IN 1903 THE YOUNG Bohemian art historian Max Dvořák (1874–1921) wrote to his first teacher, a respected professor of history at the Czech-language university in Prague, Jaroslav Goll: ‘... My work on the Van Eyck Brothers and the beginning of Netherlandish painting will be published during this summer. I am curious about the final product since I am raising my voice sharply against prevailing views on questions already long the subject of discussion...’ The final text, entitled ‘Das Rätsel der Kunst der Brüder van Eyck’ (The Enigma of the Art of the Van Eyck Brothers), is the first complex attempt to resolve art-historical questions related to the Ghent Altarpiece and the prehistory of Netherlandish painting. In this extensive article Dvořák applied the methods developed by two early protagonists of the so-called Vienna school of art history: the evolutionist paradigm developed by Alois Riegl, and the connoisseurship method of Giovanni Morelli, as adapted and advanced in Vienna by Franz Wickhoff, to whom Max Dvořák was an assistant. He then essayed a division of hands and attempted to identify the Van Eyck brothers’ individual contributions to the Ghent Altarpiece. Moreover, reconsidering the work within the long evolutionary progress of stylistic form, he investigated in detail the contribution of late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century French and Franco-Flemish artists to the new ‘naturalistic’ form of pictorial representation.

In his later writings Dvořák reconsidered what he had learned from his Vienna teachers and abandoned stylistic analysis as well as the evolutionary model in favour of a more speculative approach. His 1918–1921 university lectures on the Italian Renaissance already fully display Dvořák’s turn from a formal interpretation of the work of art to art history as ‘Geistesgeschichte’. Despite the fact that in his introductory lecture Dvořák once again revealed scepticism about the normative status of the Italian Renaissance in the history of art (as he had in his text on the Van Eyck brothers), the lecture remains an impressive apotheosis of Italian Renaissance art as well as the role of Italy as a reservoir of spiritual concentration, artistic inspiration and knowledge. Dvořák wrote:

‘These lectures concern the history of Italian art from Giotto until the death of Michelangelo, in other words, those 250 years of Italian art history that have long counted as the high point of the entire development of art since antiquity - a high point that could only be followed by a deviation from this line of development, by decline. Today we are far removed from such a theory of ascent and decline, and one can quickly demonstrate that both the succeeding period - the Baroque era - and the art outside of Italy were no less creative or advanced, and that in terms of their significance for the present they were equal to Italian art between the fourteenth and the sixteenth centuries. Yet perhaps precisely because this dogmatic attachment to the Italian Renaissance belongs to the past, it is the object of a new kind of interest, not only as a particularly striking historical phenomenon, but also as the source of artistic opinions and innovations that continued to exercise influence on the entire succeeding period, even into the present... This concentration of spiritual force, this cultural competition... transformed the country, as it was already said by Dante, into the Garden of Europe, in which many centuries continued to find enjoyment and experience.’

Dvořák delivered his lectures on the Italian Renaissance in the turbulent era at the end of the First World War, which left Europe and the Austro-Hungarian empire...
ian Monarchy devastated and in a state of profound economic and moral crisis. Dvořák believed that in such periods of political instability and human vulnerability art historians could benefit from knowledge of the past as a source of courage and strength to face the future. His lectures on Renaissance heroes, from Giotto to Michelangelo, carefully written and prepared, might have been formulated as personal comments on the stormy present. Thus, these lectures justified the importance of the Italian Renaissance and, as we will see, powerfully impressed a younger generation of Viennese art historians encumbered by the collapse of the old multinational Habsburg Empire.

In 1921 Max Dvořák died unexpectedly, shortly before his forty-seventh birthday. Karl Maria Swoboda and Johannes Wilde, two of his students, both with ties to Bohemia, prepared his writings, including the lectures on the Italian Renaissance, for posthumous publication. Two volumes of Geschichte der Italienischen Kunst im Zeitalter der Renaissance appeared in 1927–1928. Johannes Wilde (1891–1970) remains well-known as an illustrious scholar of Italian Renaissance art, and especially of Michelangelo and the Venetian school.

Wilde began his studies with the Hungarian art historian Gyula Pateiner (1846–1924) at the University in Budapest in 1909. A year later he translated into Hungarian the book Das Probleme der Form in der bildenden Kunst by the German sculptor Adolf von Hildebrand, who was a passionate admirer of Michelangelo. Wilde spent the summer term of 1911 at the University in Freiburg im Breisgau with Wilhelm Vöge (1908–1952), best known for his writings on medieval art. Vöge also devoted time and effort to the study of Italian Renaissance artists, particularly Raphael, Donatello and Michelangelo. He became an influential teacher and during his short tenure at Freiburg in 1909–1916 his teachings stimulated an illustrious group of scholars, including Erwin Panofsky, Friedrich Winkler, Kurt Badt, Theodor Hetzer, Frederick Antal, and Wolfgang Stechow.

