

Hilde Zaloscer, *Zur Genese der koptischen Kunst: Ikonographische Beiträge*. Vienna, Böhlau Verlag, 1991, 128 pp., 16 black-and-white illus., DM 42,50

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Volume 19, numéro 1-2, 1992

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1072864ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1072864ar>

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Éditeur(s)

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

ISSN

0315-9906 (imprimé)

1918-4778 (numérique)

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Citer ce compte rendu

Kultermann, U. (1992). Compte rendu de [Hilde Zaloscer, *Zur Genese der koptischen Kunst: Ikonographische Beiträge*. Vienna, Böhlau Verlag, 1991, 128 pp., 16 black-and-white illus., DM 42,50]. *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 19(1-2), 152–153. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1072864ar>

Schloss Charlottenburg, of 1824-25. On occasion he would also evoke the rustic air of an Italian villa: the Court Gardener's House at Charlottenhof, of the 1830s, is the best example. Here, too, I think, too little is made of Nash (and Repton) as a source of models — yet another instance of dowplaying context.

No book can do everything, but I cannot help wishing this one had ended with an essay exploring Schinkel's influence on later architecture, which was enormous. Early twentieth-century architects like Peter Behrens, Otto Wagner and the young Mies van der Rohe owed him a huge debt, and they knew it. Non-Germans should also be encouraged to re-examine his contribution and example. This is particularly necessary in the case of American architecture, which was affected in important ways by German models and systems of training in the nineteenth century. One cannot, for example, see Eduard Gaertner's stunning perspective of the Bauakademie (p. 179) without being struck by its resemblance to office and department-store

buildings of the 1850s and 1860s in New York, which were themselves sources of the "Chicago style." And British historians might wonder if their mid-century commercial styles, such as the "Bristol Byzantine," owed a debt to Schinkel. In industrial design, his contribution must have been substantial. What did it mean to the vigorous movement of the kind that arose in Germany in the early twentieth century, which spawned the Bauhaus? Such questions cannot be left without comment, at least.

In the absence of such a concluding essay and an opening one of the type I suggest, Schinkel is presented like a book without covers or a picture out of its frame. What remains is a strikingly beautiful book on an important — more than important — architect, which performs a great service by making him and his works accessible to English readers but falls short of being the penetrating, contextually rich study he deserves.

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HILDE ZALOSKER, *Zur Genese der koptischen Kunst: Ikonographische Beiträge*. Vienna, Böhlau Verlag, 1991, 128 pp., 16 black-and-white illus., DM 42,50.

This collection of essays by Hilde Zalosker is significant beyond the immediate scope of the topic for its essential insights into the character of an art which has long been misunderstood. Christian art in Egypt between the third and seventh centuries, between the culmination of Hellenism and the Islamic conquest, was for many years an area that did not appear to be worthy of serious research. It was only after the pioneering results by major figures of the Vienna School of art history around 1900 that previously neglected periods in world art took on new importance. The work of Josef Strzygowski, in particular, provocatively transcended the horizon of art history, as he did not focus exclusively on the culture of the Mediterranean but also included Eastern Europe and the Middle East. Strzygowski was also one of the first art historians devoted to a serious investigation of Coptic Art.¹

Hilde Zalosker was born in 1903 in Bosnia and studied with Strzygowski in Vienna. In 1936 she emigrated to Egypt, and it was there that she was challenged by the phenomenon of Coptic art, which was first explored by her teacher.² It was personal circumstances that brought Zalosker to Alexandria in 1936 and political reasons that kept her there. She taught art history at the University of Alexandria from 1947 to 1968. Teaching at the university in this cosmopolitan city, which in those years was made

famous by the somewhat decadent social atmosphere depicted in Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet*, was marked by many obstacles, one being the lack of scientific facilities for research.³ In 1970 Hilde Zalosker emigrated to Canada where she lived until 1974, teaching at Carleton University in Ottawa. Since 1974 she has been living in Vienna.

During her years in Alexandria, and without contacts with the major centres of research, she produced basic studies on Coptic churches and works of art, relying only on their physical existence. Her research resulted in new and revolutionary insights, which had not been achieved before, in the evaluation of this important period. Zalosker turned the disadvantages of not having the necessary facilities into an advantage by applying a direct intuitive method that was new to the evaluation of Coptic documents. She valued the environment in which she lived, as she realized that essentially the same culture of the past still existed in contemporary rural Egypt. She described this in an essay entitled "Vom Vorteil des Nachteils. Forschungsarbeit ohne Wissenschaftlichen Apparat."⁴ She published the results of her research in books such as *Portraits aus dem Wüstensand* (Vienna, 1961) and *Vom Mumienbildnis zur Ikone* (Wiesbaden, 1969), as well as in journal articles. The book under review offers a new theory regarding the origins and social implications of Coptic art in Egypt, uniting a number of articles previously published in Egypt and Canada, among them "Eine Jagdszene auf einem Architrav im Koptischen Museum" (1942), "Zur Entwicklung des Koptischen Kapitells" (1945), "Immanenz der Koptischen

Kunst" (1945), "Des problem der Koptischen Kunst" (1948), "Die 'Tänzerin mit dem Schleier' in der Koptischen Ikonographie" (1955), "Ein Koptischer Fries aus geschnitztem Holz" (1958), and "Gibt es eine Koptische Kunst?" (1967).

