

# The reception of Max Dvořák's thought in Italy: resistances and unlucky attempts between the 1920s and the 1940s<sup>1</sup>

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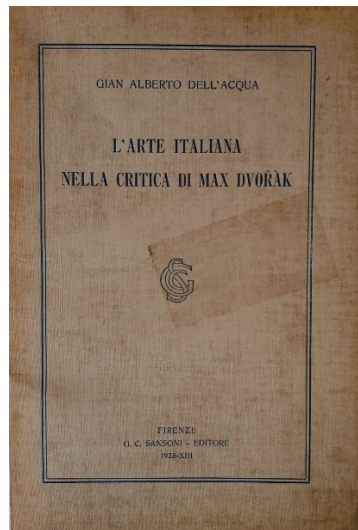


Figure 1 Gian Alberto Dell'Acqua, *L'arte italiana nella critica di Max Dvořák*, Florence: Sansoni, 1935.

When Max Dvořák died in 1921 not many works of him were published; two of his students, Johannes Wilde and Karl M. Swoboda, organized and published some of his art history lectures in the famous collections titled 'Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte'<sup>2</sup> and 'Geschichte der italienischen Kunst im Zeitalter der Renaissance'<sup>3</sup>. The already few publications resulted even fewer in Italian translations, highlighting a resistance by the Italian environment to fully embrace Dvořák's thought. To inquire the reasons behind this unwillingness by Italian scholars will be the main purpose of this essay.

In 1935 was published Gian Alberto Dell'Acqua's 'L'arte italiana nella critica di Max Dvořák'<sup>4</sup>, an essay elaborated while attending the *Scuola di Perfezionamento* in Pisa with Professor Matteo Marangoni. Until then, not many other Italian scholars

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<sup>1</sup> This essay is based on the talk 'The reception of Max Dvořák's thought in Italy' given at the conference 'The Vienna School of Art History III: Origin, Modifications and Influences of its theoretical Concepts' organized by the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences on the 19th and 20th April 2023. When not otherwise indicated, the English translations of the material are done by the author of the essay.

<sup>2</sup> Max Dvořák, *Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte. Studien zur abendländischen Kunstentwicklung von Max Dvořák*, curated by Johannes Wilde and Karl M. Swoboda, Munich: R. Piper & Co., 1924.

<sup>3</sup> Max Dvořák, *Geschichte der italienischen Kunst im Zeitalter der Renaissance: Akademische Vorlesungen*, I-II, Munich: R. Piper & Co., 1927-1928.

<sup>4</sup> Gian Alberto Dell'Acqua, *L'arte italiana nella critica di Max Dvořák*, Florence: Sansoni, 1935.

had written about this member of the *Wiener Schule der Kunstgeschichte*. In the 'Prefazione' Dell'Acqua notices: 'How many readers in Italy nowadays know the works of Max Dvořák? Most of the intellectual audience is not aware of them: even between art historians, for whom the name of this eminent scholar is as known as his writings, few devoted themselves intentionally to his thought'<sup>5</sup> [fig. 1].

The issue underlined by Dell'Acqua is twofold: on one hand there is a linguistic barrier. Dvořák's work was translated into Italian very late – for example 'Katechismus der Denkmalpflege'<sup>6</sup> in 1971, 'Idealismus und Naturalismus in der gotischen Skulptur und Malerei'<sup>7</sup> in 2003 – or not at all, like 'Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte'. Gianni Carlo Sciolla reads as 'symptomatic [...] to try to identify how works that are emblematic for Viennese art historiography are received and embraced by Italian critics;<sup>8</sup> Dvořák was not the only one overlooked by Italian translations: 'Die Kunstliteratur'<sup>9</sup> by Julius von Schlosser had to wait until 1935, 'Römische Kunst'<sup>10</sup> by Franz Wickhoff until 1947, and 'Stilfragen'<sup>11</sup> by Alois Riegl was first translated only in 1963. Still, a peculiar resistance can be observed when it comes to Dvořák's publications.

A very meaningful translation work for the Italian reception of non-Italian authors has been made by Sergio Bettini, who, in 1945, began an editorial plan for 'Le Tre Venezie', or as Michela Agazzi said: 'an extensive cultural project'<sup>12</sup> involving the translation into Italian of many writings, substantial for the art history

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<sup>5</sup> Gian Alberto Dell'Acqua, 'Prefazione' in *L'arte italiana nella critica di Max Dvořák*, (V-VII) V: 'Quanti lettori oggi in Italia conoscono gli scritti di Max Dvořák? La quasi totalità del pubblico colto li ignora: e tra gli stessi storici dell'arte, ai quali il nome dell'insigne studioso è altrettanto noto quanto le sue opere, non sono molti quelli che si sono occupati si proposito del pensiero di lui.'

<sup>6</sup> Max Dvořák, *Katechismus der Denkmalpflege*, Vienna: J. Bard, 1918. Italian Translation: Maurizio Calvesi, 'Prefazione alla traduzione italiana di Max Dvořák, Catechismo per la tutela dei monumenti', in *Bollettino di Italia Nostra*, June 1972.

<sup>7</sup> Max Dvořák, *Idealismus und Naturalismus in der gotischen Skulptur und Malerei* (Fortsetzung.) in *Historische Zeitschrift*, Bd. 119, H. 2, 1919, (185-246). Translation: Riccardo Marchi, *Max Dvořák, Idealismo e naturalismo nella scultura e nella pittura gotica*, Milan: Franco Angeli, 2003, 7-106.

<sup>8</sup> Gianni Carlo Sciolla, 'La scuola di Vienna e la critica d'arte in Italia agli inizi del XX secolo' in *Wien und die Entwicklung der kunsthistorischen Methode*, XXV. Internationalen Kongresses für Kunstgeschichte, Vienna, 1984-1986, 65-81.

