



## Dvořák and the trend towards monument care

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### *Extended abstract*

Why should we read Dvořák's writings on the conservation of monuments again? Of course, he wrote many reports and essays on the topic. His writings have an unquestionable historic value and many of them are significant from a literary point of view. I do not mean only his most famous *Katechismus der Denkmalpflege*, written on commission from the Zentral-Kommission's Protector, the archduke Franz Ferdinand, but his lessons about *Denkmalpflege* (monument care) and *Gartenkunst* (garden design) at the University of Vienna, which were among the first lectured on the field at a European University, and his writings on history, monumental sites and ensembles (the old town and San Carlo's square in Vienna, the Wawel in Cracow, Diocletian's palace in Split, Hradčany in Prague, the castle of Buonconsiglio in Trento, the basilica in Aquileia), the theory of conservation, the qualification of conservators, administrations and institutions and protection laws. All these writings, which the *Bundesdenkmalamt* (i.e., the Austrian Federal Monuments Office) will shortly collect and publish, help the historiography of the Austrian movement of monument care according to Walter Frodl's outline of its institutional beginning, to Eva Frodl-Kraft's reconstruction of the period between the World Wars I and II, to Ernst Bacher's portrait of the founder, i.e., Alois Riegl, to Theodor Brückler's palimpsest of Franz Ferdinand's age and the reorganization of the Central Commission. According to Julius von Schlosser, if a Viennese school of art history should be recognized, we are obliged to honor a contextual Viennese school of monument care, which scientifically is no less important.

All this has an undoubted value for consolidating monument care as an autonomous discipline, but it does not suffice to make the Bohemian Master's lesson still relevant. I support the thesis that the topicality of Dvořák's legacy dwells in a betrayal of the principle of "magistracy of

monument care" (or monument care arbitration magistrate), i.e., of the value-free principle Riegl had set in the critical field – "the best art historians resign their propensity to taste" – then transposed to the care of monuments, defining the conservator as a referee and counselor in relation to the conflicting values and not as a party to them, hence in the name and in defense of the most universal and common value: the age value. Dvořák indeed, contrary to his master, takes sides. He puts art in command, giving recognition to the artistic value as a social, ethical, pedagogical and constitutive factor of civilization and he rules openly for a trend: the Modern Classic, i.e., a classicist oriented modern tendency, inside the crisis of culture and art which featured in his time, articulated in a plurality of artistic post-secessionist movements. Dvořák names Oskar Kokoschka for painting and Adolf Loos for architecture as the pioneers of this Modern Classic movement, together with Karl Friedrich Schinkel, Theodor Fischer, Alfred Messel, Ludwig Hoffmann, Hermann Billing, August Hendell, Peter Behrens, Martin Dülfer and Joze Plecnik.

Dvořák pleads for this trend, on the one hand in the *Heimatschutzbewegung* (pre-ecological movement for the care of the landscape) and the *Werkbund* (movement to characterize German products) with regard to innovative architecture in an historical urban context and, on the other, in the *Denkmalpflege*, defending, together with Cornelius Gurlitt, Paul Clemen and Georg Dehio, the principle of an integral conservation of monuments in their current state against restoration as a remake.

Two writings in particular show Dvořák not as a traditionalist but as a contemporary and are still relevant today: *Borromini als Restaurator* (1907), in which he highlights the modern character of the projects for the church of San Giovanni in Laterano and especially the new arrangement of the old cenotaphs; *Die letzte Renaissance*, a manuscript of a conference from 1912, edited and annotated by Hans Aurenhammer (1997), in which Dvořák dissociates from Otto Wagner's architecture and sides with the pioneers of Modern Classic mentioned above and sketches the Loos oriented characters of this *neue Sachlichkeit* (new Objectivity).

To appreciate the radicalism and modern nature of Dvořák's attitude we must draw two distinctions. Firstly, until now, his suggestion has been connected by force with positions of "unabridged monument preservation", that argued for the total ejection of modern architecture from the old town center, as, for example, Hans Sedlmayr's calls for the protection of the old town of Salzburg in the early sixties and the detailed plan for the old town center of Bologna codified in the early seventies. The famous plan of Red-Bologna was the ancestor of a rich sequence of plans concerning the preservation of old towns in many Italian cities, up until the preservation plan of Palermo in the eighties-early nineties. These plans assert rehabilitation based on restoration as a remaking, mistrusting contemporary architecture, removing it from its historical context and ejecting it from history. However, in all these plans there is no acknowledgment of the principle of "unabridged monument preservation" theorized by Dvořák following in the tracks of John Ruskin and Riegl. This radical version of monument care provides for the most unabridged monument conservation "in the achieved condition" and for a separation between modern integrations in an historical urban context and restoration culture, intended as *restitutio in integrum*! According to Dvořák, *contemporary architecture* is the key factor that is able to build (and not re-build!) the unity in the repair. Here, where architecture must contend with the historical context, Riegl discovers an arbitrating mission between conflictive values and no direct interference, Dvořák sees a cultural battlefield because of the changed cultural context and post-secessionist artistic trends. Dvořák claims and sustains a tendency.

Secondly, on several occasions during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the trend of the Modern Classic identified by Dvořák was used as a reference; in the twenties by Werner Hegemann and Leo Adler in the German town-planning journal *Wasmuths Monatshefte für Baukunst*, in the thirties by Marcello Piacentini, who made Ludwig Hoffmann's Berlin Town Hall the manifesto of his architecture and of the journal *Architettura*, that he directed; up to Aldo Rossi, who in his film *Ornamento e delitto*, draws the cornerstones of public architecture from Adolf Loos and Dvořák.

It does not matter how much the Bohemian master wrote on the Modern Classic tendency, but that he recognized the necessity for the monuments care. In other words, he acknowledged the need to integrate conservation with the destiny of planning and the impossibility to exclude contemporary architecture from monument care. A nation, a civilization *without contemporary architecture* cannot conceive an idea of monument care; at most it knows only old recipes, as Dvořák says, *alte Rezepte!*

**Keywords:** *Context (of the monument), old-new relation, conservation-contemporary architecture relation, trend.*

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