At the beginning of 1914 Wilde worked briefly as a volunteer at the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest, where he met Simon Meller (1875–1949), who perhaps directed his interests towards Michelangelo. From the autumn of 1915, with a scholarship from the Hungarian Ministry of Education, Wilde continued his studies of art history and classical archaeology under Max Dvořák, Julius von Schlosser, Josef Strzygowski, and Emil Reisch at the University in Vienna. In 1918
he completed his studies with Max Dvořák and was awarded a doctorate summa cum laude for his thesis on the origins of etching in Italy. During this period, Wilde and his fellow students, Frigyes (Frederick) Antal, Arnold Hauser and Charles de Tolnay, became part of the Budapest Sunday Circle (Budapester Sonntagkreis). This brought together a small group of artists and intellectuals, of which the philosopher György Lukács was the most prominent figure. After the end of the war, Wilde was involved in the brief but tempestuous Hungarian Soviet Republic and returned to Vienna in 1920.

In 1923, shortly after the death of Dvořák, Wilde joined the staff of the Kunsthistorisches Museum, a move quite in tune with the tradition of the Vienna school since the time of Joseph Daniel Böhm and Rudolf von Eitelberger. As a curator of the Gemäldegalerie, Wilde was concerned primarily with Italian paintings, which he wrote on for the catalogue of Gemäldegalerie. Daily contact with the original works of art offered him the opportunity to study fundamental problems related to artistic materials and techniques. Wilde devoted special attention to problems of connoisseurship and conservation. In collaboration with Sebastian Issep, from 1925 a restorer of old masters at the Kunsthistorisches Museum, he developed exceptional knowledge in what today we call technical art history, an enhanced and more rigorous connoisseurship. Gifted with a wonderful eye and an intense feeling for the visual, Wilde quickly recognised the potential of X-radiography for connoisseurship. From 1928 both Wilde and Issep made systematic use of X-radiography to study the condition of painting at the Kunsthistorisches Museum, and in 1938 they established in Vienna one of the first museum laboratories created for this purpose in Europe. Wilde’s article of 1932 on Giorgione’s Three Philosophers and Titian’s Gypsy Madonna, based on the first X-rays of both paintings, made a significant contribution to the understanding of the working methods and creative processes of the two painters. Wilde’s pioneering work at the Kunsthistorisches Museum coincided with similar investigations conducted by A. Martin De Wild in Holland, Walter Gräff in Munich, Kurt Wehlte in Berlin, and namely with the work done by Alan Burroughs at the Fogg Museum, with whom Wilde exchanged technical information and findings.

Wilde became familiar with the ancestral collections of the Lichtensteins, Czernins, Harrachs, Wolzecks, and Lanckorońskis. In 1918 Dvořák contributed the introductory essay on Count Karl Lanckoroński to a publication on this outstanding Polish archaeologist, writer, collector, and patron, whose work Wilde reflected back on in 1933. The art historian and collector Count Karl Wilczek recommended Wilde to the young Viennese aristocrat Count Antoine Seilern (1901–1978). The two became lifelong friends and Wilde’s taste and knowledge informed celebrated Seilern’s art collection, later bequeathed to the Courtauld Institute of Art.

In 1928, the second volume of Dvořák’s Italian lectures was published and Wilde and Karl Maria Swoboda expressed their gratitude to Dvořák’s student Hans Sedlmayr, who was then helping to edit for publication the writings of the eminent Viennese art historian Alois Riegl. In his introductory essay The Quintessence of Riegls Thought, Sedlmayr thanked Wilde for formulating the central ideas of that book. Sedlmayr’s influence on the upcoming generation of Viennese art historians during the 1920s and 1930s is well known and was continued by Ernst Gombrich. Even Wilde’s article on the reconstruction of Antonello da Messina’s San Cassiano Altarpiece published in 1929 tends to confirm this.

Wilde’s primary aim in the Antonello article was to verify an established concept of the stylistic evolution of Venetian Renaissance painting. He focused his investigations on a single work, the San Cassiano Altarpiece, a work of decisive importance for the history of Venetian painting of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. This remarkable work was well documented, but had been dismantled and had disappeared. Wilde once again benefitted from his close cooperation with Sebastian Issep and conducted X-radiography on what he believed to be the surviving fragments of the altarpiece in the Kunsthistorisches Museum. Following Bernard Berenson’s suggestions he reconstructed the original conception of the work. The method employed by Wilde incorporated some of Sedlmayr’s innovative ideas, expressed in his controversial Towards a Rigorous Science of Art, which was published as the introduction to the first volume of the Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen in 1931. The method Wilde developed demonstrates...
the intellectual authority of several Viennese scholars whom he knew or had studied with. Max Dvořák’s lectures on Michelangelo and Titian and Julius von Schlosser’s philological and historical study of primary textual sources are both introduced in his writings.

