

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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***Arte Tardoromana: A Hidden Political Approach?* Licia Collobi Ragghianti on Riegl¹**

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Abstract

This article examines Licia Collobi Ragghianti's 1959 translation of Alois Riegl's *Spätromische Kunstindustrie*, published as *Arte tardoromana* by Giulio Einaudi. Drawing on both published sources and previously unpublished archival materials – including autograph manuscripts, editorial correspondence – it reconstructs the historical circumstances surrounding the volume's long-delayed publication. The translation was largely completed between 1942 and 1945, during a period of profound political transformation in Italy: first under the Fascist regime, then under the Italian Social Republic, and finally in the context of the Resistance. Archival evidence reveals a sustained, dialogical engagement, primarily with Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, through which the translation emerged not as a neutral act of scholarly transmission, but as a deeply embedded intellectual project. The study situates her work within the broader context of postwar Italy's cultural reconstruction, arguing that the translation, though not overtly political in tone, was shaped by a shared commitment to intellectual integrity and critical autonomy. In this light, the 1959 edition can be understood not merely as a scholarly intervention, but as part of a quiet, sustained reclamation of art history as a discipline capable of resisting ideological simplification.

Keywords

Art Historiography, Vienna School of Art History, Alois Riegl, Licia Collobi Ragghianti, Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti

Introduction

In a well-known passage from 1976, Henri Zerner remarked that, 'beyond the German-speaking countries, Riegl's work found little resonance, except in Italy'.² Yet the reception

¹ This essay grew out of the conference *The Vienna School of Art History IV: für Riegl / gegen Riegl*, held in Prague in 2025. I am grateful to the organisers, Tomáš Hlobil and Tomáš Murár, as well as to all colleagues for the stimulating conversations. My sincere thanks go to Fabio Tononi for his indispensable editorial work. I also wish to acknowledge the invaluable insights shared by Tommaso Casini, Annamaria Ducci, and Francesco De Carolis. I would like to express my gratitude to the Fondazione Centro Studi sull'Arte Licia e Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti and its archivists for their assistance. This essay was written at the Bibliotheca Hertziana – Max Planck Institute for Art History in Rome (BH-P-25-17).

² Henri Zerner, 'Alois Riegl: Art, Value, and Historicism', *Daedalus*, 105(1) (1976), 177-188 (177).

of his theories within Italian art historiography, and more broadly within the European scholarship, is far from uncharted. The earliest attempts to trace the channels and motivations through which Riegl's system entered the Italian intellectual sphere dated back to the early 1940s. Over the past two decades, a decisive phase of research has redefined the contours of this reception, identifying its principal turning points. The seminal works of Gianni Carlo Sciolla,³ Sandro Scarrocchia,⁴ Massimiliano Ghilardi, Fausto Zevi,⁵ and Andrew Hopkins⁶ have been instrumental in this process.

Within this framework, the 1959 Italian edition of *Spätrömische Kunstindustrie*, translated, introduced, and annotated by Licia Collobi Ragghianti and published by Einaudi, occupies an eccentric position in the historiography of Riegl's reception in Italy. In existing scholarship, the volume is typically acknowledged but rarely subjected to sustained analysis. Its presence remains largely confined to footnotes or passing references. A notable exception is Francesco De Carolis's incisive study.⁷ My decision to focus on an edition often treated as marginal to the main currents of Riegl's reception arises from a conviction: that it carries a distinct political and civic significance within the broader history of Italian art historiography and criticism. The translation was begun in 1942–43 and continued through 1945, during a period of profound political upheaval – first under the Fascist regime, then under the Italian Social Republic, and finally in the context of the Resistance. Archival evidence reveals a profoundly dialogical enterprise, conducted primarily with Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, in which art theory, art history, and the history of historiography emerge not as neutral disciplines, but as fields of knowledge inseparable from a political and historical vocation.

³ An essential study for tracing the penetration of the theories of the Vienna School into Italian art historiography in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with numerous references to the work of Alois Riegl, remains 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*, Akten des XXV. Internationalen Kongresses für Kunstgeschichte Wien, 4. – 10. Sept. 1983 1 Wien und die Entwicklung der kunsthistorischen Methode: Sektion 1 (Wien, 1984), 65-81.

⁴ For an exhaustive introduction of the complex dissemination of Riegl's writings in 20th-century Italy, see Sandro Scarrocchia, *Oltre la storia dell'arte. Alois Riegl, vita e opere di un protagonista della cultura viennese* (Milan: C. Marinotti, 2006).

⁵ For a rigorous examination of the vicissitudes experienced by Riegl's theories in Italy during the early 20th century, including chronologies, an analysis of the historical milieu, discourses within archaeology, and the fascist context, see the foundational contribution by Massimiliano Ghilardi and Fausto Zevi, 'Echi di Riegl nella critica italiana', in *Alois Riegl (1858–1905) un secolo dopo* (Rome: Atti dei convegni Lincei, 2008), pp. 219-237.

⁶ Andrew Hopkins's meticulous reconstruction of the European and North American reception of Riegl's magnum opus also comprises exhaustive observations on its dissemination in Italy: Andrew Hopkins, 'Riegl Renaissance', in *Alois Riegl. The Origins of Baroque Art in Rome. Texts and Documents*, ed. and trans. by Andrew Hopkins and Arnold Witte (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2010), 60-87 (68, 70).

⁷ De Carolis' monograph provides a noteworthy perspective on the editorial effort under scrutiny, by carefully examining the correspondence between Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti and the Vicenza-based publisher Neri Pozza: Francesco De Carolis, *Il genio dei libri difficili. Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti e il sodalizio con Neri Pozza* (Lucca: Edizioni Fondazione Ragghianti studi sull'arte, 2022), 22-25. As De Carolis notes, Neri Pozza himself had to collaborate with Ragghianti on the project of translating Riegl's work (Ibid.).

The present study is divided into three parts. The first offers a concise biographical account of Collobi Ragghianti – already well established in Italian scholarship – alongside the previously unpublished autograph and typescript translations of *Spätrömische Kunstindustrie*, drafted between 1942 and 1945. The second traces the complex editorial trajectory that culminated in the volume's publication in 1959 – nearly sixteen years after the fall of Fascism and over a decade after the first draft was completed. The third examines the interweaving of Collobi Ragghianti's historiographical vision with the historical, cultural, and political conditions under which the book took shape. It suggests that the 1959 edition, often treated as marginal in the reception of Riegl's thought, may in fact represent a pivotal intervention, one that redefined the role of the historiography as both intellectual and civic agent. In a moment when the past was being rewritten in service of ideology, Collobi Ragghianti's translation stood as a quiet but resolute assertion: that art history could be rigorous, pluralistic, and open-ended. This claim, while grounded in archival evidence, remains a hypothesis: one whose force will be demonstrated, not declared.

