Anton Springer, *Kunsthistorische Briefe* (Prague: Friedrich Ehrlich, 1857).
- 34 Franz Kugler, *Geschichte der Baukunst* (Stuttgart: Ebner und Seubert, 1858).
- 35 J. Mordaunt Crook, *The Dilemma of Style* (London: John Murray, 1987).
- 36 Mark Girouard, *Alfred Waterhouse and the Natural History Museum*, (London 1981).
- 37 H. Hubsch, *In welchem Style sollen wir bauen?* (Karlsruhe: C. F. Muller, 1828). For an English translation of this essay, together with a selection of writings it provoked, see Wolfgang Herrmann, *In what Style should we build? The German Debate on Architectural Style*. (Text and Documents published by Getty Center, Santa Monica, Cal. and distributed by the Chicago University Press, 1992), which includes an informative illustrated introduction bibliographical references, especially in Note 119.
- 38 C. Heideloff, *Der kleine Byzantine/; Taschenbuch des byzantinischen Baustyles*, (Nurnberg: Riegel and Wiessner 1837). There is a copy of this rare pamphlet in the library of the Warburg Institute.
- 39 Georg Dehio, "Romanische Renaissance", *Jahrbuch der Preussischen Kunstsammlungen*, VII, 1886, pp. 129-140.
- 40 James D. van Trump, "The Romanesque Revival in Pittsburgh" *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* XVI, n 3, October 1957, pp. 22-28.
- 41 Karl Schnaase, *Geschichte der bildenden Künste*, IV. (Dusseldorf: J. Buddens, 1871).
- 42 E. H. Gombrich, *The Sense of Order* (London: Phaidon, 1979) pp. 34f.
- 43 Wilhelm Voge, *Die Anfänge des monumentalen Stils im Mittelalter*, (Strassburg: Heitz, 1894).
- 44 E. H. Gombrich, *Aby Warburg, An Intellectual Biography*, (London: The Warburg Institute, 1970) p. 153, pl. 20c.
- 45 Alois Riegl, *Die Spätromische Kunstindustrie* (Vienna: Osterr. Staatsdruckerei, 1901)
- 46 Heinrich Wölfflin, *Die Bamberger Apokalypse* (Munich: Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1918).
- 47 Oskar Beyer, *Romanik, Vom Sinn und Wesen frühmittelalterlicher Kunst* (Berlin: Furche Verlag, 1923).

48 Wilhelm Worringer, *Formprobleme der Gotik* (Munich: Piper, 1911).

49 Andre Malraux, "The Museum without Walls", in *The Voices of Silence* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1954) , see my review in *Meditations on a Hobby Horse*, (London: Phaidon, 1963).

50 Ed. cit., p. 28.