<sup>9</sup> Julius von Schlosser, *Die Kunstliteratur. Ein Handbuch zur Quellenkunde der neueren Kunstgeschichte*, Vienna: Anton Schroll & Co., 1924. Translation: Julius von Schlosser, *La letteratura artistica. Manuale delle fonti della storia dell'arte moderna*, Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1935.

<sup>10</sup> Franz Wickhoff, *Römische Kunst (Die Wiener Genesis)*, Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1895. Translation: Carlo Anti (curator), *Franz Wickhoff, Arte Romana*, Padua: Le Tre Venezie, 1947.

<sup>11</sup> Alois Riegl, *Stilfragen: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik*, Berlin: Georg Siemens, 1893. Translation: Mario Pacor, *Alois Riegl, Problemi di stile: fondamenti di una storia dell'arte ornamentale*, Milan: Feltrinelli, 1963.

<sup>12</sup> Michela Agazzi, 'Per una biografia di Sergio Bettini' in *L'opera di Sergio Bettini*, curated by Michela Agazzi and Chiara Romanelli, Venice: Marsilio, 2011, (49-80) 62-63: 'un progetto culturale esteso.'

discipline. In Bettini's series, titled 'Ligeia. Contributi alla storia delle civiltà artistiche' can be found texts by Heinrich Wölfflin, Erwin Panofsky, Alois Riegl, Henri Focillon, and many others. Initially, the editorial plan also included the translation of 'Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte', but it was never fulfilled.

On the other hand, if part of the fault for the lack of reception is to be attributed to a difficulty in the reading of the original source, nevertheless, as pointed out by Dell'Acqua: '[this] reason certainly applies to the general public, not to scholars, whose attitude of reservation, and – I would say – distrust must, in my opinion, be otherwise motivated.'<sup>13</sup> Dell'Acqua is referring to Benedetto Croce's aesthetic, widely spread in the Italian intellectual environment, opposed to broader cultural, religious, and philosophical approaches to the work of art, and more inclined to a distinction between poetic and non-poetic in the artistic field.

Dell'Acqua is not the first one noticing the impact on reception given by the conflictual point of view between Dvořák and Croce<sup>14</sup>; another reviewer, Vincenzo Golzio, underlined this distance: 'The history of art represents for him [Dvořák] the history of the spirit not in the sense that would give it a Crocean, but in a sense that could be better said Hegelian.'<sup>15</sup>

A useful insight regarding the ideological forces at stake in the field of art history in the early 20th century is that of Claudio Gamba<sup>16</sup>, who traces the history of the writing of the 'Art' entry for the important 'Enciclopedia Italiana'. The publishing project was headed by philosopher, historian, and politician Giovanni Gentile, who entrusted one of the most important encyclopedic entries to Julius von Schlosser, specifically asking the Viennese scholar, in a letter from 1928, to write about 'the tasks and forms of art concerning the changing of social conditions, similarly, in a sense, to what Dvořák did in his essay on idealism and naturalism in

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<sup>13</sup> Gian Alberto Dell'Acqua, *L'arte italiana nella critica di Max Dvořák*, (V-VII) V: 'Difficoltà di linguaggio, aggravate dalla mancanza di traduzioni? La ragione certamente vale per il grosso pubblico, non per gli studiosi, il cui atteggiamento di riserva, e, direi, di diffidenza va secondo me altrimenti motivato. Soprattutto è da tenere presente la larga diffusione dell'estetica croceana la quale non può non rimproverare all'indirizzo metodologico di cui ci occupiamo, formatosi fuori di essa, di nutrire un interesse eccessivo nei riguardi del significato culturale, e specialmente religioso e filosofico, dell'opera d'arte, a scapito del valore più propriamente estetico di essa: di non distinguere a sufficienza poesia e non poesia.'

<sup>14</sup> This comparison with Crocean aesthetic could also be seen as one of the reasons why the term 'Geistesgeschichte' was not translated in 'storia delle idee', being too similar to Croce's 'idealism', but in 'storia dello spirito'.

<sup>15</sup> Vincenzo Golzio, 'Max Dvořák "Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte"' in *Bollettino Bibliografico, L'Arte*, XXVIII, 1925, (131-132) 132: 'La storia dell'arte per lui è storia dello spirito non nel senso che a questa espressione potrebbe dare un croceano, ma in un senso che si potrebbe dir piuttosto hegeliano.'

<sup>16</sup> Claudio Gamba, "Forse il più difficile lavoro che ho mai intrapreso". Schlosser e il carteggio con Giovanni Gentile per la redazione della voce Arte nell'Enciclopedia Italiana (1928-1930) in *L'Italia di Julius von Schlosser*, curated by Loredana Lorizzo, Rome: De Luca Editori d'arte, 2018, 41-58.

Gothic art.<sup>17</sup> Gamba notices how Gentile's choice to ask Schlosser, a Viennese scholar personally close to Croce, to write about Dvořák's art history theory specifically, is not accidental and is actually inscribed within the relation, of conflictual nature, with Croce, as well as in the interpretation of history given by Gentile:

In the immanence of "pensiero pensato", which is the basis of Gentile's actualism and which seeks to overcome the philosophy of distinctions of the idealistic Crocean system, the aesthetic moment, i. e. art, cannot be isolated from all the other components of the life of the Spirit; therefore, the history of art, instead of isolating itself in the loose pearls of Crocean criticism, had to be woven into the unitary design of the history of culture.<sup>18</sup>

This issue allows to hint at the instrumental and ideological use of Dvořák's name and legacy in Italy soon after his death. As said by Arturo Quintavalle:

In the history of art criticism in Italy, the weight of Benedetto Croce's philosophy is also decisive for criticism historians [...] and ends up conditioning many experiences. To understand the historical context, it is necessary to distinguish at least two moments of the dialogue between art historians and Crocean philosophy. The first is the period between the two wars, that of fascism and its impositions also in the aesthetic field, when the Gentilian reflection officially becomes a reference point for the regime: well then, and we must not forget it, being Croceans meant professing what Croce itself called "the religion of freedom".<sup>19</sup>

Gamba also points out how 'the reference to Max Dvořák and the problem of the relationship between art history (in the idealistic sense) and cultural history or the

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<sup>17</sup> Claudio Gamba, "Forse il più difficile lavoro che ho mai intrapreso". Schlosser e il carteggio con Giovanni Gentile per la redazione della voce Arte nell'Enciclopedia Italiana (1928-1930)', (41-58) 53.