I

On 18 August 1945, Giorgio Soavi, an Italian writer and journalist responsible for *Nuove Edizioni Ivrea*, wrote to Collobi Ragghianti⁸ to inquire about the status of the translation of Riegl's *Spätrömische Kunstindustrie*, entrusted to her in October 1942 and originally due for delivery in August 1943.⁹ Founded in 1942 amid the exigencies of war, *Nuove Edizioni Ivrea* emerged as a response to the growing difficulty of accessing international publications – a difficulty exacerbated by the conflict.¹⁰ The initiative to produce the first Italian translation of Riegl's was thus coincided within a context of institutional disruption. As the following account will try to prove, Collobi Ragghianti's engagement with the project marked not a singular endeavour but the opening phase of a protracted publishing trajectory that would span over a decade and culminate only in 1959.¹¹

⁸ Lucca, Fondazione Centro Studi sull'Arte Licia e Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti (FR), Archivio Licia Collobi Ragghianti (ALCR), Fasc. 5: A. Riegl, *Arte tardoromana*, translation, bibliography and notes by Licia Collobi (Einaudi Editore, 1959) 1942–1959, Letter from Giorgio Soavi to Licia Collobi Ragghianti, 18 August 1945.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Regarding the establishment and activities of *Nuove Edizioni Ivrea Editrice*, a publishing house founded by Adriano Olivetti and a group of young intellectuals in 1942, see Roberto Palazzi, 'Adriano Olivetti e le Nuove Edizioni Ivrea', in *Scritti di bibliografia, editoria e altre futilità*, ed. by Massimo Gatta and Mauro Chiabrando (Naples: Bibliopolis, 2008), 227–233.

¹¹ Collobi Ragghianti herself retraced these developments in an editorial clarification, completed by June 1959 and appended to the conclusion of her introduction. Alois Riegl, *Arte tardoromana*, trans. and introduced by Licia Collobi Ragghianti (Turin: Einaudi, 1959).

To grasp the significance of this correspondence, it is necessary to situate Collobi Ragghianti within the broader contours of her intellectual and professional life.¹² Born Licia Golubic in Trieste on 24 August 1914, she initially studied German Literature, before completing a degree in humanities with a thesis in art history at the University of Turin in June 1936, under the supervision of Anna Maria Brizio.¹³ From 1936 to 1938, she pursued further studies at the Istituto di Storia dell'Arte e Archeologia in Rome. In January 1937, she obtained her teaching qualification in art history for secondary schools. Later that year, she married Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, with whom she would maintain a lifelong intellectual and political collaboration.¹⁴ Between the late 1930s and the 1940s, Collobi Ragghianti published a series of early articles and reviews on fifteenth- and sixteenth-century art, focusing on figures such as Taddeo and Federico Zuccari, Lazzaro Bastiani, Parmigianino, and Zanobi Strozzi. Alongside her teaching, she pursued a continuous professional career within the Italian cultural administration: first as a cataloguer in Piacenza, then as director of the Galleria Estense in Modena (1940–1943), and later as Inspector for the Superintendency of the Gallerie in Florence from (1944–1951).¹⁵

The Riegl translation must therefore be understood not as an isolated scholarly act, but as part of a broader constellation of professional commitments and intellectual ambitions during the Second World War. Archival materials – particularly two folders preserved within a dossier documenting the long-delayed edition – offer crucial insight into the project's evolution. The first, titled *Arte industriale tardoromana* and dated Florence, July 1945, contains the complete autograph translation of *Spätrömische Kunstindustrie*, begun in a notebook and subsequently continued on a bundle of foolscap folios.¹⁶ A calendar inscribed on the inside back cover suggests that a significant portion of the translation was completed between January and March 1942.¹⁷ If this evidence is reliable – though it must be weighed against the original August 1943 deadline – the draft was likely finalised by mid-1945.¹⁸

¹² The work of Licia Collobi Ragghianti has been the subject of an increasing number of scholarships over the past decade. For an introduction to her work, see Maria Teresa Filieri (eds.), 'Licia Collobi Ragghianti storica dell'arte: giornata di studi, Lucca, 4 dicembre 2014', *Luk*, 20 (2014–2015), 63–142. See also Eleonora Caggiati, *Licia Collobi Ragghianti: ricerche 'a lunga scadenza' nella storia del disegno* (Lucca: Edizioni Fondazione Ragghianti Studi sull'Arte, 2025).

¹³ See Rosetta Ragghianti, 'Profilo Biografico: Licia Collobi Ragghianti', in Filieri (2014–2015), 65–71.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ FR, ALCR, Fasc. 5: A. Riegl, *Arte tardoromana*, translation, bibliography and notes by Licia Collobi (Einaudi Editore, 1959), 1942–1959, *Late Roman Industrial Art*, translation by LC, manuscript dated 1945 and memorandum; Riegl, Complete Translation of Chapter IV (typescript with handwritten corrections in poor condition), and memorandum note.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ When compared with the subsequent editorial developments, which can be traced through the surviving documentation, this date appears plausible – at least as far as the completion of the translation is concerned.

The critical introduction, composed by Collobi Ragghianti in the early months of 1950, confirms her decision to base the translation on the first edition of 1901.¹⁹ This choice is substantiated by the autograph manuscript, which reveals a meticulous and highly deliberate process: a translation not merely of meaning, but of style. Her rendering preserves Riegl's syntactic structure, phrasing, and terminology with remarkable fidelity, reflecting a conscious effort to convey not only the content but the very rhythm of his thought²⁰. This commitment is further underscored by an editorial note composed in June 1959, in which she articulates her methodological stance:

In undertaking a complete translation, I aimed not only to render Riegl's text into proper Italian in terms of meaning, but also, as far as possible, to preserve its distinctive phrasing. It would have been easy to break up or merge sentences, to remove redundancies and repetitions, and to make the discourse generally more fluent; yet in doing so, one would have lost all trace of the sometimes arduous, even severe, trajectory of his authentic thought, as he strove for the most valid and persuasive expression of his new definition.²¹

A second folder of particular importance for reconstructing the project's development can be tentatively dated to the latter half of the 1940s, most likely originating in Florence around 1946. It contains a schematic index annotated by Collobi Ragghianti, alongside the typescript of the fourth chapter of Riegl's text.²² Within the volume's structure, *L'arte industriale* occupies a pivotal position. It was here that Collobi Ragghianti undertook her substantial revisions between the autograph draft and the final typescript. She reworked Riegl's argument by clarifying its theoretical foundations, while simultaneously pruning the extensive corpus of case studies that characterised the original. This editorial intervention is explicitly acknowledged in a *Nota dell'editrice* (*Publisher's Note*), composed in early 1950,²³ which articulates the tension at the heart of her editorial practice: the desire to offer the Italian public a faithful yet accessible rendering of Riegl's work, without compromising adherence to the original theoretical framework. Collobi Ragghianti wrote in this regard:

One could certainly not exclude from this work, which as a whole presents the character of a history of Late Roman art, one of the author's most original investigations, indeed

¹⁹ Collobi Ragghianti 1959, XXII, translated by the author.

