

The Edgar Wind Journal



Volume 9

9/2025

ISSN 2785-2903

www.edgarwindjournal.eu

The Edgar Wind Journal

ISSN 2785-2903

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Riegl's Concept of the Monument and Its (Non)Use in Museology

Katja Mahnič

Abstract

Alois Riegl devoted the last three years of his life to the development of the theoretical basis of monument preservation. He published the results of his reflections in three texts, which were the basis for the establishment of an institutionalised monument preservation service in Austria at that time. The concept of the monument and the system of dual values of monument, as Riegl established them, have been the subject of recurrent theoretical and historiographical scrutiny. Despite the fact that Riegl established the concept of the monument as encompassing both buildings and objects, this debate has, with a few exceptions, taken place outside museology. The article begins with an outline of the complex synchronic and diachronic interplay of factors on different levels that contributed to Riegl's conceptualisation being more or less completely overlooked in the context of museological theory. Since the deepest level is related to the problem of reconstructing Riegl's understanding of museum objects, a framework within which this issue needs to be addressed is presented. The central part of the article is devoted to the careful analysis of Riegl's report to the Ministry of Education from 1900. The main findings of this scrutiny are then contextualised with some of the views of his contemporaries. This enables the reconstruction of Riegl's conceptualisation of museum objects but also points to an understanding of his work in the context of his time. As it turns out, this understanding had a strong influence on the later reception of his work in general, and in particular on the (non)use of his concepts in the context of later museological theory.

Keywords

Alois Riegl, concept of monument, museum objects, museology, university study of art history

I

In the short period between his appointment as General Conservator for the Central Commission for the Research and Preservation of Art and Historical Monuments in 1902 and his death in 1905, Alois Riegl published three texts in which he laid the foundations for

monument preservation theory in the then Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.¹ These texts, especially the most extensive one, *The Modern Cult of Monuments*, in which Riegl established the historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*) of monuments as their defining characteristic and established monument preservation as a historical science,² became an important point of reference in conservation literature in the following decades. Individual authors do not treat Riegl's conceptualisation merely as a historical stage in the development of conservation theory, but understand it as the foundation of contemporary conservation theory.³ On the other hand, this conceptualisation has had virtually no significant impact on museological literature.

More specifically, either Riegl's texts do not appear at all as a starting point for the conceptualisation of museum collections and museum objects in historical and theoretical texts,⁴ or they are mentioned by authors, but only as the work of a theorist in the field of conservation, which is understood as historically related to the field of museology.⁵ In other words, Riegl's conceptualisation of monuments is mentioned in museological texts, if at all, as conservation theory. On the one hand, this is to be expected, as it is generally accepted that both fields share the same conceptual foundations, with Riegl himself having made a significant contribution to each. On the other hand, however, it is necessary to note the clear asymmetry in the theory of both fields: the presumed common conceptual roots have been preserved in virtually unchanged form in contemporary conservation theory,⁶ while within (contemporary) museological theory, only the historiographical memory of the common beginnings of both fields and the idea of a more or less tangential connection

¹ Alois Riegl, *Der moderne Denkmalkultus. Sein Wesen und seine Entstehung* (Vienna, Leipzig: W. Braumüller, 1903); Alois Riegl, 'Neue Strömungen in der Denkmalpflege', *Mitteilungen der K. K. Zentralkommission für Erforschung und Erhaltung der Kunst- und historischen Denkmale*, n.s., 4/1-3 (1905), 85-104; Alois Riegl, 'Das Denkmalschutzgesetz', *Neue Freie Presse*, 27 February 1905, pp. 6-8.

² Within the same conceptual, i.e., historical, framework, German art historians Georg Dehio and Paul Clemen also developed their monument preservation theory around 1900. For a comparison of the conceptualisations of all three, see Stephanie Warnke-De Nobili, 'Geschichtlichkeit als Denkmalwert. Die Denkmaltheorie im Kontext der historischen Disziplinen um 1900', *Die Denkmalpflege. Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Vereinigung der Denkmalfachämter in den Ländern* 69/1 (2011), 42-48.

³ Cf. e.g., Jukka Jokilehto, *A History of Architectural Conservation. Second Edition* (London, New York: Routledge, 2018); Salvador Muñoz Viñas, *Contemporary Theory of Conservation* (Amsterdam, etc.: Elsevier, 2005).

⁴ Cf. e.g., Bruno Brulon Soares (ed.), *A History of Museology. Key authors of museological theory* (Paris: ICOFOM, 2019); Delia Tzortaki, Stefanos Keramidis (ed.), *Theory of Museology. Main Schools of Thought 1960-2000* (Athens: The Norwegian Institute of Athens, 2021).

⁵ Cf. e.g., Jan Dolák, *Museology and Its Theory* (Brno: Technical Museum, 2022).

⁶ This conceptual continuity is clearly evidenced by professional texts on the 'usefulness' of Riegl's conceptualisation, whether of the concept of the monument itself or of the system of values Riegl established.

between individual conservation concepts and museological concepts have been preserved.⁷

Several factors contributed to this conceptual discontinuity, and they are complexly intertwined in both a synchronic and diachronic context. In general, we can approach them on three levels: first, at the level of individual scientific disciplines and their historical development; second, at the level of fundamental concepts, especially the concept of the monument; and third, at the level of the reconstruction of Riegl's conceptualisation of monuments and monument preservation. A detailed analysis of their mutual interaction exceeds the scope and purpose of this article. Therefore, I will start by briefly highlighting the most important points related to the disciplinary and conceptual levels and then focus on the problem of reconstructing Riegl's concept of the monument and its significance for museological theory, with particular regard to his conceptualisation of museum objects. In doing so, I will also introduce aspects of the disciplinary and conceptual levels for consideration.

