

Julius Schlosser breaks yet another barrier

Review of:

Julius von Schlosser, *Art and Curiosity Cabinets of the Late Renaissance: A Contribution to the History of Collecting*, edited by Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, translation by Jonathan Blower, Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2021, 222 pp., 7 colour and 103 b/w illustrations, 1 line drawing, paperback US \$65.00, UK £55.00, ISBN 978-1-60606-665-2.

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This is an excellent translation with valuable annotations of an important but unusually quirky and difficult text on a subject not easily accessible. Nearly everybody should be able to learn at least something here. Editorially, it is a great improvement over the Getty edition of Schlosser's 'Geschichte der Porträtbildnerei in Wachs: Ein Versuch' where the inaccuracies began with the title, clauses were omitted and the mistakes in the footnotes simply repeated.¹ These writings are a great challenge and have been largely ignored due to this difficulty, but in my own updated English edition of *Die Kunstliteratur*, I have translated more literally and retained more of the adventurous syntax, irony and shades of sarcasm, remaining well aware of the advantages and disadvantages of the various editorial styles.

Julius Schlosser (1866-1938) was a grey eminence of the Austrian art historians, officially active at the University of Vienna from 1892 to 1936 through a critical period when the subject emerged and was defined as an academic discipline. Since his lectures were difficult to follow, his written sentences extremely complicated, idiosyncratic, and his devoted students driven all around the world, his work is best known through the work of those students. On the basis of his training in ancient literature, archaeology and philosophy, Schlosser was able to develop a deeper perspective critical of his colleagues Alois Riegl and Max Dvořák, in an 'approach' familiar to the English speaking world from the work of Ernst Gombrich and Otto Kurz who continued it at times very literally.

Schlosser worked in a period long before our familiar self-perpetuating bubble of academic 'discourse' and post-modernist gas. It was a time when the bookworm was able to read practically all relevant publications as they appeared and spend long hours quietly in the archives and libraries. In the diverse cultural situation of Vienna at the end of the nineteenth century, Schlosser was careful to address all audiences. His most serious studies are certainly those to have appeared in the *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen* and the *Sitzungsberichte* of the

¹ Roberta Panzanelli ed., *Ephemeral Bodies: Wax Sculpture and the Human Figure*, Los Angeles: Getty, 2008, pp. 171-314.

Academy of Sciences, yet in spite of his convoluted style he lectured in public places and also published in popular periodicals such as the *Beilage der Allgemeinen Zeitung* or *Corona*, both in Munich. Indeed, his bibliographical interests were boundless and he frequently quotes from daily newspapers. *Die Kunst- und Wunderkammern* appeared in the series 'Monographien des Kunstgewerbes', which was published by Klinkhardt & Biermann for the interested layman without academic specialization. In *Die Kunstliteratur*, Schlosser cites only two of the other volumes by way of correcting errors, intimating that in his mind, these volumes did not make an original contribution to the subject. He himself intended to do so, and in fact, unlike anything else from the series, his volume has been translated into Italian and French and was revised in German in 1978. Even compared to the larger studies illustrating Schlosser's theoretical interests, the enduring value of the present book as an introduction to the prehistory of our art museums also yields a view onto the history of ideas, mentalities and much else that can still entertain post-structuralists more than a century after it was written. This book is also remarkable in the annals of the Institut für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung, his intellectual home. Unlike so many of us, Schlosser had an easy relationship to the ancient and modern languages and read the philosophers from Plato to Schelling as well as nineteenth-century scientific theory closely and with an abiding interest. One of his students recalled that 'he could make the driest possible subject come alive'. We can only be pleased to see one of his earlier publications to finally come alive to the English reader.

Any of those who have consulted his writings are familiar with the difficulties. Some editors might enjoy colloquialism, but not every reader of this version will be edified by 'what Montaigne was getting at' (p. 96) or other similar expressions. 'The large collection of Dürers' (p. 208 n. 30) might better be slightly more specific as to the medium and number.

For the nineteenth-century rationalist viewing his own 'burden of erudition' (p. 86) as the key to the beatitudes, the term '*volkstümlich*' expressed a very particular social antithesis so that 'populist' (p. 76) is not the ideal choice of words. It illustrates the difficulties in bridging the 'mentalités'. A turn of phrase such as 'Margaret of Mechelen' (p. 90) is a bit vague, ahistorical and can cause confusion. Rich 'surrounds' (p. 84) is not something I was familiar with and will make some of us think of 'settings', 'sockets', or perhaps 'frames'. 'Places' for the peculiar sixteenth century noun '*Stellen*' (p. 104) seems odd instead of something like 'emplacement' or 'installation'. Schlosser's extremely tangled sentences meet the inscrutability of sixteenth and seventeenth century usage and very many readers will be very grateful to Jonathan Blower for his good translation. Inevitably, even such a piece of work as Schlosser at the popularizing level provides enough ambivalence as it is. When he spells out Jacopo de' Barbari (p. 93) why omit the actual name here? At least the facts and the figures should be spelled out in black and white.