<sup>18</sup> Claudio Gamba, "Forse il più difficile lavoro che ho mai intrapreso". Schlosser e il carteggio con Giovanni Gentile per la redazione della voce Arte nell'Enciclopedia Italiana (1928-1930)', (41-58) 53: 'Nell'immanenza del "pensiero pensato", che è alla base dell'attualismo gentiliano e che cerca di superare la filosofia delle distinzioni del sistema idealistico crociano, non può isolarsi il momento estetico, cioè l'arte, da tutte le altre componenti della vita dello Spirito; pertanto la storia dell'arte, invece di isolarsi nelle perle sciolte della critica crociana, doveva essere tessuta dentro il disegno unitario della storia della cultura.'

<sup>19</sup> Arturo Carlo Quintavalle, 'Sergio Bettini e la critica d'arte', in *Venezia Arti*, 24, Rome: Viella, 2014, (5-9) 5: 'Nella storia della critica d'arte in Italia il peso della filosofia di Benedetto Croce è determinante anche per storici della critica come Lionello Venturi e finisce per condizionare molte esperienze. Per capire il contesto storico occorre distinguere almeno due tempi del dialogo fra storici dell'arte e filosofia crociana. Il primo è il periodo fra le due guerre, dunque quello del fascismo e delle sue imposizioni anche in ambito estetico, quando la riflessione gentiliana diventa ufficialmente punto di riferimento per il regime: ebbene allora, e non si deve dimenticarlo, essere crociani voleva dire professare quella che Croce stesso chiamava "la religione della libertà".'

history of civilization is absolutely central to the critical and historiographical debate of those years.<sup>20</sup>

This debate took place primarily in specialized magazines: between 1925 and 1935 four reviews were written on the recently published 'Vorlesungen' by Max Dvořák. The aforementioned Vincenzo Golzio revised 'Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte' in 1925<sup>21</sup> and 'Geschichte der italienischen Kunst in Zeitalter der Renaissance' in 1928<sup>22</sup> for the 'Bollettino Bibliografico' of the periodical 'L'Arte'. In the first review, Golzio – after insightfully mentioning that the title is given by some 'friends of the author'<sup>23</sup> – praises 'the return to an ideal, indeed transcendental, conception of art, which will come to be an expression of humanity's infinite aspirations', especially for the 'contrast with the predominant critical address of art as pure form and visibility.'<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, Golzio finds 'inevitable defects of the system' in the fact that 'for him [Dvořák], the reality of the work of art does not matter; he conceives artistic productions as strictly dependent on the culture of the period in which they arise.'<sup>25</sup> Ultimately what Golzio objects to this method is the fact that:

Dvořák does not consider the various works of art as an expression of the personality of their authors, but transcends them to find common characteristics to all the works of a certain period, without paying any attention to the individuality of the artists, remaining faithful to its premises, for which art is in close relationship with philosophical thought and cultural movement of the period in which it occurs.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Claudio Gamba, "Forse il più difficile lavoro che ho mai intrapreso". Schlosser e il carteggio con Giovanni Gentile per la redazione della voce Arte nell'Enciclopedia Italiana (1928-1930)', (41-58) 53: 'Il riferimento a Max Dvořák e al problema del rapporto tra storia dell'arte (nel senso estensivo idealistico) e storia della cultura o storia della civiltà è assolutamente centrale nel dibattito critico e storiografico di quegli anni.'

<sup>21</sup> Vincenzo Golzio, 'Max Dvořák "Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte"' in *Bollettino Bibliografico, L'Arte*, XXVIII, 1925, 131-132.

<sup>22</sup> Vincenzo Golzio, 'Max Dvořák "Geschichte der italienischen Kunst im Zeitalter der Renaissance"' in *Bollettino Bibliografico, L'Arte*, XXXI, 1928, 89-90.

<sup>23</sup> Vincenzo Golzio, 'Max Dvořák "Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte"', (131-132) 131: 'Molto seducente questo titolo che gli amici del Dvorak mettono in fronte a una postuma raccolta dei suoi saggi.'

<sup>24</sup> Vincenzo Golzio, 'Max Dvořák "Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte"', (131-132) 131: 'Questo libro certamente è molto importante per la storia della critica d'arte, in cui segna come un ritorno a una concezione ideale, anzi trascendente, dell'arte, che verrebbe a essere espressione di aspirazioni infinite dell'umanità [...]. Forte e quasi strano contrasto con l'indirizzo critico predominante dell'arte come pura forma e visibilità.'

<sup>25</sup> Vincenzo Golzio, 'Max Dvořák "Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte"', (131-132) 131: 'Per lui la realtà dell'opera d'arte non conta; egli concepisce le produzioni artistiche come strettamente dipendenti dalla cultura del periodo in cui sorgono [...].'

<sup>26</sup> Vincenzo Golzio, 'Max Dvořák "Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte"', (131-132) 132: 'Il Dvořák non considera le varie opere d'arte come espressione della personalità dei loro autori, ma le trascende per trovare dei caratteri comuni a tutte le opere di un determinato periodo, senza curarsi affatto dell'individualità degli artisti, restando fedele alle sue premesse, per cui l'arte è in strettissima relazione col pensiero filosofico.'