At the disciplinary level, the problem of understanding museology as a scientific discipline proves to be a significant factor. There are two aspects to this problem. Firstly, museology is not a generally accepted term in professional circles. In addition to it, other terms are also used to refer to the field that is broadly related to the functioning of museums and their collections, such as, in English, 'museum studies' and, in German *Museumskunde* and *Museumswissenschaft* (both in the broad meaning of museum science). These are not just different terms that mean the same thing; the different names also reflect different understandings of the nature of what they refer to. This brings us to the second aspect: museology is only understood as an independent scientific discipline in a limited area, particularly in Central and Eastern European countries. Apart from a few experts who understand it as a multidisciplinary scientific field, the majority of the professional public understands museology in the broadest sense as 'everything related to museums', whether it be a field of research or a collection of theoretical and practical

⁷ The *Dictionary of Museology* clearly reflects this; François Mairesse (ed.), *Dictionary of Museology* (Abingdon, New York: Routledge, 2023). There, Riegl's concepts appear in entries related to conservation theory (entries related to the general concepts of *Heritage* and *Monument* and the more specific concepts of *Historical Monument*, *Historical Building* and *Historical Area*) and in the overview of the historical development of individual concepts common to both fields (the entries *Authenticity* and *Restoration*). The only exception is the concept of *Value*, which is also common to both fields, but is discussed in the entry in the context of museological theory. Riegl, on the other hand, is not mentioned in any of the entries pertaining to the most important museological concepts, including the fundamental concept of the musealia. This understanding of Riegl's conceptualisation in relation to museological theory is already evident in *Key Concepts of Museology*, which was published thirteen years earlier as a kind of preliminary version of the dictionary; André Desvallées François Mairesse (ed.), *Key Concepts of Museology* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2010). In it, Riegl is mentioned exclusively in the historical overview of the development of the concept of *Heritage*.

knowledge necessary for successful work in museums.⁸ In addition to the fact that the number of experts who understand museology as a scientific discipline with its own conceptual apparatus is extremely limited, it is necessary to point out another, no less important fact, namely, that museology understood in this way was only established in the 1960s. Both of these factors have had a significant impact on the historiographical search for and theoretical justification of the starting points for its fundamental concepts: musealia, and museality as its defining characteristics. With its unambiguously close connection to the field of monument preservation, museology, insofar as we speak of it at all, was therefore theoretically established later, and above all *vis-à-vis* monument preservation.

At the level of basic concepts, it is necessary to highlight two factors that are largely interdependent and, at the same time, distinctly time-bound. The first is the mutual relationship between the basic concepts of monument preservation, i.e., the concept of the monument, and the basic concept of museology, i.e., the concept of the musealia. This relationship is significantly marked by a process of constant demarcation, which sometimes narrows and sometimes broadens the intersection of the meanings of both concepts. Due to the above-mentioned time lag in the development of museological theory, the concept of musealia, i.e., an object whose essential characteristic is museality, first had to be clearly distinguished from the concept of the monument; however, subsequently in museological literature, the conceptual extension of the concept of museality to monuments also became an important issue.⁹ The second factor is general terminology, in particular the problem of precise definition and consistent use of individual technical terms and the occasional (non)distinction between the use of a technical term as a kind of general designation, which is to some extent interchangeable, and a concept that has a well-defined semantic field. More specifically, the term monument is used in two different ways in professional literature: as a general designation for certain objects and as a fundamental concept in monument preservation. The two meanings are frequently interchanged, which is often only clearly evident on the basis of a detailed contextual analysis. Two additional facts further complicate the issue. Firstly, the term monument, which is also a fundamental

⁸ See the entry *Museology*, *Museum Studies in the Museological Dictionary*. The author of the entry, François Mairesse, organises the use of the term into three different categories: a field of research, an academic discipline, and an area of professional training; Mairesse, p. 324. In the earlier publication *Key Concepts in Museology*, Mairesse, together with his co-author André Desvallées, differentiated the use of the term museology even more precisely and defined five clearly distinct meanings; Desvallées, Mairesse, pp. 53-56.

⁹ Cf. Ivo Maroević, 'Spomenik kulture kao dokument' [Cultural Monument as a Document], *Pogledi* 18/3-4 (1988), pp. 783-791; Ivo Maroević, *Uvod u muzeologiju* [Introduction to Museology] (Zagreb: Institute for Information Studies, 1993), pp. 132-152; Ivo Maroević, 'Razine muzealizacije vezane uz kulturnu baštinu' [The levels of musealisation related to the Cultural Heritage], *Informatika museologica* 36/3-4 (2005), pp. 44-49. Two points should be emphasised here. Firstly, the consideration of the 'expansion' of the concept of musealia is linked to its essential characteristic, museality, i.e., its nature as document. Secondly, the consideration of the museality of monuments, i.e., individual buildings and even urban complexes, is closely linked to the concept of heritage.

concept in monument preservation,¹⁰ has a different semantic field in different languages. Secondly, both fields of expertise, monument preservation and museology, are closely linked to the activities of various humanities and other disciplines, each of which conceptualises the objects of its study in its own way, while using the same terms.¹¹ Musealia as a fundamental museological concept was therefore established much later and in close connection with the older concept of monument. Their interconnection is complex and, in some instances, difficult to reconstruct due to various theoretical, terminological and linguistic problems.