Very few readers will be grateful for references such as 'Jahrbuch Reg XIV, 10672' (p. 110) which to make this edition useful should read: David von Schönherr,

'Urkunden und Regesten aus dem k k Statthaltereia-Archiv in Innsbruck (Fortsetzung)', *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des Allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses*, vol. 14, 1893, part two, p. CLXVII no. 10672, similar to the way these editions are cited in his notes 37, 40 or 45. It reveals how closely the author read the documents, stuck to facts, and in later years expected his students to do the same.

The 'Reise-Diarium bey Fürstlich Sachsen Weimarischer Abschickung nach Dresden und Annaburg Anno 1654' published in Johann Joachim Müller, *Entdecktes Staats-Cabinet, achte Eröffnung*, as chapter 3, quoted on p. 147 actually dates from 1717 and not 1771. It indeed begins on page 220, but it will interest some readers that it ends on page 274. As we move into electronic formats, such printing errors, omissions and other mistakes will become very irritating problems. The facilities of the Getty Center, Princeton and London are not available to everybody and could probably have been used to correct such details.

Even after the subordinate clauses have been brought under control without the redundancy of the original, prepositions are always fun and present interesting questions. Most of us would grant the Church of St. John in Lüneburg its article (p. 72), admit that the Hvezda is no longer outside of Prague but now within it (p. 96, 111), but insist that the Zollfeld might be within the district but not the city of Klagenfurt (p. 68). The translation of disjointed sentences can be elegant as when integrating the '*Kind und Kegel*' of the glass blower from Murano (p. 96), but on occasion very slightly obscure. When we are told that the *boti* in Florence, SS. Annunziata were 'finally' removed in the eighteenth century, Schlosser's actual tense and term are being sacrificed to smoothen things (p. 74), again a very minor matter but something that can satisfy us in this case.

It will be very helpful and pleasing to most readers that many off-beat or not precisely translatable terms are given with the original in brackets. Even aside from the changes in the language, a certain ambiguity lies in the very nature of 'art and curiosity'.

Amidst all of this, the thorough use of reliable historical sources can be appreciated in this translation and its notes. The text has endured because its author knew more than most others

Professor Kaufmann is known to us personally as an affable and knowledgeable scholar with a large private library, able to build on the research of Karl Vocelka and his students ensconced in the Finanz- und Hofkammerarchiv in the Himmelpfortgasse. He has provided us with the standard references on the artists in Prague during the reign of Rudolf II and many other related topics, putting him in the perfect position to introduce Julius Schlosser to a new generation of English readers. While Schlosser was obviously a curmudgeon not politically correct to current academics, Professor Kaufmann gives an introduction surprisingly wobbly on the factoids.

Schlosser was not born to the knighthood. His mother achieved the patent posthumously for the father in 1871 and was able to sign the wedding invitations for her son as Sophie Freifrau von Schlosser.

His parents seem to have hailed from Koblenz and Mainz respectively, both in Rheinland-Pfalz and not Hessen (p. 6). For historians, the left bank of the Rhine had been Roman and the right bank not. Many of the locals still bear that in mind today.

Marcus Aurelius is generally believed to have expired in Sirmium and not in Vindobona (p. 9). The latter legend is not countenanced by *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* Third Edition, and the editor of an upcoming essay volume assures me that it is based on corrupted texts from far later.

Technically, Fritz Saxl (p. 3) was a student not of Schlosser, but of Max Dvořák with Strzygowski as his second reader. There are numerous others such as Betty Kurth, Georg Sobotka, Kurt Rathe or Emil Kaufmann who were all certainly influenced more by Schlosser than the other faculty although Dvořák and Strzygowski again took the oral examinations and ended up deciding whether their dissertations merited passing. While Saxl's dissertation was on the favourite Wickhoff-topic of Rembrandt subject matter, Ernst Gombrich has told us that during his entire tutelage with Schlosser, he could not recall having heard that name of Rembrandt a single time.