²⁰ As Ragghianti stated in 1966: "As Collobi rightly observed, Riegl thinks while writing". Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, 'Il ritorno del Riegl', *Critica d'arte*, 80 (1966), 3-8 (3), translated by the author.

²¹ Collobi Ragghianti 1959, XXVIII, translated by the author.

²² FR, ALCR, Fasc. 5: A. Riegl, *Arte tardoromana*, translation, bibliography and notes by Licia Collobi (Einaudi Editore, 1959), 1942–1959, calendar and 'Riegl Complete translation of Chapter IV'.

²³ Collobi Ragghianti 1959, 202, translated by the author. In a letter to the publisher Einaudi dated 15 April 1950, Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti noted: 'Before Part IV, devoted to late Roman art industry, a publisher's note should be inserted explaining why this section of the text has been largely condensed, and the principles followed in this reworking. As I have already stated, it remains entirely faithful to the original text and, in certain respects, even enhances its impact, since the original suffers from a certain analytical excess'. FR, Fondo Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti (ACLR), Fasc. 2: Einaudi 1950–1966, Letter from Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti to Giulio Einaudi, 15 April 1950.

discoveries: namely, the first-ever aesthetic treatment of the so-called industrial or applied arts.²⁴

II

Before turning to the broader implications of this critical choice, it is instructive to retrace the complex, inter-editorial trajectory of the volume – a history not of a single publishing venture, but of a project repeatedly displaced, reconfigured, and reimagined across shifting institutional and political landscapes. With the closure of *Nuove Edizioni Ivrea* and the founding of the publishing house *Comunità* in 1946, the initial Italian translation of *Kunstindustrie* effectively stalled. The project then found a second, fleeting possibility in *Edizioni U*,²⁵ established in 1945 in Florence by Dino Gentili, Aldo Garosci, and Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti. Active only until 1948, this publishing house was marked by ambitious intellectual ambitions.²⁶ In a letter to Bernard Berenson dated 2 May 1945 Ragghianti described Riegl's text as one of the 'fundamental critical works', whose translation was to be included in a curated selection of writings by Konrad Fiedler and Franz Wickhoff, envisioned as part of 'a program of modern culture beneficial for Italy and abroad'.²⁷ Despite the purchase of coated paper in January 1946 and a planned release for Christmas that year, the initiative ultimately proved unsuccessful.²⁸ As De Carolis observed, the root cause of *Edizioni U*'s demise lay not in financial insolvency, but in the absence of sustained institutional energy among its founders.²⁹

The third and final phase of the project was realised through *Giulio Einaudi Editore*, whose publishing house became the unlikely vessel for Riegl's reception in postwar Italy. As had occurred with *Nuove Edizioni Ivrea* and *Edizioni U*, the initiative emerged at a moment of profound cultural reorientation, that is the will to re-embed Italian intellectual life within the broader European tradition, long suppressed under two decades of Fascist cultural isolation.³⁰ In August 1945, Einaudi approached Ragghianti regarding a proposed translation of Max Dvořák's essay *Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte*, seeking his

²⁴ Collobi Ragghianti 1959, p. 202, translated by the author.

²⁵ Francesco De Carolis, 'Le Edizioni U e Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti', *Predella*, 49 (2021), 35-36, 40.

²⁶ For an in-depth documentary analysis of the establishment and operations of Edizioni U, see De Carolis 2021, 29-30.

²⁷ De Carolis 2021, 35. See FR, ACLR, Edizioni U, b. 1, file 4, letter from CLR to Bernard Berenson, May 1, 1945, translated by the author.

²⁸ FR, ACLR, Fasc. 2: Edizioni U 1946, Board of Directors' report, 30 January 1946.

²⁹ De Carolis 2021, 46, translated by the author.

³⁰ An essential essay for contextualising Collobi Ragghianti's translation within the broader and more complex events surrounding the publisher Einaudi is Emanuele Pellegrini, 'Ragghianti in Einaudi', in Paolo Soddu, Franca Varallo (eds), *Editoria e storici dell'arte nell'Italia del secondo dopoguerra* (Rome: Viella, 2023), 343-374. Pellegrini's work highlights the fact that Ragghianti's anti-fascist beliefs and his education at Croce's institution rendered him an ideal candidate for partnership with the publishing house, which espoused similar values in the aftermath of the Second World War. Pellegrini, 2023, 348-49.

recommendation for a suitable translator.³¹ Ragghianti responded with enthusiasm, endorsing Gian Alberto Dell'Acqua for the task.³² Yet the translation of Riegl's work, already in advanced stages of completion, was drawn into a far more intricate web of editorial negotiation.³³ A corpus of at least fifty largely unpublished letters, spanning the years 1946 to 1959, reveals a protracted and often cutting exchange among Ragghianti, Giulio Einaudi, and Giulio Bollati. These documents expose not merely logistical delays, but deep-seated disagreements over editorial authority, textual fidelity, and the very purpose of translation in a postwar cultural context. Collobi Ragghianti's role in these negotiations was, by contrast, relatively peripheral, reflecting the convolute, often informal network of editorial politics that characterised that period. Ragghianti functioned as the *de facto* intermediary, navigating between the publisher's commercial imperatives and the translator's scholarly commitments.³⁴ Yet it is precisely in this marginality that the archival record becomes most revealing: the letters, though often terse and occasionally confrontational, offer an unprecedented glimpse into the reception of Riegl in postwar Italy – not as a static text, but as a receptive object of intellectual transmission.

By 15 April 1950, as confirmed in a letter from Ragghianti to Giulio Einaudi, Collobi Ragghianti had finalised and approved for printing a core body of materials. This included the critical introduction (*Nota critica*), the full translation, the editorial clarification to the fourth chapter, the author's notes, a rare photographic portrait of Riegl bearing his autograph, and a previously unpublished bibliography of his writings.³⁵ The persistent delays in publication, which provoked Ragghianti's impassioned correspondence, were officially attributed to the procurement of reproductions and clichés, to be placed at the

³¹ FR, ACLR, Fasc. 2: Einaudi 1950–1966, Letter from Einaudi Editore (EE) to CLR, August 6, 1945.

³² FR, ACLR, Fasc. 2: Einaudi 1950–1966, Letter from CLR to GE, 15 April 1950. As the correspondence makes clear, the publisher ultimately took responsibility for Dall'Acqua's name, with the aim of producing a translation of the essay *Idealismus und Naturalismus* – a project that never came to fruition. Italian readers would have to wait decades before accessing the essay in translation, with Max Dvořák, *Idealismo e naturalismo nella scultura e nella pittura gotica*, translated by Riccardo Marchi (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2003). Cfr. FR, ACLR, Fasc. 2: Einaudi 1950–1966, Letter from EE to CLR, August 24, 1945. For a recent introduction to the complex reception of Dvořák's thought in Italian historiography, see Francesca Bottura, 'The reception of Max Dvořák's thought in Italy: resistances and unlucky attempts between the 1920s and the 1940s', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 23 (2023), 1–14.