Given the aforementioned close intertwining of factors at all three levels, the framework for the necessary discussion is clearly outlined when moving on to the level of reconstructing Riegl's understanding of the museum object within the framework of his conceptualisation of the monument and of monument preservation. Firstly, since museology as we understand it today did not yet exist in Riegl's time, we cannot expect to find museological theory or an explicit establishment and discussion of the concept of musealia in his texts. It should be emphasised that the very expectation of a separate theory is in itself a projection of today's understanding of both fields, monument preservation and museology. Secondly, due to the lack of rigour in the use of individual terms that was characteristic of his time, on the one hand, and their subsequent changes in meaning on the other, it is necessary to carefully read all of Riegl's texts, not just those in which he discusses matters that we today understand as monument preservation or museology. In other words, Riegl's understanding of individual terms and related concepts can only be gained through a contextual analysis of his own use of individual terms.¹² Thirdly, in addition to Riegl's texts, comparative material must also be included in the analysis, including documents, legal regulations, texts by other authors, and other sources that can shed light on Riegl's conceptualisation of museum objects, both in terms of its content and the conditions of its formation within the context of the time and place.

¹⁰ For a historical overview of the use of the term monument in connection with the establishment of the fundamental concept of monument preservation, cf. Norbert Wibiral, 'Ausgewählte Beispiele des Wortgebrauchs von "Monumentum" und "Denkmal" bis Winckelmann', *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Kunst und Denkmalpflege* 26/3-4 (1982), pp. 93-98.

¹¹ In the context of art history, in some languages, including Slovenian, the term monument is still used as a synonym for a work of art or artwork. As a result, the term has a broader as well as a narrower meaning. In addition to the use of specialised, discipline-specific terms, the situation is further complicated by the establishment of the term heritage, which has become predominant in both fields of expertise, monument preservation and museology, and is also becoming increasingly established in individual basic disciplines. On the necessity of precise use of individual terms, especially in the context of historiographical analysis, cf. Astrid Swenson, "'Heritage', 'Patrimoine' und 'Kulturerbe': Eine vergleichende historische Semantik", in *Prädikat 'Heritage'. Wertschöpfungen aus kulturellen Ressourcen*, ed. by Dorothee Hemme, Markus Tauschek and Regina Bendix (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2007), pp. 53-74.

¹² However, it is not necessary to consider Riegl's oeuvre as a whole solely in the context of understanding his own conceptualisation of the individual terms he uses in it. Individual terms are linked to Riegl's conception of art history as a discipline, art as a specific human activity, and its results as physical entities with precisely defined characteristics. In other words, Riegl's works were created within the framework of a unified development.

In the balance of this article, I will focus on the latter.¹³ I will use Riegl's report to the Ministry of Education from 1900 as a starting point.¹⁴ I will compare the conclusions offered by its analysis with some of the views of his contemporaries. In this way, I will attempt to reconstruct Riegl's own understanding of his professional identity and the nature of his work, which is crucial for any attempt to reconstruct his conceptualisation of museum objects. At the same time, I will also highlight those aspects of Riegl's report which, together with selected texts by his contemporaries, point to an understanding of his work in the context of his time. As it turns out, in addition to the reasons already mentioned, this understanding had a strong influence on the later reception of his work in general, and in particular on the (non)use of his concepts in the context of later museological theory.

II

Although the diversity of Riegl's professional work is highlighted in the literature, his career is often presented as a linear sequence of two periods: museum and academic.¹⁵ According to this model, the twenty-one-year period is divided into the first thirteen years, when Riegl was employed at the then Austrian Museum of Art and Industry, and the last eight years, when he taught at the University of Vienna. However, from a chronological point of view, his two professional identities – museum and academic – significantly overlapped. Riegl started to work at the museum as a volunteer in August 1885, and after completing his training as a curator, he took over the care of four collections (textiles, furniture, leather, and book equipment) as assistant curator at the beginning of 1886. He held this position until 1897.¹⁶ In 1889, he qualified as a professor at the University of Vienna, where he taught as a private lecturer in the following academic year. After being appointed *extraordinarius* at the university in June 1894, he continued to work at the museum for

¹³ A detailed presentation of Riegl's conceptualisation of the museum object as a monument and the sources from which he drew inspiration will be the subject of a separate article.

¹⁴ *Dr. Alois Riegl k.k. u. ö. professor der Kunstgeschichte an der Wiener Universität berichtet über die Bedürfnisse seiner Lebkanzel*, 8 July 1900, Austrian State Archives, General Administrative Archives, Ministry of Culture and Education, Fasz. 4g (University of Vienna), Zl. 19887, fols 9r-17v.

¹⁵ The reasons for this are varied and are linked both to the nature of the individual texts in which Riegl's professional career is presented and to other reasons. An important example, both in a literal and chronological sense, is the obituary for Riegl written by Max Dvořák. In it, Dvořák presented Riegl's professional life as a sequence of three periods – museum, university, and monument preservation – which he also understood as stages in the development of Riegl's art-historical theory; Max Dvořák, 'Alois Riegl', *Mitteilungen der K. K. Zentralkommission für Erforschung und Erhaltung der Kunst- und historischen Denkmale*, n.s., 3/4 (1905), 261-276.

