

Introduction

THIS STUDY examines some of the intellectual and historical circumstances that helped define the academic study of art history. It does so by tracing and contextualizing the ways in which the first generation of professional interpreters of art in Germany shaped discourse on medieval art. The investigation focuses on the decades of the 1880s and 1890s, when art history was first established as an academic discipline at German, Austrian and Swiss universities. In conjunction with the study of published texts, an analysis of archival materials affords new insights into the complex (and often contradictory) movements of thought that helped shape humanities scholarship generally, and art historical scholarship specifically, in late nineteenth-century Germany.

In view of the wave of theoretical and critical self-examination that has swept recently through many disciplines, including art history, it may come as a surprise to many scholars that the intellectual and methodological foundations of art history have been only partially explored to date. This applies to the historiography of art history as a whole – for example, a comprehensive analysis of the institutionalization of the discipline at German universities during the late nineteenth century has yet to be undertaken¹ – as well as to the historiography of scholarship treating the various historical eras embraced by the discipline since its founding. The majority

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-14762-0 - The Shaping of Art History: Wilhelm Voge, Adolph Goldschmidt, and the Study of Medieval Art

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of recent chroniclers of art history have regarded scholarship on the Renaissance or post-Renaissance periods as the primary intellectual barometer of the growth and development of the discipline. The widespread assumption that the most important methodological experiments took place in the investigation of Italian Renaissance art has meant that short shrift has been given to 1880s and 1890s scholarship examining artistic monuments of other periods. This is especially true of the early study of medieval art.

But chroniclers of the discipline are not the only scholars who have neglected to explore the pioneering discourse on medieval art. Even historians of medieval art, including native speakers of English, German and French, have been slow to investigate and contextualize the writings that form the foundations of their now largely discrete subdiscipline. As a result, nineteenth-century scholarship on medieval art (and especially the ground-breaking writings of German-speaking scholars) remains *terra incognita* to scholars of our day on both sides of the Atlantic.²

Why, one might ask, does historiography occupy the margins of art historical inquiry on the Middle Ages? At least part of the neglect stems from a widespread belief that the dusty, often disintegrating tomes in our libraries are essentially “old hat,” and that they present information that has long since been improved upon or corrected. Another common misconception is that the discourse of the pioneering scholars was fundamentally unilinear and therefore has little to offer to a multidimensional present. Recent debates concerning the aims, nature and methods of art history by a new generation of critical historians of art, though highly provocative for the field as a whole, have frequently conveyed the impression that the first-generation scholars were positivists concerned almost exclusively with formal categorization.³ This impression has acquired the force of virtually unquestioned truth, because many students and scholars of medieval art, whether in Germany, France, Britain or America, no longer possess first-hand knowledge of the now century-old founding texts – texts that demonstrate that much of the early scholarship was remarkably varied in method.

Furthermore, recent scholars outside of Germany have neglected early medieval scholarship written in German, for a variety of political, ideological or chauvinistic reasons. Medievalists in France, for instance, have traditionally confined their research to monuments located within the borders

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of France.⁴ British scholarship, although somewhat less insular, likewise does not tend to look farther east than France.⁵ To cross the Atlantic, Erwin Panofsky's optimistic vision (1953) of American art history as operating free of the national borders of Europe has not had any long-term validity for the scope of research on medieval monuments by North American scholars.⁶ Despite the presence of Panofsky and other German-trained émigré scholars at American universities from the 1930s to the present, the scholarship of American-born medievalists during the past forty or fifty years has been primarily Francocentric, and secondarily Anglocentric, in orientation.⁷ The bias inherent in this dominance of an Anglo-French axis outside of Germany is self-perpetuating, for it has severely limited the acquisition of fluency in foreign languages (not just German) by many art historians.⁸ Whatever the priorities among these and other conditioning factors, the neglect of German scholarship has made a balanced historiographical analysis of medieval art historical scholarship virtually impossible, especially as it relates to the study of the Middle Ages in northern Europe.