In the review of 1928, once more praising some aspects like the interpretation of, for example, Gothic art, Golzio complains about Dvořák's 'tendency towards abstraction'<sup>27</sup>, in his opinion particularly 'indigestible' for the Italian intellectual environment. As the author himself notices, both reviews are very brief and can only address the various topics presented by Dvořák.<sup>28</sup>

Another comment on 'Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte' was signed in 1925 by Vittorio Moschini<sup>29</sup> on 'La Cultura', a periodical directed at the time by Cesare De Lollis, but tied to Crocean positions. In his review, Moschini welcomes the way in which '[Dvořák] wanted to comprehend in art the deepest sense of the general historical development in its complexity,'<sup>30</sup> but remains skeptical about the 'transcendental' analysis:

Perhaps Dvořák in dealing with the so-called figurative arts, has been too far removed from that criticism of the values of visibility, which if theorized can only lead to the abstractions of schemes as by Wölfflin, [...]. He went too far behind that his vague psychological concept of idealism, spiritualism, and has not always taken enough into account what *style* is.<sup>31</sup>

A longer review is the one dedicated by Aldo Bertini in 1931 to 'the concept of art dominant in [Dvořák's] criticism.'<sup>32</sup> The author derives Dvořák's concept of 'historical continuity' from Alois Riegl's 'continuity that is no longer understood only in the sense of the development of formal problems, but as a more complex legacy of all the spirituality of an era.'<sup>33</sup> Another important link between the two Viennese scholars is found by Bertini in the denial 'of the possibility of criticism based on absolute aesthetics,'<sup>34</sup> namely the rejection of the esthetic judgment in

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<sup>27</sup> Vincenzo Golzio, 'Max Dvořák "Geschichte der italienischen Kunst im Zeitalter der Renaissance"', (89-90) 89: '[...] resta però in lui la tendenza all'astrazione, che l'arte dello scrittore non riesce a render inavvertita al nostro temperamento latino.'

<sup>28</sup> Vincenzo Golzio, 'Max Dvořák "Geschichte der italienischen Kunst im Zeitalter der Renaissance"', (89-90) 90: '[...] la nostra povera esposizione.'

<sup>29</sup> Vittorio Moschini, 'Max Dvořák "Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte"', in *La Cultura*, 1925, 280-281.

<sup>30</sup> Vittorio Moschini, 'Max Dvořák "Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte"', (280-281) 280: 'Egli ha voluto cogliere nell'arte il senso più profondo di tutto uno svolgimento storico nella sua complessità.'

<sup>31</sup> Vittorio Moschini, 'Max Dvořák "Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte"', (280-281) 281: 'Forse il Dvořák trattando delle cosiddette arti figurative è stato troppo lontano da quella critica dei valori di visibilità, che se teorizzata non può non condurre alle astrazioni degli schemi alla Wölfflin, [...]. Egli è andato troppo dietro a quel suo vago concetto psicologico di idealismo, spiritualismo, e non ha sempre tenuto conto abbastanza di ciò che è *stile*.'

<sup>32</sup> Aldo Bertini, 'Sulla critica di Dvořák', *L'Arte*, XXXIV, 1931, (461-467) 461: '[...] il concetto di arte dominante nella sua critica.'

<sup>33</sup> Aldo Bertini, 'Sulla critica di Dvořák', (461-467) 463: 'Continuità che non è più intesa solo nel senso di sviluppo di problemi formali, ma come eredità più complessa di tutta la spiritualità di un'epoca.'

<sup>34</sup> Aldo Bertini, 'Sulla critica di Dvořák', (461-467) 463: '[...] [Dvořák] nega la possibilità di una critica basata su un'estetica assoluta.'

order to achieve the autonomy of discipline. The absence of 'valuation interest' is an aspect underlined by Dell'Acqua as well:

Given this fundamental critical interest, which interprets artistic phenomena in the light of general promises and intentions, regardless of the peculiar way in which they are resolved in the reality of figurative representation, it is understandable that Dvořák may not have any valuation interest, and that his art history does not necessarily include works of art as such. In fact, mediocre or even lacking works are included in it by right, since the artistic program of the time is revealed, sometimes with peculiar evidence in them.<sup>35</sup>

While 'Riegl's method to demonstrate the spirituality of stylistic becoming consisted in noting that the works of art were the result of a determined conscious-will, *Kunstwollen*,'<sup>36</sup> in Bertini's opinion, 'the greatest effort of Dvořák's criticism [...] is to indicate the collaboration of art to the universal consciousness, that is, to point out the element of thought inherent in the work of art.'<sup>37</sup> For the Italian author, this perspective is 'wrong' because it does not consider 'individuality' and even more because it searches in religion and philosophy the relations between work of art and 'historical events': 'really, the history of the spirit into which he [Dvořák] would like to insert the history of art is nothing more than the history of religion or philosophy.'<sup>38</sup>

Bertini published this comment on Dvořák's criticism in 1931 on 'L'Arte', the same journal, directed by Adolfo Venturi, which contained the article of Golzio. Venturi was a figure of great importance in the field, for Italian art historiography, as well as for the European one. It is therefore important to keep in mind the consideration that Venturi expressed of the Viennese colleague: in short, in his *memoires* Adolfo Venturi remembers Dvořák as 'an excellent scholar, [...] but the poor guy always had his head in the clouds of metaphysics.'<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Gian Alberto Dell'Acqua, *L'arte italiana nella critica di Max Dvořák*, 5: 'Posto questo fondamentale interesse critico, che interpreta i fenomeni artistici alla luce di generali promesse e intenzioni, senza badare al modo peculiare con cui esse si risolvono nella realtà della rappresentazione figurativa, si comprende come per lo Dvořák possa anche non sussistere un interesse valutativo e come la sua storia dell'arte non comprenda necessariamente opere d'arte in quanto tali. In essa infatti rientrano di diritto opere mediocri od addirittura mancate, poiché in esse si palesa, talora con singolare evidenza, il programma artistico del tempo.'