¹⁶ 'Personalien', *Jahresbericht des k.k. Österreichischen Museums für Kunst und Industrie für 1885* (Wien: Selbstverlag, 1886), 12; 'Personalien', *Jahresbericht des k.k. Österreichischen Museums für Kunst und Industrie für 1886* (Wien: Selbstverlag, 1887), 11-12 (p. 11); 'Personalnachrichten', *Mitteilungen des k.k. Österreichischen Museums für Kunst und Industrie. Monatschrift für Kunstgewerbe* n.F. XII/12 (1897), 544; 'Kuratorium', *Jahresbericht 1905* (Wien: Selbstverlag, 1906), 1.

another three years.¹⁷ The complete transition from the museum to the university did not take place until October 1897, when he was promoted to ordinarius, which means that Riegl worked in both fields for a full seven years, i.e., a third of his career. In addition, as already mentioned, he also served as general conservator for the last three years of his life.¹⁸ A detailed analysis of his works shows that Riegl's museum work and his academic work overlapped temporally as well as in terms of content. In other words, the main themes, and above all the conceptual and methodological framework of his work, did not change significantly throughout his career. On the contrary, over the years we can trace in his works a subtle refinement of the conceptualisation of the discipline in which he worked, the nature of its subject matter and the methods he used to study it.¹⁹ Although not often highlighted as such, museum objects played an important part in this conceptualisation.

Riegl's own words clearly attest to this. In the summer of 1900, at the end of his third academic year since being appointed ordinarius and since ceasing to work as a curator, Riegl sent a report on what his Chair needed to the Ministry of Education, which was responsible for both educational institutions and museums. Although the text had a very clear purpose, as its title suggests, a careful reading reveals much more. In it, Riegl not only presents what he considers to be inadequate teaching conditions specific to his Chair and makes proposals for their improvement, but also clearly reveals his professional preferences and his own professional identity. In addition, the text provides insight into his understanding of art history as a field of study and professional activity, and, most importantly in relation to the topic of this article, clearly reveals Riegl's conceptualisation of the functions of museum collections and the nature of museum objects.

In his report, Riegl points out that there are two Chairs of Art History at the University of Vienna, which differ in the nature of their teaching and the associated concept. This was due to a combination of two factors: the nature of studies at the Faculty of Arts, which, in addition to introducing theoretical knowledge, also provided its graduates with adequate preparation for practical professions, and the understanding of the function of art when art history studies at the University of Vienna were established. Art at that time was not only seen as an educational factor, but also an economic one. The direct consequence of this was that the state took over almost entirely the public care of art (*öffentliche Kunstpflege*), on the one hand by establishing museums and monument preservation as public services, and on the other by founding numerous art schools,

¹⁷ 'Personalien und besondere Begebenheiten', *Jahresbericht des k.k. Österreichischen Museums für Kunst und Industrie für 1894* (Vienna: Selbstverlag, 1895), 17-22 (p. 18).

¹⁸ As Max Dvořák points out, at that time this part of Riegl's professional activity was generally understood as a 'bureaucratic addition to art history'; Dvořák, 275-276.

¹⁹ Some of his contemporaries already pointed this out in their obituaries for Riegl; Dvořák, 255-256; Moritz Dreger, 'Alois Riegl †', *Kunst und Kunsthandwerk. Monatschrift des K.k. Österreichischen Museums für Kunst und Kunstindustrie* 8/7-8 (1905), 401-405.

thereby taking an active role in promoting contemporary art production.²⁰ Both of these factors influenced the specifics of art history study, which thus had two missions. Firstly, it had to provide an appropriate education for future art history scholars and researchers, for whom theoretical knowledge was particularly important. Secondly, it also had to educate future teachers at art schools, conservators and museum employees, for whom practical knowledge was essential in addition to theoretical knowledge. Providing both types of knowledge, theoretical and practical, required two different types of teaching. The teaching of theory (namely, explanation of the theoretical concept of style) can adequately achieve its goals with the support of reproductions – photographic and graphic reproductions of paintings and casts of sculptures; in contrast, high-quality teaching of the practical aspects necessary for the successful performance of future teachers of art history, museum employees and conservators (presentation of aspects related to materials and techniques) can only be achieved through demonstration on original monuments.²¹

To implement this type of teaching, Riegl emphasises, access to arts and crafts collections is necessary. This need was met at the University of Vienna through close ties with the Austrian Museum of Art and Industry and its collections, as the first professor of art history, Rudolf von Eitelberger, was also the director of the museum. After twenty years of performing both functions, a new theoretical Chair was established to relieve him of some of his many responsibilities. From that point on, the University of Vienna had two Chairs: a theory Chair dedicated to teaching critical historiography in the field of fine arts, similar to other universities, and a practical Chair dedicated to practical teaching. Having a practical Chair was unique to the University of Vienna. As Riegl emphasises once again, the latter had the necessary conditions for its operation in Vienna due to its connection with the museum. Although, as he points out, teaching at the two Chairs was conducted separately, theoretical teaching never lost touch with actual monuments, and practical teaching never strayed from its scientific basis.²²

In what follows in the report, Riegl focuses on the development of both Chairs after the death of their first heads, especially the long process of finding a successor to von Eitelberger in the practical Chair. The reason for this was the intertwining of two functions, teaching and directing, which von Eitelberger performed. This meant that, in principle, it would be necessary to find a person who had the appropriate knowledge for teaching and who would also be capable of running a museum. However, at that time, there was a change in the understanding of the museum's mission, which severed the link between the museum collections and the Chair, which was indeed essential for successful teaching. Someone who was not a university teacher was appointed director of the museum, and at the same time, the university was unable to find a suitable teacher to take over the Chair. It therefore remained vacant for almost a decade. As Riegl points out, the

²⁰ Riegl, *Bericht*, fols 9r-9v.