The neglect of these early studies has broad implications for our understanding of how the discipline of art history was formed. In late nineteenth-century Germany, study of the medieval era achieved important status within art history – a status comparable to that granted to the study of the Italian Renaissance and classical antiquity. Indeed in its early years, the field of art history was far less specialized in orientation and practice than it is today. For the small group of men who formed the fledgling art historical community in Germany during the 1880s and 1890s,⁹ the study of art history denoted critical engagement with the entire history of art, rather than with the largely independent subdisciplines (e.g., Renaissance art history, modern art history) so familiar to scholars of our day, especially in countries outside of Germany. The relatively unpartitioned state of the young discipline was conditioned in part by its extremely small size. No more than several dozen professors and students populated the field in Germany in the 1880s and 1890s,¹⁰ making “specialist” directions in art history fluid in definition. Often those scholars who concentrated their work on the Middle Ages also published or taught on the art of other eras.¹¹ The division of art history into professional subcategories, most notably outside of Germany, occurred only later, following World War I, with the institutional and geographic expansion of the field.

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Thus critical study of early scholarship on medieval art can help us understand broader intellectual currents in the developing discipline.

These writings also reflect the centrality accorded to the study of the Middle Ages in German academic and political culture during the late nineteenth century. It is well known that the Middle Ages attracted much scholarly and popular attention all over Europe from the late eighteenth century onward. But the founding of the German empire in 1871 acted as a powerful catalyst for German scholars.¹² The medieval period was championed as an era that anticipated the formation of the European nation-states – and the German empire specifically. Nationalist sentiment sparked interest in Germany's own history, and not surprisingly, much post-1871 research on the Middle Ages (including art historical writings) focused on the medieval empires of the Carolingian, Ottonian, Salian and Hohenstaufen eras.

Although consideration of the specific nationalist agendas and academic politics that helped shape the study of the Middle Ages in Wilhelmine Germany is beyond the scope of the present study, it is important to point out that this heightening of scholarly interest in the Middle Ages more or less coincided with the formation of the discipline of art history. This situation, and the virtually immediate integration of the study of medieval art into the new discipline, must be factored into any attempt to analyze the formulation of art historical method as a whole. By neglecting to consider early scholarship on medieval art, we have severely limited our understanding of the development of the entire discipline of art history.

It is not my aim here to construct a panoramic view of the scholarship on medieval art published in late nineteenth-century Germany nor to determine whether specific arguments put forward in that scholarship were right or wrong. Rather, my goal is to begin sorting out and identifying some of the criteria that provided intellectual support for the pioneers of art history as they structured discourse on medieval art during the 1880s and 1890s. In other words, I am interested in gauging the kinds and range of issues and methodological stimuli that gave direction to the study of medieval monuments at a moment when interpretative norms for the fledgling discipline of art history had not yet been established.

I have chosen to emphasize art historical pioneers less well known than canonical figures like Alois Riegl (1858–1905) and Heinrich Wölfflin (1864–1945), who have received the lion's share of scholarly attention to

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date.¹³ Instead, in order to contribute to a more complete picture of the formation of art history, my study centers on two crucial figures whose work has been inadequately studied: Wilhelm Vöge (1868–1952) and Adolph Goldschmidt (1863–1944), two of the most prominent scholars of medieval art in German academic and museum circles during the 1890s and later (Figs. 1, 2). My investigation takes the general form of a case study of the thought and work of these two men, who received their university educations during the 1880s and embarked on their professional careers around 1890. Along with Austrian, Swiss, German and French scholars such as Franz Wickhoff (1853–1909), Riegl, Julius von Schlosser (1866–1938), Wölfflin, Max J. Friedländer (1867–1958), Aby Warburg (1866–1929) and Émile Mâle (1862–1954), Vöge and Goldschmidt belonged to the pioneering generation of art historians born in the 1860s or just slightly earlier. Within German art history, Vöge and Goldschmidt stand out because they represented fresh blood, conceptually speaking, for the study of medieval art during the 1890s.¹⁴