In 1939, after the Nazi annexation of Austria, Wilde and his wife, art historian Júlia Gyarfás, left the country, as did many other museum professionals, including Otto Benesch (1896–1964), Ernst Kris (1900–1957), Ernst H. Buschek (1889–1963), and Sebastian Issep (1884–1954).23 In 1939 Count Seilern, who possessed British citizenship, went to England with his art collection. He became a constant supporter of Wilde, who had also moved to England, where he soon resumed his research.

In London Wilde was able to study one of the best collections of Michelangelo drawings in the world at the British Museum. His catalogue, begun in 1940 but published only in 1953, is one of his greatest scholarly achievements.24 In comparison with Bernard Berenson, Wilde benefited also from the critical formalism developed by the founding fathers of the Vienna school. In the ensuing years he produced several essays on Michelangelo’s drawings. The last was devoted to Michelangelo’s elaborate small-scale drawings, which Wilde believed were made for fellow artists.25 Although Wilde adopted the approach of a critical formalist in this essay, six years earlier he had already declared: ‘... My objective is limited: to discuss a few cases in which some kind of connection appears to exist .... In other words, in the old-fashioned art historian’s way, I shall look for influences, though influences in the wider sense of the term, including conscious criticism and opposition.’26 This approach varied widely from those of two fellow-art historians, Frederick Antal and Charles de Tolnay, whom Wilde had become acquainted with back during his student days in Budapest. Antal, who had also studied under Dvořák and following his emigration to England also occasionally lectured at the Courtauld Institute, emphasised the social context of art. Charles de Tolnay, who wrote his dissertation under the supervision of Julius von Schlosser and spent much of his life in the United States and Italy, was principally engaged with the metaphysical world of symbols and cultural forms. It seems likely that Wilde’s personal experiences of Béla Kun’s Soviet Hungarian republic and Nazism led him, like many other art historians after the Second World War, to prefer formalism as the basis for his research. This offered clear benefits in his museum work, but also implied an apolitical aestheticism linked to the formalist approach to which English writers and scholars were inclined.27 Thus, Wilde’s formal analysis of works of art allied with a precise and subtle evaluation of historical sources might be considered to be a humanist celebration of canonical art which consciously sought to eliminate ideology and its consequences from art history.

Wilde’s work was concurrent with that of other Central European exiles in England. Earlier Vienna school graduates who arrived in London before the Second World War and developed close contacts or were directly associated with the Warburg and the Courtauld Institutes were Frederick Antal (1887–1954), Fritz Saxl (1890–1948), Otto Pächt (1902–1988), Otto Kurz (1908–1975), and Ernst Gombrich (1909–2001). They contributed hugely to the soaring reputation of continental professional art history and its interaction with the English antiquarian and critical traditions represented by John Ruskin, Roger Fry, and Adrian Stokes. Some of the exiles had also studied under Dvořák and never completely abandoned his intellectual legacy. For instance, although Fritz Saxl dedicated years of his life to Aby Warburg and his institute, he had retained close ties with Dvořák until the latter’s death in 1921, as did

4/ Antonello da Messina, Madonna with the Saints Nicolas of Bari, Anastasia (?), Ursula and Dominic (San Cassiano Altarpiece) 1475–1476
wood, 36/113 × 133.6 cm
Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien
Photo: Courtesy of Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien
Antal. When the question of editing Dvořák’s literary estate was raised for discussion, Saxl even expressed his interest in collaborating on the work.28

Wilde’s contribution to art history in England extended far beyond his museum catalogues and scholarly papers. He was also an influential teacher and mentor, appointed as Reader in the History of Art at the Courtauld Institute in 1947. He became Professor of History of Art in 1950, lecturing mostly on Michelangelo, early sixteenth-century Venetian painting, painting in Parma and Ferrara, and Florentine art. Wilde’s old friend from Vienna, Count Antoine Seilern allowed young adepts of art history to study his growing collection at 56 Princes Gate, a large house near the Victoria and Albert Museum. Thus, Seilern’s exceptional collection which nucleus was build up in Vienna and which followed in many ways the collection of the Kunsthistorisches Museum served also teaching purposes.29 Wilde taught generations of Courtauld students, several of whom became outstanding scholars and went on to play an important role in art historical studies in Britain and in the United States. His version of Viennese art history was a crucial inspiration for many students including John Shearman, Michael Hirst, John White, Andrew Martindale, and Michael Kitson, all of whom became influential scholars and teachers.30 Through Wilde the legacy of Max Dvořák and Julius von Schlosser not only survived, but through the process of cultural confluence with the English art critical and antiquary traditions was transmuted into its own distinctive mode, which came to be widely and internationally recognised.