³³ FR, ACLR, Fasc. 1: Einaudi 1941–1949; Fasc. 2: Einaudi 1950–1966.

³⁴ Nevertheless, it is essential to recognise the complex web of individuals, their pivotal roles, and the range of perspectives that shaped the first two decades of the publishing house's development. This network both influenced institutional decision-making and either enabled or constrained various initiatives. The dynamics underlying these relationships have already been rigorously examined through philological analysis of archival sources and correspondence in Pellegrini 2023, *passim*.

³⁵ FR, ACLR, Fasc. 2: Einaudi 1950–1966, Letter from CLR to GE, 15 April 1950. In a letter of 21 February 1952, Ragghianti stated that the entire work had been in the publisher's hands for four years, dating the submission of the materials to the winter of 1948. On 7 October 1953, he placed Collobi's manuscript as delivered between 1947 and 1948 (FR, ACLR, Fasc. 2: Einaudi 1950–1966). The portrait is mentioned in a letter from Giulio Bollati (GB) to CLR dated 30 November 1953.

conclusion of each chapter.³⁶ Yet beneath these typographical justifications, a more subtle dynamic emerged: Einaudi's lack of sustained commitment to the project. Notably, while the editor refused to grant Ragghianti the rights to the translation of Schlosser's *Arte nel Medioevo* (a project discussed since the late 1940s),³⁷ he authorised the sale of the rights of Riegl's translation and introduction in May 1958.³⁸

It is worth noting that this decade of negotiations coincided with publication, in October 1953, of *Industria artistica tardoantica*, issued by Sansoni.³⁹ This volume, which represents the first Italian edition of Riegl's work, was in fact the product of a separate editorial lineage. Initiated in the late 1940s by Carlo Anti for the publisher *Tre Venezie*,⁴⁰ the project had languished due to the latter's financial collapse – accounting for the six-year delay before its eventual release.⁴¹ The Sansoni edition, while pioneering, was structurally distinct from the Collobi Ragghianti-Einaudi version. As Collobi Ragghianti herself acknowledged in the 1959 preface, the Sansoni translation relied on the 1927 edition for both text and illustrations and reproduced the chapter on industrial art in its entirety, resulting in a significantly expanded page count.⁴² Rendered by classical archaeologists Bruna Forlati Tamaro and Maria Teresa Ronga Leoni, the translation exhibits a notably fluid prose, though with a somewhat looser fidelity to Riegl's original phrasing.⁴³ Moreover, Sergio Bettini's extensive fifty-page introduction, while invaluable in contextualising Riegl's categories and sources, adopted a methodological framework distinct from Collobi Ragghianti's own. He addressed not to a general public, but to a specialised academic readership, one familiar with the intricacies of German art historiography and the theoretical challenges of defining artistic value in late antiquity.

³⁶ Numerous letters, in fact, concern the layout and the procurement of printing clichés, supplied from Florence.

³⁷ The translation by the young Carlo Sgorlon was finished as early as September 1950. FR, ACLR, Fasc. 2: Einaudi 1950–1966, Letter from CLR to GE, September 18, 1950. The Einaudi edition of the essay was not published until 1961.

³⁸ FR, ACLR, Fasc. 2: Einaudi 1950–1966, Letter from GE to CLR, May 29, 1958.

³⁹ Sergio Bettini, *Industria artistica tardoantica*, trans. by Bruna Forlati Tamaro and Maria Teresa Ronga Leoni (Florence: Sansoni, 1953).

⁴⁰ The editorial history of this equally complex project, together with the Pozza-Ragghianti correspondence, has already been reconstructed on a solid philological basis in De Carolis, 22–26; Cfr. Ghilardi, Zevi 2008, 235–236.

⁴¹ As Bettini himself underlines in the *Nota introduttiva*: '[...] the translation, ready for several years to be included in the series *Contributi alla storia delle civiltà artistiche* of the publishing house *Le Tre Venezie*, could not ultimately be published due to the cessation of that Publishing House's activities. Bettini 1953, XXVII–VIII, translated by the author.

⁴² Bettini emphasizes that it represented a 'laborious translation', undertaken by 'archaeologists as well as scholars with linguistic expertise, who did their utmost [evidently to make Riegl's discourse more to accessible the Italian audience]; yet the reader will no doubt forgive any traces of the original rigor that occasionally emerge in their rendering'. Bettini 1953, XXVIII, translated by the author.

⁴³ Ibid. This translation was closely reviewed by Collobi Ragghianti and Ragghianti. Ragghianti indeed assessed the translation, particularly faithful to Riegl's text, as essentially 'archaeological'. FR, ACLR, Fasc. 2: Einaudi 1950–1966, Letter from CLR to GE, October 7, 1953.

The final stages of the Collobi Ragghianti-Einaudi edition were completed in June 1958, when she undertook a scrupulous revision of the indices of names and places, verified the photographic clichés, and composed the postscript tracing the work's editorial history.⁴⁴ The volume was scheduled for printing in the winter of 1958 and, after a final delay, was published in 1959, fifteen years after the original commission and nearly a decade after the first draft was completed. Its arrival marked not merely the culmination of a chronically-delayed translation, but the emergence of a distinctive Italian rendering of Riegl's thought. Shaped by editorial conscience, a disciplined attentiveness to Riegl's wording, and, above all, a profound conviction in the enduring relevance of the text. A conviction that, in the context of postwar Italy's cultural reconstruction, amounted to an act of intellectual resistance: a claim whose significance will be suggested in the following section.

III

We now arrive at the heart of the present argument: what conception of Riegl emerges from Licia Collobi Ragghianti? In my assessment, this critical portrait is not the product of a solitary scholarship, but a collaborative and fundamentally political enterprise of research. One shaped by years of intellectual exchange, shared resistance, and a commitment to the reconstitution of art history as a discipline of ethical and methodological rigor. From the early 1920s onward, Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti engaged both directly and indirectly with Riegl's writings,⁴⁵ encouraging Collobi Ragghianti undertaking of the *Spätrömische Kunstindustrie* translation and commentary.⁴⁶ In 1942, at the height of the Second World War, Ragghianti published one of the first systematic surveys of Riegl's reception in Italy, posing his contribution as evidence of a 'new consciousness'⁴⁷ emerging among a generation of Italian art historians. This assessment was reaffirmed in his correspondence with Einaudi throughout the 1950s, where he consistently expressed the highest regard for

⁴⁴ FR, ACLR, Fasc. 2: Einaudi 1950–1966, Letter from LC to GB, May 28, 1959.