²¹ *Ibid.*, fols 10r-10v.

²² *Ibid.*, fols 10v-11r.

Chair was thus deprived, if not of its right to exist, then at least of its ability to exist.²³ Even when Riegl was finally appointed to the Chair, the situation did not improve significantly. Upon his employment at the university, he was instructed to organise his teaching in connection with the museum collections, which was difficult because he was only an assistant curator, and on top of that, the new museum management was not in favour of combining museum and educational work. Three years later, when he had to leave his job at the museum, the situation only worsened. At the same time, the museum's mission changed, which had consequences for the management of the so-called old collections. At the time of writing his report, Riegl points out that resolving the situation is urgent from the perspective of higher education.²⁴

If, Riegl points out further, 'old monuments' have lost their charm for contemporary art production, they have nevertheless become all the more important with the realisation that 'reflection on the stages of human cultural development to date is an indispensable and characteristic need of the present day'. The fact that 'historical contemplation' (*historische Betrachtung*) is a spiritual stimulus and educational tool that ennobles and cannot be replaced is evidenced, on the one hand, by interest in old collections, increased respect for domestic monuments, and the rise in prices of old works of art, and, on the other hand, by full art history lecture halls. Artists, who have often performed the tasks of museum employees, conservators and art history teachers, will inevitably have to be replaced by art historians. They will therefore become indispensable. In order for them to do their job successfully, they need to be given the opportunity to acquire 'practical knowledge of art monuments' (*praktische Kennerschaft von Kunstdenkmälern*) as part of their university studies. Without this, they will continue to require self-learning, an educational process that can never reach beyond the level of dilettantism and that will thus never attain the level of science.²⁵ In Riegl's view, the fact that practical training for conservators, museum employees and teachers at art schools had not yet been established meant a failure. It was therefore necessary to establish university lectures and exercises as soon as possible that would be devoted to 'practical monument studies' (*praktische Denkmalkunde*), i.e., the study of arts and crafts, and architecture, which should be based on scientific principles. A Chair dedicated to this purpose already existed at the University of Vienna, and with thirteen years of experience working in a museum, Riegl had the specific knowledge required to perform the related tasks; all that was needed was a connection to museum collections. Only the collections of the Austrian Museum of Art and Industry could be considered, as this was the only museum subordinate to the Ministry of Education. Riegl believed that such a connection was not only inevitable, but also possible and feasible.²⁶

²³ Riegl, *Bericht*, fols 11r-11v.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, fols 11r-13v.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, fols 13v-14r.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, fols 14r-15r.

Therefore, in the rest of the report, although this exceeded his authority, as he emphasises, he proposes a solution to the situation that was linked to at least a partial reorganisation of the management of the so-called old collections of the Austrian Museum of Art and Industry. A detailed analysis of the content of Riegl's proposal and its implications is certainly an interesting topic, but it is too broad for the subject under discussion.²⁷ In what follows, I will focus only on those points of Riegl's argumentation that clearly reveal his understanding of the nature of museum collections and museum objects. In the part where he deals with the mission of the Austrian Museum of Art and Industry, Riegl could not avoid considering the relationship between the so-called old collections and contemporary arts and crafts production – or rather how it had changed since the museum was founded.²⁸ He emphasises that monitoring current artistic activity has become such a complex and extensive task that even the most knowledgeable expert would not have much time left to deal with old art. This is especially true because, in modern times, old monuments require more specialist knowledge than in the past if the collection is to 'truly fulfil its cultural mission'.²⁹ He goes on to say that objects were not acquired to stand in display cases as dead capital, but have an active force (*werkende Kraft*) that must be constantly maintained in circulation. The volume of scientific production on works of old art is constantly increasing. Every day, therefore, those who have at their disposal a comprehensive collection, not just a collection related to a particular field, and who are familiar with the current state of research in the field of art (*Kunstforschung*), are encouraged to take action. This opportunity must be seized immediately and translated into new insights, which then have a stimulating and fruitful effect on further research.³⁰ However, according to Riegl, the ephemeral material of old objects has not yet found its way into museums, and even a well-equipped collection such as that of the Austrian Museum of Art and Industry is not so complete in terms of representative objects that it could satisfy all legitimate demands.³¹ One of these requirements was also linked to his teaching role. At the very end of the report, where he talks about the appropriate teaching materials (*Apparat*) necessary for the successful delivery of lectures, Riegl specifically pointed out that if the 'isolation of the practical Chair from museum collections' continued, for his lectures at the faculty he would have to establish truly worthy and appropriate demonstration material.³²

²⁷ Riegl's proposal for the reorganisation of the management of the museum collections of the Austrian Museum of Art and Industry was discussed by Diana Reynolds Cordileone; Diana Reynolds Cordileone, *Alois Riegl in Vienna 1875-1905* (Aldershot, Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 248-256; Diana Reynolds Cordileone, 'Mood, Modernism, and the Museum for Art and Industry', in *Alois Riegl Revisited. Beiträge zu Werk und Rezeption / Contributions to the Opus and its Reception*, ed. by Peter Noever, Artur Rosenauer and Georg Vasold (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2010), pp. 37-44.