When Vöge and Goldschmidt began their university studies in the mid-1880s, the discipline of art history was in its infancy, and medieval art was just becoming a subject of intensive study in universities and museums.¹⁵ Goldschmidt, who is much better known today than Vöge, studied at the university between 1884 and 1889.¹⁶ In his Leipzig dissertation of 1889, Goldschmidt presented the first systematic study of late medieval painting and sculpture in the Hanseatic city of Lübeck.¹⁷ Although late medieval art always remained an area of special interest for Goldschmidt, many of his subsequent publications of the 1890s concentrated on Carolingian and Romanesque manuscripts, as well as on twelfth- and thirteenth-century sculpture in Germany, all topics that had received little attention until then. His work during these years was not restricted to medieval art, for he also published and taught on subjects that included Michelangelo and Dutch and Flemish painting.

In 1892 Goldschmidt became the first art historian with a medievalist orientation to teach at the University of Berlin. In 1895 he published his *Habilitationsschrift*, or postdoctoral thesis, on the twelfth-century Albani Psalter.¹⁸ In 1904 he became professor of art history at the University of Halle, a post he held until 1912. Although Goldschmidt had served in an important advisory capacity during the late 1890s for dissertations on medieval illuminated manuscripts by Arthur Haseloff and Georg Swarzen-

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Figure 1. Wilhelm Voge, before 1915. (Photo: Klaus Dziobek and Ursula Hausen)

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978-0-521-14762-0 - The Shaping of Art History: Wilhelm Voge, Adolph Goldschmidt, and the
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Figure 2. Adolph Goldschmidt, ca. 1912. (Photo: Staatsarchiv Hamburg, Bestand 622-1 Goldschmidt)

Cambridge University Press

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ski,¹⁹ it was in Halle that he established his reputation as a teacher. Indeed Goldschmidt's pivotal role in shaping the field of art history, and medieval art history specifically, stemmed equally from his publications and from his accomplishments as a teacher. During the years he spent in Halle and at the University of Berlin (to which he returned in 1912) Goldschmidt supervised almost one hundred doctoral dissertations in many different areas of art history. His doctoral students included Hans Jantzen, Ernst Gall, Alexander Dorner, Rudolf Wittkower, Ulrich Middeldorf and Kurt Weitzmann, all of whom became distinguished scholars in their own right.²⁰

Shortly after 1900 Goldschmidt published his first article on medieval ivory carvings.²¹ Between 1914 and 1926 he published his monumental four-volume corpus of Carolingian, Ottonian and Romanesque ivories, which was supplemented in 1930 and 1934 by a two-volume corpus of Byzantine ivories, produced in collaboration with his student Kurt Weitzmann.²² Although Goldschmidt's name tends today to be associated most closely with his pathfinding corpus of medieval ivory carvings, *Die Elfenbeinskulpturen*, he also published dozens of important articles and books on medieval manuscripts, bronze doors, and Romanesque and Gothic sculpture during the same years.

Unlike many of his German-speaking contemporaries (for example Riegl and Wölfflin), Goldschmidt achieved an international reputation on both sides of the Atlantic during his lifetime. American medievalists maintained regular contact with Goldschmidt from the early 1920s onward. He made three trips to the United States (in 1927–28, 1930–31 and 1936–37), where he lectured widely, in addition to teaching at Harvard University and at the Institute of Fine Arts in New York. Following a long and immensely productive scholarly career, Goldschmidt was forced to leave Nazi Germany in 1939 and died in Basel in 1944.