⁴⁵ The most comprehensive reconstruction of Riegl's reception in Ragghianti's thought and writings can be found in Gianni Carlo Sciolla, 'Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti e la "Scuola di Vienna"', *TeCLA-Rivista di Critica e di Letteratura Artistica*, 1 (2010), 8–28. Sciolla observes that Ragghianti first encountered Riegl's writings during his university years in Pisa, under the tutelage of Matteo Marangoni (Sciolla, 9, translated by the author). The period spent at the Warburg Institute in London, in the heart of the interwar period, provided further opportunity for dialogue on Riegl's theories with his Polish colleague Jenő Lányi. Sciolla, 9: Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, 'Care reliquie: in memoriam Jenő Lányi', in *Il pungolo dell'arte* (Venice: Neri Pozza, 1956); Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, 'Ritardi culturali' in *La scuola Viennese di storia dell'arte*, ed. by Marco Pozzetto (Gorizia: Istituto per gli incontri culturali mitteleuropei, 1986), p. 252. The bibliographical references cited previously are to be found in Sciolla 2019. It is also worth noting, as De Carolis has pointed out to me, the significance that Julius von Schlosser, *La storia dell'arte nelle esperienze e nei ricordi di un suo cultore* (Bari: Laterza, 1936) had for an entire generation of Italian authors associated with formalism – among them, foremost, Ragghianti himself – particularly as they approached the legacy of the Vienna School.

⁴⁶ Collobi Ragghianti 1959, XXVII.

⁴⁷ Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, *Profilo della critica d'arte in Italia* (Florence: Vallecchi [1942] 1990), 47.

Riegl's essay.⁴⁸ On 21 February 1952, Ragghianti described it as 'one of the very rare volumes truly fundamental for art criticism'.⁴⁹

Within this context, the Italian reception of Riegl reveals two interwoven historiographical trajectories. On one hand, as a substantial body of Italian-language scholarship has demonstrated, renewed interest in Riegl's writings emerged in the mid-20th century, particularly within the transnational re-evaluation of the Baroque.⁵⁰ Like many Italian intellectuals, both Collobi Ragghianti and Ragghianti encountered Riegl through the mediation of Benedetto Croce and Julius von Schlosser⁵¹ – a cultural bridge on which Ragghianti himself had already offered incisive reflections prior to Collobi Ragghianti's work.⁵² As Sandro Scarrocchia and Carlo Sciolla have shown, Croce's role was both

⁴⁸ In the extensive correspondence between Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti and Giulio Einaudi, spanning the period from the mid-1940s to the publication of the volume in 1959, Ragghianti openly expresses his discontent at the persistent delays in publication. In July 1951 he inquired about the editorial fate of the 'poor Riegl'. In a letter sent that September, Ragghianti reminded the publisher that Collobi had been forced to forgo obtaining her *libera docenza* because the volume had not yet appeared. Then, in a letter dated 11 January 1952, Ragghianti wrote in a bitter tone, asking: 'When will we finally be able to see these proofs? Must this unhappy chapter, too, be added to the story of the fortunes of this great critic, who, perhaps precisely because of his stature, in life and in death must endure so many purgatories?'. As late as 7 October 1953, with the work once again delayed, Ragghianti addressed the publisher anew, insisting that 'for twenty years I have been emphasizing the fundamental importance of Riegl's great essay', yet without producing any tangible result regarding the publication of the translation. Thus, even on 12 July 1954, once again inquiring about the publication of the volume, Ragghianti confided to Giulio Einaudi that 'the matter which, as you know, lies closest to my heart is the Riegl volume, translated and annotated by my wife'. On 5 September 1955, in a tone at once somber and resolute, Ragghianti declared that 'the only thing I still care about is the publication of Riegl, so that it may be read and reflected upon by many'. FR, ACLR Fasc. 1: 1941–1949; Fasc. 2: Einaudi 1950–1966 (all the documents here reported have been translated by the author).

⁴⁹ FR, ACLR, Fasc. 2: Einaudi 1950–1966, Letter from CLR to GE, February 21, 1954. At that same venue, Ragghianti did not fail to mention Collobi's commitment to translating, introducing and meticulously annotating Riegl's essay, which had already been completed for at least a year.

⁵⁰ The connection between Riegl's studies and the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century reappraisal of the Baroque has become a well-established trope within Italian art-historical. See Benedetto Croce, *Storia dell'età barocca in Italia* (Bari: Laterza, 1967), 28–29; Muñoz 1908, 391–393; Lionello Venturi, *Storia della critica d'arte* (Florence: Edizioni U, 1948). Venturi, 1948, 432; Ragghianti (1942) 1990, 47; Pellegrini 2004, 262; Scarrocchia 2006, 98–99; Ghilardi, Zevi 2008, 226; Sciolla 2010, 9.

⁵¹ On the mediation undertaken by Benedetto Croce and Julius von Schlosser in introducing Riegl's work to the Italian context, Scarrocchia remains an indispensable point of reference. Scarrocchia 2006, 97–101, 102–104, 113–119.

⁵² See Sciolla 2010, 14. It is well known that Ragghianti pondered the question of whether Croce might have been influenced by Riegl's theories as early as the final quarter of the nineteenth century. Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, 'Diario critico', *Critica d'arte*, 1(2) (1954), 188–189. The passage under scrutiny has previously been transcribed in Scarrocchia 2006, 98; Sciolla 2010, 14. As Emanuele Pellegrini has shown, Ragghianti regarded Schlosser as 'an indispensable figure', not least because 'Schlosser himself had sought to define his role as a "bridge" between German and Italian culture, a task he carried out with consistency even when circumstances set these two poles in opposition [...]'. Emanuele Pellegrini, 'Il carteggio von Schlosser-Ragghianti: qualche anticipazione', *Ragghianti critic e politico*, ed. by Raffaele Bruno (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2004), 259–290 (273).

facilitative and constraining⁵³: while he introduced Riegl's ideas to Italian readers, his idealist framework stood in marked tension with Riegl's Herbartian roots⁵⁴, 'purovisibilista' orientation⁵⁵, and psychological method. As Emanuele Pellegrini has reconstructed, Ragghianti maintained an active correspondence with Schlosser, likely initiated in January 1936.⁵⁶ His engagement was neither monolithical nor uncritical,⁵⁷ yet consistently acknowledged Schlosser's decisive role 'in precipitating, so to speak, the historical and methodological work of the 'Vienna School' into the new Italian historiography'.⁵⁸

In this cultural milieu, leading figures such as Lionello Venturi and Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli critically interrogate with Riegl's theories from the mid 1930s onward.⁵⁹ It was precisely through this delayed reception that a second phenomenon took shape: the interpretation and, indirectly, the interpolation of Riegl's theoretical premises. As Massimiliano Ghilardi and Fausto Zevi have demonstrated, Riegl's theories – which until the 1910s had received only sporadic and often partial attention – were subjected to a process of re-evaluation that was, in most cases, instrumental rather than philological. This movement was frequently intertwined with a pretextual and propagandistic notion of

⁵³ In a well-known passage written on 21 March 1937, Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli reflected on his engagement with Croce's legacy, describing the master's role as a 'barrier' that had, at least in part, shielded him from the cultural challenges posed by contemporary circumstances. This passage has already been transcribed and thoroughly discussed in Scarrocchia 2006, 140.