It might be true that 'with great reluctance' Schlosser 'gave up his position at the museum' (p. 14), but actually with the financial situation of the republic, he was being retired, could probably not have been promoted at the museum around the time when Max Dvořák unexpectedly died in February 1921. Unable to accept the influence of Josef Strzygowski, Schlosser was elected '*primo et unico loco*' and reluctantly accepted the bureaucratic responsibilities of the *Ordinarius*, the full-professor, dogged until his death by the difficulties in finding places for his students to publish their work. Interestingly, Strzygowski voted for Schlosser's appointment. Wilhelm Köhler was originally supposed to be hired beside him as *Extra-Ordinarius*, but the ministry could not fund that position and Köhler found his place in his ancestral Weimar.

For the phrase '*Kunst- und Wunderkammern*' rather than simply '*Kunstammer*', as curator in charge of the Ambras collection 'Schlosser probably was familiar with this citation' within a will by Archduke Ferdinand of 1594, 'he would have had the opportunity to see it in print' *Jahrbuch der kunsthistorischen Sammlungen* 1894, p. 22. In some, such an understatement will arouse a smile or laugh about an author probably able to recite many of those documents from memory. It is exactly the sort of isolated reference that would attract Schlosser, who later in life constructed his meditation on 'Magistra Latinitas' on a single word in the Montecassino Chronicle by Leo of Ostia. Prof. Kaufmann cites the 1978 edition of the present book without telling the reader that the text was changed there without distinguishing the original from the not always edifying additions and changes.

We can only agree that at the end of his life, Schlosser might have made 'questionable political choices' (p. 16), but whatever the choices, they had little consequence and it is difficult to see that he 'joined the party' (p. 7). Such

conclusions seem to be contradicted by the larger of the Austrian document collections in the Gauarchiv belonging to the Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv at the Gasometer in Vienna where his name does not appear among Austrians who applied for membership. Although curiously, there are a number of others with the same name but different ages and locations, I could not find him in the card file filling 1400 microfilm rolls from the US National Archive. I understand that the Berlin Document Center now in the Bundesarchiv Berlin also includes the entire research done by the Deutsche Demokratische Republik on all aspects of German fascism, and have been informed that our Julius Schlosser does not appear there or in the *'bestandsübergreifendes Recherchemodul "invenio"'*. The unexpected end of the thousand year-old monarchy surprised nearly everybody, and there were many who saw the idea of 'Gross-Deutschland' as an economic solution, but would never have endorsed the *'Bewegung'* as Hitler led it.²

On both the maternal and paternal side, Julius Schlosser hailed from military families, was raised during the neo-absolutist period of the Franco-Prussian war well versed in political history. He was intense in some ways, more imbued with Goethe than most of us, eccentric or strange in other ways, deeply resentful in some academic disputes but remembered by students as an unusually polite person and went to unusual lengths to accommodate his Jewish students in the Austrian bureaucracy.

His conservative cultural utterances and Francophobic asides in *Die Kunstliteratur* suggest that he would have resented such things as the gradual French assimilation of what had been the 'Middle Empire' in the later Carolingian dynasty, and presumably also Bismarck's grant of autonomy to Luxembourg. While the art collections of Archduke Ferdinand, Emperor Rudolf II and Leopold Wilhelm remained somewhat intact and recognizable, Schlosser reminds us that the ever unrivalled collections of the Burgundian dukes were dissipated and melted down. This was his job as a curator. His uncharitable remarks about French history are based entirely in fact and not particularly emotional or eccentric. In the context of scholarship, he makes the point himself quite clearly in *Die Kunst des Mittelalters* (which will hopefully appear soon in an anthology I have prepared in English).

Two of Schlosser's best known students have admonished us to eliminate emotions based in religion from scholarship, Otto Pächt in his essay, 'Das Ende der Abbildtheorie', and Ernst Gombrich with surprising vehemence in a lecture from 1996.³ These are topics we should rather postpone to another time and place, but the ad hominem coda of 'Concluding Remarks' would better have been omitted from

² Donald G. Daviau, *Major Figures of Modern Austrian Literature*, Riverside CA: Ariadne, 1988, p. 5 note 3. Prof. Daviau dealt with that question in numerous other publications as well.

³ Otto Pächt, 'Vielfach den Ersatz für nicht mehr vollziehbare religiöse Erlebnisse', Pächt, 'Das Ende der Abbildtheorie', *Kritische Berichte zur kunstgeschichtlichen Literatur*, vol. 3-4, 1930-31, 1931-32, p. 9. Gombrich, *The Visual Arts in Vienna ca. 1900: Reflections on the Jewish Catastrophe*, The Austrian Cultural Institute London, 1996, Occasions no. 1, pp. 5-6.

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the present volume. In spite of some of these blemishes, this book provides an invaluable popular introduction to the scholarship of Julius Schlosser.

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