<sup>36</sup> Aldo Bertini, 'Sulla critica di Dvořák', (461-467) 462: 'Il metodo del Riegl per dimostrare la spiritualità del divenire stilistico consisteva nel rilevare come le opere d'arte fossero il risultato di una volontà cosciente determinata, *Kunstwollen*.'

<sup>37</sup> Aldo Bertini, 'Sulla critica di Dvořák', (461-467) 464: 'Lo sforzo massimo della critica di Dvořák in questi saggi, è di indicare questa collaborazione dell'arte alla coscienza universale, cioè in altre parole rilevare l'elemento di pensiero insito nell'opera d'arte.'

<sup>38</sup> Aldo Bertini, 'Sulla critica di Dvořák', (461-467) 465: 'Effettivamente la storia dello spirito in cui egli vorrebbe inserire la storia dell'arte, altro non è che storia della religione o della filosofia.'

<sup>39</sup> Adolfo Venturi, *Memorie autobiografiche*, Rome: Hoepli, 1927, 97: 'Dvořák ottimo studioso, ispettore artistico del Governo austriaco, ma il poveretto aveva sempre la testa nelle nuvole della metafisica.'

Adolfo Venturi's opinion encapsulates the objections raised by the reviewers and has clearly a deep influence on them. A few years later, in 1945, his son, Lionello Venturi, summarizes these positions as follows:

The history of the spirit means for Dvořák connection between the history of art and the history of philosophy and religion. We will discuss how the history of pure visibility, which is also called genetic-formal, considers the forms in their development, abstracting them from the personality of the artists. In the same way Dvořák considers the connection between art, philosophy, and religion: that is, abstract forms, dogmas and systems are put in relation to each other from the outside, as parallel documents of a given civilization. What is missing is the psychological mediation of the artist, which alone allows us to understand how forms, dogmas, and systems, reduced to the state of taste, are transformed into the single work of art. Dvořák's indifference to aesthetic judgment is the first cause of the lack of fusion of the elements of which his history is composed.<sup>40</sup>

In this context, could as well be taken into consideration the implications of Dvořák's open letter 'Ein Brief an die italienischen Fachgenossen'<sup>41</sup> written in 1919 after the Italian government demanded the return from Austrian collections of numerous Italian works of art as a war reparation. The tones used are very harsh: 'It was not a nice impulse, gentlemen, who persuaded you to demand the Viennese pictures and codes.'<sup>42</sup> Dvořák appeals not only to an intellectual friendship between Italian and Austrian scholarship, but also to a due appreciation that Italians should reserve to German and Austrian scholars who have extensively studied Italian art, sometimes even rediscovering neglected periods like Franz Wickhoff did for late-roman art and Alois Riegl for Baroque. The one outlined by the author in these pages is a total dependence of the Italian scientific discipline of art history to the Austrian one:

The underlying method and conception of the problems is based much more on German and Austrian than on French or English art research. This is no coincidence, but it can be explained by the close relations that

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<sup>40</sup> Lionello Venturi, *Storia della critica d'arte*, Turin: Einaudi, 1964, 236: 'La storia dello spirito significa per Dvořák rapporto tra storia dell'arte e storia della filosofia e della religione. Vedremo come la storia della pura visibilità, che si chiama anche genetico-formale, considera le forme nel loro svolgimento astraendole dalla personalità degli artisti. Nello stesso modo Dvořák considera il rapporto tra l'arte, la filosofia, e la religione: cioè le forme astratte, i dogmi e i sistemi sono messi in rapporto tra loro dall'esterno, come documenti paralleli di una data civiltà. Quel che manca è la mediazione psicologica dell'artista, che sola permette di capire come forme, dogmi e sistemi, ridotti allo stato di gusto, si trasformino nella singola opera d'arte. L'indifferenza del Dvořák per il giudizio estetico è la causa prima della mancata fusione degli elementi di cui si compone la sua storia.'

<sup>41</sup> Max Dvořák, 'Ein Brief an die italienischen Fachgenossen' in Hans Tietze, *Die Entführung von Wiener Kunstwerken nach Italien. Eine Darlegung unseres Rechtsstandpunktes*, Vienna: A. Schroll, 1919, 3-9.

<sup>42</sup> Max Dvořák, 'Ein Brief an die italienischen Fachgenossen', (3-9) 3: 'Es war kein schöner Impuls, meine Herrn, der Euch bewogen hat, die Wiener Bilder und Kodizes zu verlangen.'



once united us. It is no exaggeration to say that you have learned and adopted much from us. Not only in scientific results, but in the whole organisation of the work in art history. Scientifically, you are not only our allies, but also our pupils, and now you are setting hand grenades in motion that are to the doors of our museums and libraries.<sup>43</sup>

Dvořák does not spare some other accusations: 'You have already showered us with invective and defamation in your books and essays during the war years, but we have never waged war against your culture, art and science.'<sup>44</sup> Truthfully, a few years earlier, Dvořák too had written about Italian academic accomplishment, and on one of the most important one: the 'Storia dell'arte italiana' by Adolfo Venturi<sup>45</sup>. In the review 'the limits of this volume are underlined with great courtesy'<sup>46</sup> but nonetheless, it could be argued, with punctuality and firmness: 'Despite the abundance of material contained in his art history, no mention can be made of an even approximative completeness, and at times we will not even be able to spare the author the reproach that he neglected monuments, which should definitely be used to understand the art development that took place.'<sup>47</sup> It would be difficult to indicate what weight Dvořák's words might have had on his reception by Italian scholars, but it certainly was not insignificant.