⁵⁴ On several occasions, Croce criticizes the Herbartian formalist approach with marked severity (Croce 1902, 342-344; Croce 1920, 268-269. A recent analysis of the Herbartian roots of the young Croce can be found in Giuseppe Guastamacchia, *Il giovane Benedetto Croce: herbartismo, neokantismo e scienze dello spirito* (Naples: Bibliopolis, 2024).

⁵⁵ This refers to the celebrated Benedetto Croce, 'La teoria dell'arte come pura visibilità', in *Nuovi Saggi di Estetica* (Bari: Laterza, 1920), 239-254. For an exhaustive examination of the correlation between Croce and pure visualist theories, see Scarrocchia 2006, 109-113. The incompatibility between Croce's neo-idealism and psychological approaches had already been harshly denounced by Alfredo Gargiulo, 'Recensione a A. von Schmarsow, Grundbegriffe der Kunstwissenschaft', *La Critica*, 5 (1906), 224.

⁵⁶ Pellegrini 2004, 260-261.

⁵⁷ Sciolla 2010, 9-10, 13, 18-21. Ragghianti, who was prompt to recognise the pivotal role Schlosser played in introducing German-speaking *Kunstwissenschaft* into the Italian context, nonetheless did not refrain from highlighting the limitations he perceived underlying the Viennese scholar's approach. These limitations, which Ragghianti consolidates into a single point, consist in 'a capacity for sensitivity to the taste of form markedly inferior to his great humanistic and historiographical qualities'. From this perspective, Schlosser appears 'far inferior to Riegl, to Wölfflin, to Berenson, and above all to Longhi' (Ragghianti 1942 [1990], 91, translated by the author). This quotation is already transcribed in Sciolla 2010, 21.

⁵⁸ Ragghianti 1942 [1990], 86. Translated by the author.

⁵⁹ Definitive remains in this sense Sciolla 1984.

romanità,⁶⁰ articulated in opposition to the Eastern, Northern, and later Nazi perspective advanced by Strzygowski, a model that retained considerable influence until the mid-1920s.⁶¹

Within this context, Collobi Ragghianti and Ragghianti played a crucial role in mediating Riegl's reception. From the late 1920s onward, both were identified as unwavering antifascists;⁶² Ragghianti, in particular, was arrested by the Fascist police in 1942 and again in May 1943.⁶³ During the most intense years of her professional and political activity, Collobi Ragghianti simultaneously undertook the translation and commentary of *Spätrömische Kunstindustrie*, taught of art history in secondary schools, served as Inspector at the Modenese Superintendency, and contributed editorially to the journals founded by Ragghianti.⁶⁴ She also coordinated local antifascist groups, including the ones connected to *Giustizia e Libertà*,⁶⁵ and ensured the clandestine circulation of Ragghianti's political writings during his imprisonment.⁶⁶ After the Armistice, she actively participated in the Italian Resistance and was later described as 'the living archive of the military and

⁶⁰ As Ghilardi and Zevi convincingly demonstrate, a group of figures aligned with the Fascist milieu – specifically with the Istituto Nazionale di Studi Romani, founded in 1925 – including Pietro D'Achiardi, Roberto Paribeni, Carlo Galassi Paluzzi, Carlo Cecchelli, and Pericle Ducati, contributed indirectly to a sort of rehabilitation of Riegl's theses, and in particular of the *Spätrömische Kunstindustrie*. As the authors note, 'it is thus only around the 1930s, or slightly earlier, that – in parallel with the decline of Strzygowski's theories – Riegl's thought seems to surface for the first time within Italian art-historical studies. Yet one cannot avoid the impression that, with only a few exceptions, this renewed and positive consideration of Riegl did not arise from serious scholarly debate or from an autonomous assessment of his insights and results, but rather [...] from a nearly instrumental appropriation within an anti-Strzygowskian context, profoundly compromised by the shifting political climate of the time and directed toward precise propagandistic objectives [...]'. Ghilardi and Zevi, 2008, 230.

⁶¹ Ghelardi and Zevi 2008, 221-224. See also Bernabò 2001, 1-10; The bibliography on this renowned dispute is extensive. A selection of the more notable entries is provided below: Margaret Olin, *Art History and Ideology: Alois Riegl and Josef Strzygowski*, ed. by Schine Gold, Penny Sax, and C. Benjamin (eds.), *Cultural Visions: Essays in the History of Culture* (Brill, 2000), 151-170; Jas Elsner, 'The Birth of Late Antiquity. Riegl and Strzygowski in 1901', *Art history*, 25 (2002), 358-379; Georg Vasold, 'Riegl, Strzygowski and the development of art', *Journal of Art Historiography*, (2011), 103-116; Rémi Labrusse, and John Goodman, 'Anthropological Delirium: Josef Strzygowski Confronts Alois Riegl', *Art in Translation*, 6(1) (2014), 59-75; Ivan Foletti and Francesco Lovino (eds), *Orient oder Rom? History and Reception of a Historiographical Myth (1901–1970)* (Rome: Viella Editrice, 2018). Annamaria Ducci, 'Strzygowski in Geneva circa 1933: Ideological and Political Use of Artistic Genealogies', in I. Baldriga and M. Ruffini (ed.), *Politics of the Arts and Collective Memory. A Critical Approach to 'Cancel Culture'* (Florence: Edifir Edizioni, 2025), 143-154.

⁶² An indispensable resource for a finely detailed documentary reconstruction of Ragghianti and Collobi's militancy is Emanuele Pellegrini, *Storico dell'arte e uomo politico. Profilo biografico di Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti* (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2018), 26-45, 47-56. A further resource for approaching Ragghianti's political profile, inseparable from his identity as an art historian, is provided by Becherucci, Pozzi 2024.

⁶³ Pellegrini 2018, 49, 51.