²⁸ The museum was founded in 1864 to provide 'artistic and scientific aids' for the promotion of arts and crafts and the elevation of taste; cf. Statuten des k.k. Oesterrichischen Museums für Kunst und Industrie, *Mitteilungen des k.k. Österreichischen Museums für Kunst und Industrie* I/1 (1864), pp. 4-8 (pp. 4-5).

²⁹ Riegl, *Bericht*, fol. 15^v.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, fols 15^v-16^r.

³¹ *Ibid.*, fol. 16^r.

³² *Ibid.*, fol. 17^v.

In addition to Riegl's conceptual understanding of museum collections and museum objects, the report also reveals a much more personal dimension of his relationship with the latter in particular. Regarding his employment at the museum, Riegl states unequivocally in the report that his departure was forced – when he was appointed ordinarius at the university, he was dismissed as an assistant curator at the museum. He particularly emphasises that after transferring to the university, it was difficult for him to give up further work with the objects, although he did submit to this disconnection.³³ With regard to the specific knowledge he had acquired during this time, he also pointed out that it would be lost if he were unable to transfer it as a lecturer within a properly functioning practical Chair.³⁴

III

At this point, it is essential to place Riegl's report, or more precisely his view of the problem presented in it, in the broader context of the study of art history at the University of Vienna at the time. At the same time, it is important to compare his more personal views with the understanding of Riegl's work as gleaned from the words of his contemporaries.

Riegl wrote the report three years after he lost the opportunity to directly care for museum objects when he made the final transition to the university, and at the same time, as he points out, he was denied access to museum collections even in his role as a teacher. Upon his appointment as an extraordinarius, he was explicitly instructed to base his lectures on the demonstration of objects from museum collections, which is why he was allowed to retain his position at the museum, but this was later prevented for various reasons.³⁵ Upon his appointment, Riegl took over the Chair previously held by Rudolf von Eitelberger, who was not only the first university teacher of art history, but also the founder of the subject matter and design of art history studies at the University of Vienna. During the second decade of his teaching career, he established this as a field of study, an integral part of which was the study of original works in museum collections. Since the establishment of the Austrian Museum of Art and Industry, of which he was the initiator and first director, the museum's collections became the venue for almost half of the study process.³⁶

³³ Riegl, *Bericht*, fols 12r-12v.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, fols 14v-15r.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, fols 12r-13v.

³⁶ For the establishment of art history studies at the University of Vienna, its original mission, concept and content, and subsequent changes, especially its specificity in relation to art history studies at German universities, cf. Tanja Jenni and Raphael Rosenberg, 'Die Analyse der Objekte und das Studium der Quellen – Wiens Beitrag zur Etablierung einer universitären Kunstgeschichte', in *Reflexive Innenansichten aus der Universität. Disziplinengeschichten zwischen Wissenschaft, Gesellschaft und Politik*, ed. by Karl Anton Fröschl et al. (Vienna: Vienna University Press, 2015), pp. 121-134.

As mentioned, after von Eitelberger's death, his Chair remained vacant for almost a decade. When Riegl finally took over the Chair, mainly due to changes in the understanding of the museum's mission and operation, he was unable to continue with the lectures as conceived by his predecessor. In his report, Riegl rightly points out the danger of an actual interruption in the University of Vienna's characteristic approach to the teaching of art history, which is linked to the study of original works.³⁷ Von Eitelberger is said to have stated on several occasions that 'it makes no sense for a professor of art history not to have a museum at his disposal.'³⁸ He himself understood that the very fact that he had access to the museum collections as director of the museum enabled him to establish teaching based on visual material (*Anschauungsunterricht*).³⁹

Thus, during the first six years of his university career, Riegl was able, as he says, to teach exclusively art history theory on a provisional basis.⁴⁰ However, his report clearly shows that Riegl saw his true pedagogical mission as a teacher in the context of practical monument studies and that he understood his experience in museum work as the basis for this. At the same time, he was convinced that his specific knowledge would be lost if he were not allowed to teach in accordance with his intentions, i.e., in close connection with museum collections.⁴¹ The consequences, as Riegl understood them, would be far-reaching. The knowledge and skills that practical teaching was supposed to provide were also important for art history researchers, i.e., theorists, but they were absolutely essential for museum curators, conservators and art history teachers.⁴²

In his report, Riegl uses the term practical science of monuments to refer to this knowledge and these skills. The coiner of the German term, if not the founder of the science of monuments (*Denkmalkunde*) in the German-speaking world, was Rudolf von Eitelberger.⁴³ Von Eitelberger justified the need for a new science that would encompass the systematic collection, description and analytical evaluation of monuments, not so much on the basis of their historical significance as on the basis of their impact on contemporary

³⁷ Art history studies naturally proceeded smoothly within the theory Chair. This was similar to other universities. Although, in his own words, Riegl was forced to teach only theory within the practical Chair, he had to make do with teaching materials that were inadequate for both work and demonstration; Riegl, *Bericht*, fols 16^v-17^r.