Nevertheless, a sign of a possible dialogue between Viennese and Italian art historians around the 1920s is documented in two letters written by Antonio Morassi<sup>48</sup> to Oswald Kutschera-Woborsky at the end of 1919 and at the beginning of

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<sup>43</sup> Max Dvořák, 'Ein Brief an die italienischen Fachgenossen', (3-9) 7: 'Die ihnen zugrunde liegende Methode und Auffassung der Probleme berührt sich viel mehr mit der deutschen und österreichischen Kunstforschung als mit der französischen oder englischen. Dies ist kein Zufall, sondern erklärt sich aus den engen Beziehungen, die uns einst verbunden haben. Es ist nicht Überhebung, wenn ich behaupte, dass Ihr viel von uns gelernt und übernommen habt nicht nur an wissenschaftlichen Ergebnissen, sondern in der ganzen Organisation der kunstgeschichtlichen Arbeit. Wissenschaftlich seid Ihr nicht nur unsere Bundesgenossen, sondern auch unsere Schüler gewesen und nun setzt Ihr Handgranaten in Bewegung, die die Türen unserer Museen und Bibliotheken sprengen sollen.'

<sup>44</sup> Max Dvořák, 'Ein Brief an die italienischen Fachgenossen', (3-9) 8: 'Ihr habt uns bereits in den Kriegsjahren in Euren Büchern und Aufsätzen mit Schmähungen und Verleumdungen überschüttet, wir führten aber nie Krieg gegen Eure Kultur, Kunst und Wissenschaft.'

<sup>45</sup> Max Dvořák, 'Rezension: A. Venturi, Storia dell'arte italiana, I-III, Milano, 1901-1904' in *Kunstgeschichtliche Anzeigen*, II, 1905, 6-23; and in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kunstgeschichte*, Munich: R. Piper & Co., 1929, 315-322.

<sup>46</sup> Gianni Carlo Sciolla, 'La "Scuola di Vienna" e la critica d'arte in Italia agli inizi del XX secolo' in *Argomenti viennesi*, Turin: Il Segnalibro, 1993, (10-39) 18: 'i limiti di questo volume sono sottolineati del resto, con molto garbo.'

<sup>47</sup> Max Dvořák, 'Rezension: A. Venturi, Storia dell'arte italiana, I-III, Milano, 1901-1904', (315-322) 316: '[...] trotz der Fülle des Materials, welches seine Kunstgeschichte enthält, kann von einer auch nur annähernden Vollständigkeit nicht gesprochen werden, ja zuweilen werden wir dem Autor sogar nicht den Vorwurf ersparen können, dass er Denkmäler außer Acht ließ, die zum Verständnis der stattgefundenen Kunstentwicklung unbedingt herangezogen werden sollte.'

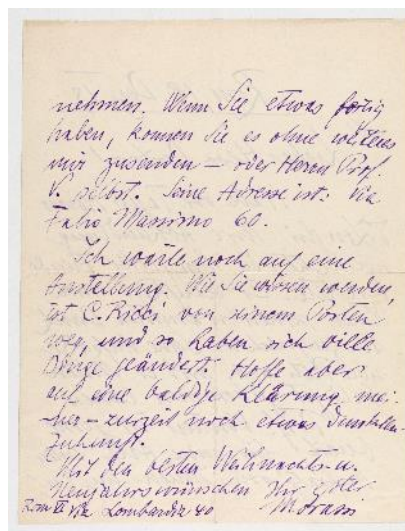
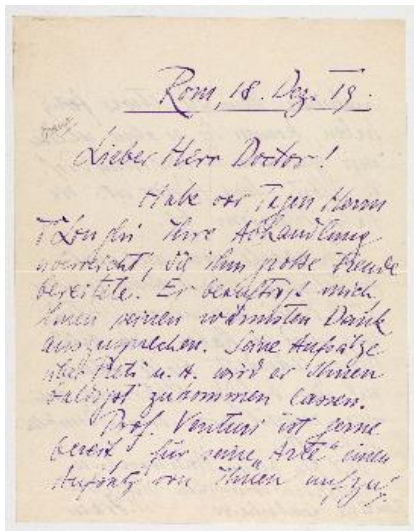
<sup>48</sup> Antonio Morassi (1893-1976) represents a peculiar connection between Austrian and Italian scholarship. Born in the Habsburg city of Gorizia, he studied in Vienna between 1912 and

1920, now preserved at the *Institut für Kunstgeschichte* in Vienna<sup>49</sup>. Morassi and Kutschera-Woborsky were both students of Max Dvořák, and both devoted themselves to Venetian painting from the 18th century. Their correspondence outlines a relationship of exchange between Vienna and Rome that involves Adolfo Venturi and Roberto Longhi, who are said to be receiving and sending drafts and publications. On the 18th of December 1919, Morassi writes [figs 2-3]:

Dear Doctor,

I have delivered your treatise to Dr. [Roberto] Longhi a few days ago, which has made him very happy. He begs me to offer his heartfelt thanks. He will have his essays on Preti sent as soon as possible.

Prof. [Adolfo] Venturi is more than willing to accept your introduction to his 'L'Arte'. If you have something ready, you can send it without further corrections to me – or to Prof. V[enturi] [...].<sup>50</sup>



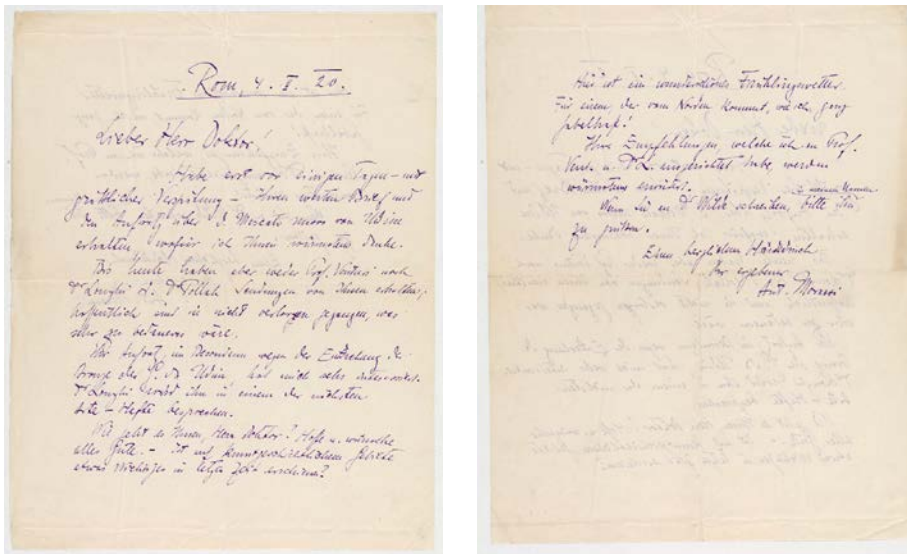
Figures 2 & 3 Letter from Antonio Morassi to Oswald Kutschera-Woborsky, 18/12/1919. Institutsarchiv: Kutschera-Woborski 12, 4. Flügelmappe Briefe an Kutschera III (Europa), Institut für Kunstgeschichte Wien.