⁶⁴ Rosetta Ragghianti 2014–2015, 65-71.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Pellegrini 2018, 49.

civil clandestinity entrusted to her husband'.⁶⁷ In April 1971, she was formally recognised eligible for the honorific title of 'partisan combatant' – a testament to her enduring civic commitment.⁶⁸

This political trajectory must be accounted for in understanding the reception of Riegl. The influence of Croce, however, extends beyond his role as a cultural intermediary. His position as a political actor and antifascist intellectual – already acknowledged and intellectually assimilated by Ragghianti⁶⁹ – warrants particular attention. It is not merely Croce's historiographical involvement with *Kunstwissenschaft* that matters, but his broader intellectual stance, exemplified in *La storia come pensiero e azione* (1938),⁷⁰ a volume that, though not directly addressing Riegl, functioned as a quiet but powerful response to the cultural coercion of the Fascist regime.⁷¹

The central question, then, is this: might Collobi Ragghianti's presentation of *Spätromische Kunstindustrie* to the Italian public be understood, in some sense, as a reflection of her political and civic engagement? While no documentary evidence confirms how this engagement directly shaped her interpretation, the archival record reveals a profound coincidence between her political activity and her scholarly work. More illuminating still is the *Nota critica* that introduces the volume. Compared to Sergio Bettini's prologue for the Sansoni edition, Collobi Ragghianti's introduction stands out for its precision and scope. It offers a tightly structured overview of Riegl's thought, grounded in the writings of Schlosser, Max Dvořák, and Hans Sedlmayr,⁷² and systematically organised within a concise secondary bibliography.⁷³ Throughout, she identifies the reasons for the limited engagement with Riegl in Italy: the German language of his texts, the 'arduous terminology' he developed, and the 'obscurity' into which his thought could at times

⁶⁷ Rosetta Ragghianti 2014–2015. It should be recalled that Collobi co-edited the crucial volume *Ferruccio Parri, Una lotta nel suo corso* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1954). Reconstructing in detail its editorial vicissitudes and long (and troubled) gestation, Francesco De Carolis called it a 'documentary volume on the Resistance'. De Carolis 2022, 44.

⁶⁸ Papers relating to the qualification of 'Partigiana combattente' (1971), FR, ALCR, Box 6: Biographical documentation and personal papers 1918–1989, File 1: Biographical documentation 1918–1976.

⁶⁹ On the subject, Emanuele Pellegrini has written incisive pages, offering a documentary reading that I believe can be applied not only to Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, but also to Collobi Ragghianti. Pellegrini writes in this regard: "Naturally, the figure of Benedetto Croce serves as a backdrop. Here we are not so much referring to the philosopher whom Ragghianti began to reflect upon in 1930–31 [...], but to the author of *Storia come pensiero e azione*, Croce the political figure, senator, and signatory of the manifesto of the intellectuals who did not adhere to Fascism, actively engaged in Italian civic life, as Ragghianti himself did not fail to emphasize: 'My deepest engagement with Croce's thought has been precisely in its historical-political or ethical-social dimension: without that inspiration and that critique, I would not consider myself a moral and political person'; the quotation is from FR, ALCR, General Correspondence, Leo Viliani, Letter from CLR, December 13, 1962. Pellegrini 2018, 28, translated by the author.

⁷⁰ Croce 1938.

⁷¹ For a detailed analysis, cfr. Mimmo Franzinelli, *Croce e il fascismo* (Rome: Laterza, 2024).

⁷² Julius von Schlosser, 'Alois Riegl', in *Framing Formalism. Riegl's work*, ed. by Richard Woodfield (Routledge 2001), 33–48; Hans Sedlmayr, in Karl M. Swoboda (ed.), *Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Augsburg: Filser, 1929).

⁷³ Collobi Ragghianti 1959, XXI–XXII.

descend.⁷⁴ Her aim was not merely to inform, but to demonstrate ‘the originality of Riegl’s work and its fundamental importance for the development of modern art criticism’ – a didactic intent articulated in tightly wrought, vivid prose, yet never at the expense of scholarly rigor.

Her introduction delineates a threefold framework for introducing Riegl to the Italian public. First, she reconstructs Riegl’s intellectual formation: his mentorship under Franz Wickhoff, whom he ultimately surpassed in historiographical thought; his training with Zimmermann, the ‘last of the Herbartians’; his engagement with the ‘polyhistor Max Buedinger’ and the ‘positivist Moritz Thausing’, a perceptive exegete of Giovanni Morelli; the persistence of a ‘Hegelian derivation’ in the constructs of *Kunstwollen* and *Weltanschauung*; and his distancing from Gottfried Semper’s ‘materialistic prejudice’.⁷⁵

Second, she engages critically with Riegl’s theoretical corpus. Far from offering a hagiographic account, she acknowledges both his ‘illuminating insights and notable limitations’.⁷⁶ In one of the most incisive passages, she writes:

For Alois Riegl, artistic material is the projection and exemplification of a mental framework, which he reconstructs and represents: in a succession of phases of *Entwicklung*, of progress, he traces the history of significant artistic forms across so broad an era of human history. *Entwicklung* und *Verfall*, progress and decline, fixed schemas of art history understood naturalistically, and still all too often obscuring our discipline’s studies, are overcome by Riegl in a new conception that passionately rejects decadence.⁷⁷

Recognising the striking modernity of Riegl’s legacy – and its subsequent assimilation by figure such as Henri Focillon⁷⁸ – Collobi Ragghianti does not shy from confronting the tensions within his discourse. Among these, she identifies Riegl’s systematic interrelation of ‘artistic production and spiritual activity’, his notion of ‘artistic progress, undefined like human progress’, and the subordinate position backordered to the ‘artistic personality’ within this system, a point later singled out by Schlosser as a legitimate object of inquiry.⁷⁹ She admittes as Riegl’s ‘greatest limitation’ the subsumption of artistic development within a broader history of the spirit – a conceptual perspective completed by his pupil Dvořák. In this, she aligns herself with a form of scepticism already articulated by Ragghianti in the early 1940s toward approaches grounded in the ‘cultural’ history of art (exemplified, not coincidentally, by Dvořák).⁸⁰

⁷⁴ Collobi Ragghianti 1959, XXI, translated by the author.

⁷⁵ Collobi Ragghianti 1959, XVII-XVIII, XXIV, translated by the author.

⁷⁶ Collobi Ragghianti 1959, XXIV, translated by the author.

⁷⁷ Collobi Ragghianti 1959, XXIII, translated by the author.

⁷⁸ Collobi Ragghianti 1959, XXV, translated by the author.

⁷⁹ Collobi Ragghianti 1959, XXV-XXVI, translated by the author.

⁸⁰ Ragghianti 1942, 88.

Finally, a third and decisive dimension emerges. In contrast to the existing body of Italian scholarship on Riegl, what stands out most in Collobi Ragghianti's introduction is the author's sustained emphasis on the Austrian scholar's civic stature. From the outset, she emphasises his 'moral integrity with which [he] confronted practical problems, even when these brought him moral and material hardship'.⁸¹ This ethical dimension – articulated across multiple moments in the introduction, despite its brevity – resonates on several levels and constitutes a distinctive feature in relation to contemporary and immediately preceding Italian sources. In fact, the author systematically returns to Riegl's methodological stringency and intellectual honesty, constructing a portrait in which the theoretical dimension is not merely intertwined with, but actively shaped by, his principled approach to scholarship. She insists that 'the systematic spirit, the rigor of his historical-philological method, and the profound concern with source originality left a formative and lasting imprint on Riegl's analytical sensibility'.⁸² On the one hand, this rigor derives from Riegl's intimate, embodied engagement with artefacts in the field, made possible by his prolonged experience as a museum conservator. On the other hand, in contrast to the Fascist embargo that Collobi Ragghianti experienced while translating the essay, this material approach shields Riegl from ideological constraints, while enabling him to develop a temporally layered (and oriented) proposal.