³⁸ Jakob von Falke, *Lebenserrinerungen* (Leipzig: Verlag von Georg Heinrich Meyer, 1897), p. 196.

³⁹ Rudolf von Eitelberger, 'Zur Publication des Libro della Pittura des Lionardo da Vinci nach der vaticanischen Handschrift', *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft*, IV. Band, ed. by Hubert Janitschek (Stuttgart: Verlag von W. Spemann, Vienna: Gerold & Co, 1881), 280-292 (p. 281).

⁴⁰ Riegl, *Bericht*, fol. 17^r.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, fols 14^v-15^r.

⁴² *Ibid.*, fols 10^r-10^v and 14^r-14^v.

⁴³ Rudolf von Eitelberger, 'Die Aufgabe der Alterthumskunde in Österreich', *Mittheilungen der K. K. Central-Commission zur Erforschung und Erhaltung der Baudenkmale* 1/1 (1856), 1-3. On prehistory, von Eitelberger's contribution, and the subsequent development of monument studies, cf. Matthias Noell, 'Denkmalkunde. Rudolf von Eitelberger und die Grundlegung einer neuen Disziplin', in *Rudolf Eitelberger von Edelberg. Netzwerker der Kunstwelt*, ed. by Eva Kernbauer, Kathrin Pokorniy-Nagel, Raphael Rosenberg, Julia Rüdiger, Patrick Wernker and Tanja Jenni (Vienna, Cologne, Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2019), pp. 239-256.

art and culture in general.⁴⁴ Almost half a century later, Riegl understood this science as the foundation that enables art historians to work successfully in the field of teaching and, even more so, in the field of monument preservation, i.e., in museums and in the context of monument preservation. Unlike von Eitelberger, he understood the historical nature of monuments to be their defining characteristic. In the period between the publication of von Eitelberger's programmatic texts in the Central commission's newsletter and Riegl's report, the Central commission had already successfully undergone its first substantive reform and was on the verge of the next, so Riegl's unease at the fact that formal education for experts working in the field had not yet been established, let alone successfully implemented, is understandable.

However, in addition to this frustration, which is entirely justified from the professional point of view of a university teacher, the report also reveals a more personal level of Riegl's distress at the situation in which he found himself. When viewed in the context of the testimonies of Riegl's contemporaries, this allows us to discover an extremely important, if not essential, aspect of Riegl's professional work. It is clear from the report that working at the museum meant a great deal to Riegl. This is not only evidenced by his repeated mentioning that he had to resign from his position at the museum due to external circumstances. Even more important in this regard is his explicit admission that it was difficult for him to give up his direct care for the museum objects he had been dealing with for many years.⁴⁵ Riegl's distress did not remain hidden from his contemporaries. In his obituary for Riegl, Max Dvořák wrote that after his 'expulsion' from the museum, Riegl never complained or accused anyone, but that he was unhappy and dissatisfied. Riegl, as one of the most successful researchers of his time, according to Dvořák, is said to have stated on several occasions that he was 'without a profession',⁴⁶ which clearly shows that museum work was not just a job for Riegl, but his professional identity. This is also confirmed by Moritz Dreger, who wrote in his obituary for Riegl that, with the exception of Rudolf von Eitelberger, no one was as closely connected to the museum as he was.⁴⁷ Even after leaving the museum, Riegl remained fond of it and always considered it his starting point, the place where he developed.⁴⁸

About Riegl's departure from the museum, Dreger wrote that he 'probably also had concerns,' but that he was also driven by a desire to create new opportunities for himself and find new inspiration.⁴⁹ This relatively mild description of the circumstances in which Riegl, in his own words, was forced to leave his job at the museum is understandable given that Dreger was an employee at the museum when he wrote the obituary. A particularly

⁴⁴ Rudolf von Eitelberger, 'Kunst und Alterthum in ihrem Wechselverkehr', *Mittheilungen der K. K. Central-Commission zur Erforschung und Erhaltung der Baudenkmale* 3/1 (1858), 1-4 (pp. 1-2).

⁴⁵ Riegl, *Bericht*, fol. 13r.

⁴⁶ Dvořák, 266.

⁴⁷ Dreger, 396.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 405.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

interesting perspective on the situation can be found in Wickhoff's obituary for Riegl. In it, Wickhoff states that Riegl was employed at the museum at a time when, following the death of Rudolf von Eitelberger and under the leadership of Jakob von Falke, the museum was still a centre of 'intellectual endeavour and scientific culture'. Eleven years later, Riegl left the museum because conditions there had changed so much that he could no longer work successfully.⁵⁰