1916, when he defended a thesis on the Italian architect Michele Sanmicheli in front of Josef Strzygowski, Julius von Schlosser and Max Dvořák. He then moved to Rome to attend the *Scuola di Perfezionamento* of Adolfo Venturi and became a valid scholar and superintendent in Italy. Nevertheless, he remained tied to what he had learned in Vienna with Dvořák, preserving the memory and the notes of his lectures, his books and his thought on art history and restoration.

<sup>49</sup> In Institutsarchiv: 'Kutschera-Woborski 12, 4. Flügelmappe Briefe an Kutschera III (Europa)'. See also: Francesca Bottura, 'Wiener Schule der Kunstgeschichte: L'insegnamento di Max Dvořák attraverso gli appunti di Antonio Morassi', in Giulio Zavatta, *Il Michele Sanmicheli di Antonio Morassi. La tesi all'Università di Vienna e una monografia perduta* (1916), Treviso: ZEL, 2022, 169-172.

<sup>50</sup> In Institutsarchiv: 'Kutschera-Woborski 12, 4. Flügelmappe Briefe an Kutschera III (Europa)': 'Caro Dottore, ho consegnato da alcuni giorni il vostro trattato al Dott. [Roberto] Longhi, cosa che gli ha fatto molto piacere. Egli mi prega di porle il suo caloroso ringraziamento. Vi farà mandare i suoi saggi su Preti il più presto possibile. Il Prof. [Adolfo] Venturi è più che disponibile ad accettare una vostra introduzione per la sua 'Arte'. Se aveste qualcosa di pronto, potete inviarlo senza ulteriori correzioni a me – o allo stesso Prof. V[enturi] [...].'

He writes again some months later, again reporting an ongoing conversation between Italian and Austrian art historians [figs 4-5].



Figures 4 & 5 Letter from Antonio Morassi to Oswald Kutschera-Woborsky, 04/02/1920. Institutsarchiv: Kutschera-Woborski 12, 4. Flügelmappe Briefe an Kutschera III (Europa), Institut für Kunstgeschichte Wien.

Noteworthy is the fact that, at least in these two letters, Morassi does not directly mention Max Dvořák, and correspondence between master and pupil has not been found at this day. Certainly, though, the memory of his teacher was well alive in Morassi, who refers to him as 'indimenticabile maestro'<sup>51</sup> ('unforgettable teacher') after more than fifty years from Dvořák's death.

Giulio Zavatta<sup>52</sup> was recently able to find, in the archive of the Italian art-historian in Venice, a letter from Antonio Morassi representing the evidence of an agreement with an editor for the translation and publication of Dvořák's writing. Apparently, in 1942 Morassi had already begun the work, but it was never published. The note is addressed to Federico Gentile, director of the Casa Editrice Sansoni, son of aforementioned Giovanni Gentile: maybe indicating a long-lasting interest in Dvořák's art history theories by a certain part of the Italian intellectual environment. The letter reads [fig. 6]:

Dear Doctor,

my friend Prof. [Leone] Planiscig, [...] told me that he had received at the time an invitation – then declined – from a publisher in Ivrea, not otherwise known, to write a preface to the works of Dvořák, translated into Italian.

I was very surprised by the news, because I thought that your publishing company had secured the exclusivity of the translation,

<sup>51</sup> Unità 22A, Archivio Fototeca A. Morassi, Dipartimento di Filosofia e Beni Culturali, Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia, in Giulio Zavatta, 'Antonio Morassi e la nostalgia di Vienna', in *Il Michele Sanmicheli di Antonio Morassi. La tesi all'Università di Vienna e una monografia perduta* (1916), Treviso: ZeL, 2022, (21-58) 33.

<sup>52</sup> Giulio Zavatta, 'Antonio Morassi e la nostalgia di Vienna', (21-58) 43-44.

entrusted to me at the time, and already begun by myself. I will  
therefore be very grateful for a hint of clarification.

Yours truly, A. M.<sup>53</sup>

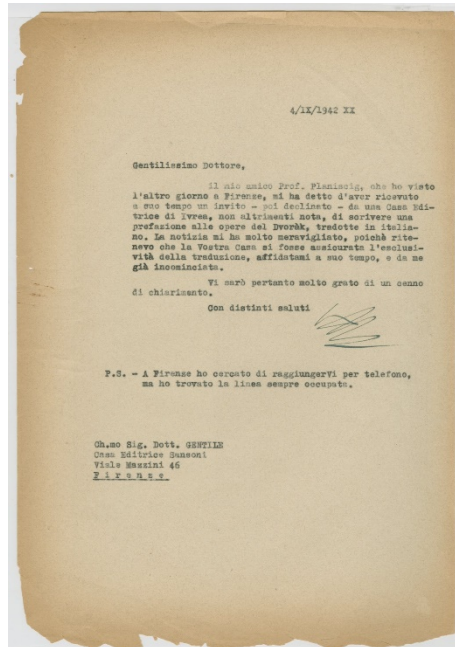


Figure 6 Letter from Antonio Morassi to Federico Gentile, 04/11/1942. Unità 17A, Archivio Fototeca A. Morassi, Dipartimento di Filosofia e Beni Culturali, Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia.