In analysing Riegl's thought within the horizon of Late Antique material culture, she highlights its dual temporality – simultaneously anchored in the present and in the past. In a gesture that echoes Croce's dictum that all history is contemporary history, she underscored 'Riegl's acute awareness of the contemporaneity of history, of the fertile and inevitable relationship between the problems of the present and the understanding of the past', a perspective she traces to Jacob Burckhardt.⁸³

This interpenetration manifests in a vision grounded in the 'equality of aesthetic value' inherent in artistic expression, a principle that dismantled the academic hierarchy separating the so-called major and minor arts⁸⁴. In contrast to any form of 'doctrinal generality'⁸⁵ or a priori imposition – such as Collobi Ragghianti discerned at the core of Heinrich Wölfflin's theoretical edifice⁸⁶ – she insists that

the historical process of art [in Riegl] unfolds as a continuous flow of artistic activity, whose phases, though arising from one another, each possess an autonomy and originality of value and meaning, and are never to be regarded as mere 'negativities' or as lacking in significance or worth.⁸⁷

⁸¹ Collobi Ragghianti 1959, XXIV, translated by the author.

⁸² Collobi Ragghianti 1959, XVIII, translated by the author.

⁸³ Collobi Ragghianti 1959, XXIV, translated by the author.

⁸⁴ Collobi Ragghianti 1959, XXV, translated by the author.

⁸⁵ Collobi Ragghianti 1959, XVIII, translated by the author.

⁸⁶ Collobi Ragghianti 1959, XXIV, translated by the author.

⁸⁷ Collobi Ragghianti 1959, XXIII, translated by the author.

By underscoring Riegl's 'continuous closeness to the works themselves', Collobi Ragghianti draws attention to his civic understanding of the art historian's vocation.⁸⁸ What emerges most clearly is his tireless commitment to the reorganisation of the Austrian Museum and, above all, to the drafting of legislation for the reform of the *Denkmalpflege* – a reform that would only take effect after his premature death.⁸⁹

It was precisely this inseparability of civic and intellectual consciousness, released from any form of dogmatism, that Collobi Ragghianti sought to project and embed within her interpretation. This methodological openness is further emphasised by her decision to title the volume *Arte tardoromana*, a choice that several later commentators regarded as not entirely consistent with the original German. She justifies it on the firm conviction

the (so-called) art history of late Roman art necessarily constitutes, for him [Riegl], a history of all late Roman art. And after him, there has been no example of a similarly comprehensive treatment, which therefore remains exemplary in scholarship, and continues to warrant reflection and further study.⁹⁰

It was perhaps this passionate, indefatigable, and critically sustained dialogue with Riegl's text – conceived as a locus of methodological and moral openness, in deliberate antithesis to the totalitarian currents permeating the culture of the regime – that prompted her, in May 1959, to confess:

I am partial in this my Riegl, in a surge of affection that I do not know whether should be regarded as a due tribute to that great spirit, or as the desire to finally see the volume published, or, once again, because of the distant times when I worked on it.⁹¹

Conclusion

In conclusion, Licia Collobi Ragghianti's translation and commentary on *Spätromische Kunstindustrie* reveal not merely a reception of Riegl's thought, but a reconstitution of it. The translation represented a sustained intellectual engagement, one that extended beyond the text to the broader cultural and political conditions of its time. Collobi Ragghianti's theoretical effort, at least partially, was shaped by Ragghianti's earlier scholarship, yet it was also marked by a deep and non-superficial acquaintance with the existing critical literature. This is evident in the concise biographical profile of Riegl, which draws on a carefully curated bibliography of his writings. The choice of title *Arte tardoromana* reflects a specificity of Riegl's approach that had already been recognised by Venturi in 1942, when he observed that Riegl had 'drawn an actual history of that period.'⁹²

⁸⁸ Collobi Ragghianti 1959, XIX, translated by the author.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Collobi Ragghianti 1959, XXV, translated by the author.

⁹¹ FR, ACLR, 2: Einaudi 1950–1966, Letter from LC to GB, May 28, 1959, translated by the author.

⁹² Venturi 1942, 435, translated by the author.

In this context, Collobi Ragghianti's critical introduction stands out for two reasons. First, it offers a remarkably concise yet comprehensive overview of Riegl's intellectual formation and systematically organised within a brief secondary bibliography. Second, and more significantly, it presents a reading of Riegl that emphasises the moral and civic dimensions of his thought, a datum absent from previous Italian critical literature. A dimension that Collobi Ragghianti's work, in its structure and tone, implicitly associates with the historical and political conditions of postwar Italy. While she acknowledges the limitations of Riegl's theoretical framework, particularly its subsumption of artistic development within a broader history of the spirit, she insists on the enduring value of his methodological openness and his commitment to the autonomy of aesthetic judgment: a stance that conflicted with the cultural embargo, at once hierarchical and hierarchizing, perpetuated by the Fascist regime.

This reading – or, better, this projection – speaks not only to Riegl's legacy but also to the dense historical moment in which the translation was produced. It reveals how the act of translation became, in practice, a form of intellectual and civic reclamation, one that aligned Riegl's vision with the values of resistance, integrity, and critical autonomy. The translation and Ragghianti's scholarship on Riegl served as a bridge to the renewed Italian engagement with the Austrian thinker, which gained momentum from the late 1970s onward.⁹³ Often, it was the Ragghianti couple who championed these efforts. Consider, for example, their role in promoting the first Italian translation of *Stilfragen*, by Arturo Quintavalle, published by Feltrinelli in 1963.⁹⁴ Three years later, in an essay titled *Il ritorno del Riegl*, published⁹⁵, Ragghianti greeted the appearance of the posthumous publication of Riegl's *Historische Grammatik der bildenden Künste*. He offered a severe assessment, asserting that Riegl's work stood 'outside historicism and its development, outside dialectic,'⁹⁶ while still acknowledging its foundational importance. Collobi Ragghianti, who had herself identified the limitations of Riegl's theoretical edifice, nonetheless emphasised the modernity of his intellectual freedom – a freedom she saw as more enduring than the theoretical framework itself.

⁹³ I refer to the well-known and foundational studies of Sciolla and Scarrocchia, which have shaped the reception of Riegl's work in Italy for at least two decades.

⁹⁴ Alois Riegl, 'Problemi di stile: fondamenti di una storia dell'arte ornamentale', prefaced by Arturo Quintavalle, translated by Mario Pacor (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1963). Quintavalle explicitly acknowledged the pivotal and largely solitary role played by Ragghianti, Bandinelli, and Collobi Ragghianti in the diffusion of Riegl's theories in Italy. Quintavalle 1963, p. XX, translated by the author. Among Ragghianti's papers, a typescript translation of *Stilfragen*, corrected by Ragghianti himself, has been preserved.

⁹⁵ Ragghianti 1966, 3-8.

⁹⁶ Ragghianti 1966, 8, translated by the author.

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