How Riegl himself understood the nature of this work, which, according to the almost unanimous opinion of all those who remembered him at the time of his death, was denied him, is also evident from the report. It is clear from the report that Riegl did not understand museum objects merely as demonstration material, either for illustrating individual stages of artistic development or as models for contemporary arts and crafts production, but primarily as objects of scientific research, which is never complete. In his opinion, the tasks associated with caring for so-called old collections require the full attention of their scientific custodian.⁵¹ In his obituary, Dreger began by noting that Riegl dealt with objects 'with extraordinary love and professional knowledge'. Even more important is Dreger's continuation, in which he first points out that Riegl's work with objects never remained merely superficial, but that he always felt the need to 'recognise and explain the ultimate secrets and deepest causes' of individual objects. One of Riegl's immense strengths was said to be his 'ability to immediately incorporate every observed thing into a great thought process.'⁵² Dvořák also recalled Riegl's ability to establish an objective relationship with the objects of his research and to base his understanding of them on historical analysis.⁵³ Moreover, Dvořák emphasises that Riegl used the historical approach, i.e., the analysis of a sequence of phenomena conditioned by time and place, in a similar way to how it is used in natural sciences. Therefore, from the very beginning, the source and goal of his work was epistemological.⁵⁴ He based his work on the foundations of exact historical methods, establishing his general findings within the limits and on the basis of the actual results of his individual research.⁵⁵ Even the author of the anonymous obituary in the *Proceedings of the Austrian Archaeological Society* highlighted Riegl's persistent 'search for sources and attempts to get to the bottom of things'.⁵⁶ Almost all authors of obituaries for Riegl particularly emphasised in their presentation of his work that, in his persistent search for foundations, he broke new ground and set important milestones in the development of science.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ Franz Wickhoff, 'Alois Riegl', *Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung* XXVII (1906), 203-204 (p. 203).

⁵¹ Riegl, *Bericht*, fol. 16r.

⁵² Dreger, 396-397.

⁵³ Dvořák, 272.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 257.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 260.

⁵⁶ 'Emil Szanto, Wilhelm Gurlitt, Alois Riegl', *Jahreshefte des Österreichischen Archäologischen Institutes in Wien* VIII (1905), 125-128 (col 126).

⁵⁷ Dvořák, 266; Wickhoff, 203-204; Michael Haberlandt, 'Prof. Dr. Alois Riegl †', *Zeitschrift für österreichische Volkskunde* XI (1905), 132; Dreger, 401.

IV

A careful analysis of Riegl's report and its contextualisation leads to the following conclusions: Riegl linked his professional identity to his work in the museum, more specifically to the study of museum objects. Even as a university teacher, he understood his mission primarily as imparting knowledge and skills related to an in-depth understanding of museum objects (and buildings) to graduates who would care for them or teach about them in their professional careers. He approached the museum objects that were the object of his research within the framework of hermeneutic understanding, based on rigorous historical observation, which he constantly placed in dialogue with the findings of other researchers. He was not guided solely by a desire to understand individual phenomena, but strove for a general insight into the topic, problem or field he was dealing with.

If we approach his three texts on monument preservation in this context, we cannot understand them as anything other than fundamental epistemological texts for the field he referred to in his report as the science of monuments. Although written on the basis of a specific task he was given as general conservator – the theoretical renovation and functional reorganisation of monument preservation – they present Riegl's conceptualisation of monuments. Given that he spent his entire career dealing primarily with museum objects and that his report clearly shows that he understood the science of monuments as a unified field whose subject of study included not only buildings but also museum objects, this conclusion is logical.⁵⁸ This is confirmed by the fact that he explicitly mentions them in all three texts; moreover, in some key passages, it is the museum objects that serve as illustrations for his arguments.⁵⁹ During a period when he no longer had direct contact with museum objects, which greatly upset him, Riegl nevertheless had the opportunity to coherently reflect on their nature as monuments.⁶⁰ Like his colleagues who had trained in rigorous historical method with him at the Institute of Austrian Historical Research, he too saw museum objects as documents. It was Riegl, however, who, due to his unstoppable desire to search for fundamental laws, established their epistemological nature with his system of dual values of monument.

In his report, Riegl pointed out the possible long-term consequences of severing the living connection between the university as a place of professional training for future

⁵⁸ Max Dvořák already pointed out that working at the museum, which focused on specific areas of art, was of exceptional importance for Riegl's scientific career; Dvořák, 261. Moreover, at the beginning of his obituary dedicated to Riegl as general conservator, Dvořák wrote that it was necessary to consider Riegl's entire oeuvre in order to understand his 'intervention in the tasks and issues of monument preservation'; *ibid.*, 255-256.

⁵⁹ For example, an unnamed reproduction of Botticelli's painting as an illustration of the changing nature of monuments over time; Riegl, *Denkmalcultus*, pp. 189-190. Or Jamnitzer's cup as a starting point for reflection on the (ir)relevance of a monument's national origin; Riegl, *Neue Strömungen*, p. 87.

⁶⁰ Moritz Dreger already pointed out in his obituary that Riegl, as an expert in architecture and especially in arts and crafts, was called upon to work on the Central commission, so it is not surprising that he was able to lay the deepest foundations for the field. Dreger understood the *Modern cult of monuments* as Riegl's *magnum opus*, the crowning achievement of his entire career; Dreger, 404-405.

museum curators and conservators, and the museum collections they needed access to during their studies. In addition, in his proposal for the management of the so-called old collections in the Austrian Museum of Art and Industry, he also very clearly expressed the need for a scientific framework for understanding the nature of museum objects as historical testimonies or documents, and consequently also for working with them. From today's perspective, we can conclude that further developments did not go in the direction that Riegl deemed necessary. University studies of art history, as well as other humanities and natural sciences, which we now understand as the parent disciplines for the fields of individual museums, and the actual operation of these museums, have developed increasingly separately from one another. In addition, there have been significant changes in the very field of understanding the functioning of museums and their mission. When museology was finally established as a scientific discipline, Riegl's conceptualisation of museum objects, especially since he did not formulate it explicitly, was more or less forgotten, and museology theorists established the concept of musealia on the basis of other conceptual sources.

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