Neither Morassi's plan nor Planiscig's were fulfilled. If completed, the work would have been not only the first Italian translation of Dvořák's thought, but also the first critical edition in Italian made by a direct student. This occurring almost at the same time the publication project of Bettini was drawn up, can be seen as a sign of renewed interest for the writings of the Viennese scholar, interrupted shortly after by the consequences of the Second world war.

A comprehensive work of translation like the one foresaw by Antonio Morassi is still needed. Nevertheless, lately some gaps have been filled: Wladimiro Dorigo translated in 1992 Morassi's notes to the lecture given by Dvořák on 'Idealismus und Naturalismus in der Kunst der Neuzeit'<sup>54</sup> and 'Titian und

<sup>53</sup> Unità 17A, Archivio Fototeca A. Morassi, Dipartimento di Filosofia e Beni Culturali, Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia: 'Gentilissimo Dottore, il mio amico Prof. [Leone] Planiscig, [...] mi ha detto d'aver ricevuto a suo tempo un invito – poi declinato – da una Casa Editrice di Ivrea, non altrimenti nota, di scrivere una prefazione alle opere del Dvořák, tradotte in italiano. La notizia mi ha molto meravigliato, poiché ritenevo che la Vostra Casa si fosse assicurata l'esclusività della traduzione, affidatami a suo tempo, e da me già incominciata. Vi sarò pertanto molto grato di un cenno di chiarimento. Con distinti saluti, A. M.'

<sup>54</sup> Wladimiro Dorigo, 'Antonio Morassi da Max Dvořák, Idealismus und Naturalismus in der Kunst der Neuzeit' in *Antonio Morassi alla Scuola di Max Dvořák – Per i settant'anni di Terisio Pignatti, Quaderno di Venezia Arti*, Rome: Viella, 1992, 15-54.

Tintoretto'<sup>55</sup>, Riccardo Marchi translated in 2003 'Idealismus und Naturalismus'<sup>56</sup>, and in 2019 Mina Bacci and Giovanna De Lorenzi worked on a new edition of the 'Katechismus der Denkmalpflege'<sup>57</sup>.

New perspectives on Dvořák's thought have even brought to a reconsideration the concept of *Geistesgeschichte*: while it had always been translated as 'storia dello spirito' ('history of the spirit'), which sometimes lead to it assuming a more religious meaning than intended<sup>58</sup>, the term has recently shifted towards a more suiting 'storia delle idee'<sup>59</sup> ('history of ideas'). Again, this interpretation can already be found in Dell'Acqua's essay: 'the history of art, for Dvořák, even seems to be identified with the history of "ideas" in the field of art, that is, of common intentions and assumptions – deducible from consistent characters and preferences in the works of the various eras and schools.'<sup>60</sup> On an even more purist, but very agreeable position, stands Marchi<sup>61</sup>, who expresses the opinion that the term should not be translated at all:

It is necessary to leave the term "Geistesgeschichte" in German because "history of ideas" or "history of the spirit" do not render with the necessary specificity the reference to the German-speaking historiographical tradition that in the wake of Wilhelm Dilthey "had set itself the program of seeing art, literature, social structure and *Weltanschauung* under one aspect" (Gombrich).<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Wladimiro Dorigo, 'Antonio Morassi da Max Dvořák, Titian und Tintoretto' in *Antonio Morassi alla Scuola di Max Dvořák – Per i settant'anni di Terisio Pignatti, Quaderno di Venezia Arti*, Rome: Viella, 1992, 55-83.

<sup>56</sup> Riccardo Marchi, *Max Dvořák, Idealismo e naturalismo nella scultura e nella pittura gotica*, Milan: Franco Angeli, 2003, 7-106.

<sup>57</sup> Giovanna De Lorenzi and Mina Bacci, *Max Dvořák, Catechismo per la tutela dei monumenti*, Florence: Edifir, 2019.

<sup>58</sup> This type of understanding can be observed in the work of another Italian scholar: Luigi Coletti. Coletti in *L'arte di Tomaso da Modena, 1934* (Ed. curated by Clara Rosso Coletti, Venice: Neri Pozza Editore, 1963, 105), mentions Dvořák's spiritualism speaking of medieval art and he defines this *spirito* as the 'direct search for God'.

<sup>59</sup> Orietta Rossi Pinelli, 'La disciplina si consolida e si specializza (1912-1945)' in *La storia delle storie dell'arte*, Turin: Einaudi, 2014, 367: 'A lui stava piuttosto a cuore la storia delle idee, la *Geistesgeschichte*.'

<sup>60</sup> Gian Alberto Dell'Acqua, *L'arte italiana nella critica di Max Dvořák*, 5: 'Anzi, la storia dell'arte, per lo Dvořák, par che si identifichi addirittura con la storia delle "idee" nel campo dell'arte, e cioè degli intenti e presupposti comuni – deducibili da caratteri e preferenze costanti nelle opere delle varie epoche e scuole.'

<sup>61</sup> Riccardo Marchi, 'Max Dvořák e la storia dell'arte come parte della *Geistesgeschichte*' in *Max Dvořák, Idealismo e naturalismo nella scultura e nella pittura gotica*, Milan: Franco Angeli, 2003, 107-197.

<sup>62</sup> Riccardo Marchi, 'Max Dvořák e la storia dell'arte come parte della *Geistesgeschichte*', (107-197) 111: 'Occorre lasciare in tedesco il termine "Geistesgeschichte" perché "storia delle idee" o "storia dello spirito" non rendono con la specificità necessaria il riferimento alla tradizione storiografica di lingua tedesca che sulla scia di Wilhelm Dilthey "si era posta il programma di vedere l'arte, la letteratura, la struttura sociale e la *Weltanschauung* sotto un unico aspetto" (Gombrich).'

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