Wilde always spoke heavily accented English, and like Dvořák, whose Bohemian German had been similarly criticised in his time, he meticulously wrote out his lectures in their entirety. Thus, after his death in 1971, his reputation was confirmed by the appearance of posthumous publications. Wilde’s pupils edited his manuscripts and the first volume of lectures on Venetian painting was published in 1974. Four years later his lectures on Michelangelo appeared precisely fifty years after Dvořák’s own lectures on sixteenth-century Italian art, in which late Michelangelo occupied a significant role.31
Wilde established his reputation in the field of Italian art as a scholar who applied technical analysis, first-rate connoisseurship and imagination to problem solving.\textsuperscript{32} He continued Dvořák’s research on Michelangelo and Venetian Renaissance painting as well as his precise connoisseurship. In this Wilde faithfully followed the tradition of the Vienna school of art history since Moritz Thausing and his student Franz Wickhoff, who had conceived of connoisseurship as a specific scientific method. However, while Wilde’s teacher fused art history with the history of ideas, Wilde sought to integrate questions about ways of seeing with technical analysis. His study of painting techniques brought connoisseurship to a new, more analytical level. By adding to his intellectual agenda a range of well-established methods from the world of the natural sciences Wilde was among the first Viennese art historians to transcend what has long been a difficult area – the boundary between the humanities and sciences. He modestly shared his experience with his students at the Courtauld Institute.

\textbf{Notes}

1. In writing this article, I have benefited from the help of many individuals whom I wish to thank. First of all, I am enormously grateful to Eve Borsook, who encouraged me to write this paper, for her essential remarks and suggestions on the first draft of the manuscript and generally for her constructive criticism. I am indebted to Christopher White who, as a former pupil of Wilde, kindly commented on the text. I am thankful to Charles Hope for the valuable time made available to me during my work on this paper and for his willingness to discuss things related to the topic with me. Mark Evans and Bram Kempers patiently commented on the first version of the present text and generously shared information. Also, I am deeply indebted to Kathryn Brush, who read the text and responded with many valuable suggestions. Marcella Marongiu from Casa Buonarroti and Louisa Wood from the Frick Collection generously helped me in various ways. My sincere thanks go to Johannes Weiss from the Archive of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna and Martin G. Emme from the Archive of the Universität Wien. Finally I wish to thank Ernst Vegelin for allowing me to consult the Seilern archive preserved at the Courtauld Gallery’s archive and Helen Graham for her knowledgeable comment on Johannes Wilde memorabilia. It should also be mentioned that in 2009 I was able to consult materials in the London archives and libraries concerning Johannes Wilde and Count Antoine Seilern, in part thanks to a grant from the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art. – Dvořák wrote: ‘…Má práce o bratřích z Eycka u počátečního nizozemského malířství vyjde během léta. Jsem zvědav na výsledek, poněvadž se stavím diskutovaných…’ Dvořák’s letter to Jaroslav Goll dated 22 June 1903, in: Max Dvořák, Listy o životě a umění (Letters about Life and Art), ed. Jaromír Pečírka, Praha 1943, p. 119. Translation from the Czech is by the author.


8. Johannes Wilde – Karl M. Swoboda (eds), Geschichte der italienischen Kunst im Zeitalter der Renaissance: akademische Vor-


Ingrid Ciulisová – DVOŘÁK’S PUPIL JOHANNES WILDE (1891–1970)

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1936, No. 1, pp. 7–11. In 1940 Wilde, as a non-Jewish Austrian, was placed in a concentration camp and subsequently deported to 1938–1945


27. Podro (see note 23), p. 85.


29. Count Antoine Seilern who strongly opposed the Nazi regime bequeathed a part of his collection, formed also through Wilde’s astute advice, to the Home House Trustees for the Courtauld Institute of Art, London University in 1978. The Courtauld acquired this huge bequest, comprising chiefly paintings, drawings, prints, and a large art library, including rare books, under Seilern’s last will. The donation, called the Princes Gate Collection, is generally considered to be one of the single greatest gifts received by a British gallery. The Princes Gate Collection (exh. cat.), introduction by Helen Graham, Courtauld Institute Galleries, London c. 1981, p. VII.


32. Meyer Shapiro wrote: ‘His papers on Italian painting are extraordinarily fine works, models of exactness and full of surpris- ing insights. He is internationally known for his results with modern physical methods, especially X-rays. He is admired by connoisseurs as well as by scholars in the field of Italian art for his expertise and sensibility. There is no one here who combines, like Dr Wilde, technical laboratory skill, first rate connoisseurship and imagination in solving problems.’ Ulrike Wendland, Biographisches Handbuch deutschsprachiger Kunsthistoriker im Exil: Leben und Werk der un- ter dem Nationalsozialismus verfolgten und vertriebenen Wissen- schafter, Munich 1999, Vol. 2, p. 771.

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