WILHELM VÖGE, like Goldschmidt, was one of the first major German art historians to concentrate on the Middle Ages.²³ After commencing his university studies at Leipzig in 1886, Vöge spent his academic *Wanderjahre* at the universities of Bonn, Munich and Strasbourg. In his Strasbourg dissertation, published in 1891 and still considered fundamental today,

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Vöge established many of the identifying characteristics of the Ottonian group of manuscripts now associated with the scriptorium at Reichenau.²⁴ Between 1892 and 1894 Vöge traveled to France to study at first hand French monuments of medieval architecture and sculpture. His second book, *Die Anfänge des monumentalen Stiles im Mittelalter* (The Beginnings of the Monumental Style in the Middle Ages), was published in 1894.²⁵ In this highly influential study Vöge presented the first critical account of the genesis of Gothic sculpture in France. In 1895 Vöge became a *Privatdozent*, or lecturer, under Georg Dehio (1850–1932) at the University of Strasbourg, and he taught there until 1897. After making a foray into the Renaissance by publishing a book on Raphael and Donatello in 1896,²⁶ Vöge devoted the rest of his brief public career to the study of medieval sculpture. Between 1898 and 1908 he worked under Wilhelm Bode (1845–1929) in the sculpture department of the Berlin Museums. There he published two influential catalogues on medieval ivories and monumental sculpture, as well as numerous essays.²⁷

In 1908 Vöge returned to academia and established the art history institute at the University of Freiburg im Breisgau. During the eight years he spent in Freiburg Vöge supervised fourteen doctoral dissertations, including Erwin Panofsky's study of Dürer's theory of art (1914).²⁸ Kurt Badt, Friedrich Winkler, Wolfgang Stechow and Percy Ernst Schramm were among the many young scholars at Freiburg who were greatly influenced by Vöge's teaching. In 1915, however, Vöge suffered a nervous breakdown, triggered, at least in part, by his intense despair over the destruction of medieval monuments in France by his German compatriots during World War I. In 1916 Vöge retired from the university and also retreated from the scholarly world at large, rarely venturing thereafter from the provincial town of Ballenstedt in the Harz region of Germany. Although he published sporadically until his death in 1952 – monographs on the late medieval sculptors Nikolaus Hagenower and Jörg Syrlin appeared in 1930 and 1950²⁹ – Vöge's withdrawal from active academic life in 1916 accounts in part for the low visibility of his writings, in contrast to the enduring international reputation of Goldschmidt.

Although their careers followed different paths after 1915, Vöge and Goldschmidt were among the prime movers who gave the developing discipline of art history decisive impetus, direction and meaning in turn-

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of-the-century Germany. Both men were prominent writers and teachers whose work met with immediate response in their own day – unlike Aby Warburg, who was “discovered” only much later, and largely outside Germany.³⁰ Vöge and Goldschmidt, like Riegl in Vienna and Wölfflin in Basel (and Berlin),³¹ were influential shapers of the discipline at the time of its professionalization. They are, in effect, the academic grandparents or great-grandparents of many scholars active today.

Although I have analyzed their publications here, I have not relied exclusively on investigation of their published texts.³² Instead I have allowed archival documents of both a professional and personal sort associated with Vöge, Goldschmidt and their circle to determine the shape of my inquiry. These materials, which include correspondence, unpublished manuscripts and lecture notes, offer new and often unexpected insights into how these scholars perceived their critical activities. Prime among these documents are some 360 letters and postcards written by Vöge to Goldschmidt between 1892 and 1938.³³ They provide remarkably comprehensive evidence of a creative intellectual partnership between the two young men, particularly during the crucial decade of the 1890s. The bonding that lies behind their scholarly production emerges only from study of their publications together with these unpublished archival materials.³⁴ Indeed, Vöge’s letters to Goldschmidt afford rich and compelling insights into the specific intellectual operations that helped define the conceptual contours of medieval art historical scholarship. At a time when pioneering art historical texts tend to be read and judged almost entirely apart from the conditions that elicited them, this kind of investigation can contribute to a clearer and more sensitive assessment of them.

THE PARAMETERS of this study are necessarily determined by the directions Goldschmidt’s and Vöge’s scholarship took. Because their research from the 1890s onward concentrated on the study of medieval sculpture and manuscripts, this book also emphasizes those media. The focus of their work was highly significant; although sculpture and illuminated manuscripts had received some treatment earlier in the century, they were not studied intensively in Germany until after the political consolidation of the German empire in 1871.³⁵ The new interest accorded medieval sculpture and painting after 1871 is important, for research paradigms were less