These articles, together with the earlier books by Hilde Zaloscer, establish a new basis for the treatment of an art form that dominated Egypt for several centuries and created an alternative to the previous Pharaonic, Greek and Roman art of the region, in dealing with the establishment of an artistic manifestation by the people rather than the courts. What was previously misunderstood as being immature and incompetent was developed, under her new perspectives, in a rearticulation which recognized that the clients were not the rulers of Pharaonic, Greek and Roman times but rather the Christian community. An earlier aristocratic art was transformed into an art with its foundation in the poor population of Egypt. The newly craft-oriented character of building types and decoration found an explanation in Zaloscer's interpretation: "the plurality of style is a sign of artistic freedom;" this was one of the results of her original observations, an insight that can be applied to other periods in art history as well.⁵

It is not by chance that Zaloscer came in contact with the Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy, who often attended her lectures in Egypt. In his own way Fathy attempted to regenerate contemporary Egyptian architecture, redirecting it from western foreign influence toward an authentic vocabulary based on the roots of Egyptian tradition, specifically the simple and people-oriented forms and materials of Coptic architecture of the past.⁶

The important results of Zaloscer's research conclude that each art form, indeed, has to be interpreted in regard to its own reality and conditions, geographically, culturally and sociologically. It can and should be compared with other related art forms, earlier ones and parallel ones, but in the final analysis it can only be understood through those elements that characterize its identity, which define a time and people in a unique situation.

This is how Hilde Zaloscer has approached Coptic art in Egypt, pointing out the differences it has in comparison with Pharaonic, Hellenistic and Roman art in Egypt. She does not evaluate the works in question from a preordained point of view, such as regarding Coptic art as a lesser and qualitatively lower form of art than Pharaonic art, but rather according to aspects of its objective nature. The results of her research have created a completely new basis on which to interpret this period of art. Her revolutionary insights

have subsequently been fully accepted by contemporary authorities in Coptic art such as Wessel and Eppenberger.⁷ Her research has also opened perspectives that can be applied to any other period in the history of art, as she so brilliantly documented in her interdisciplinary investigations on Expressionism at the beginning of the twentieth century and the work of Thomas Mann.⁸

As he expressed it in a letter of 24 August, 1953 to Hilde Zaloscer, Thomas Mann considered her essay on *Doktor Faustus* one of the best scientific studies written about his book, which is no small achievement considering the endless publications devoted to the interpretation of this work.

Hilde Zaloscer's universalist and at the same time detailed analytic view, her intuitive insight into the essence of the individual work of art and literature, her unique sense of the interrelations between the human condition and art, all contribute to the work of a great art historian.

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- 1 Josef Strzygowski, *Koptische Kunst* (Cairo, 1904). See also U. Kultermann, *Geschichte der Kunstgeschichte* (Munich, 1991).
- 2 In her autobiography, *Eine Heimkehr gibt es nicht. Ein österreichisches Curriculum Vitae* (Vienna, 1988), the author describes the early phases of her professional career and specifically the political and social situation of art history in the 1920s.
- 3 Many emigrant art historians in those years had to escape the Nazi persecution in Germany and occupied territories in Europe. Like Hilde Zaloscer's, the situation was similar in Istanbul for Erich Auerbach, who in spite of comparable disadvantages produced his classic standard work *Mimesis* (Bern, 1946).
- 4 *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, XLIII (1990), 157-67.
- 5 Hilde Zaloscer, *Zur Genese der koptischen Kunst* (Vienna, 1991), 110.
- 6 On Hassan Fathy, see U. Kultermann, "Contemporary Arab Architecture: The Architects of Egypt," *Mimar*, IV (1982), 56-61; James Steele, *Hassan Fathy* (London, 1988).
- 7 See K. Wessel, *Koptische Kunst* (Recklinghausen, 1963); K. Wessel, *Christentum am Nil* (Recklinghausen, 1964); A. Eppenberger, *Koptische Kunst* (Vienna, 1975); and J.H. Emminghaus, rev. of *Die Kunst im christlichen Ägypten*, by Hilde Zaloscer, *German Studies*, X (1977), 149-51.
- 8 See especially her book *Der Schrei. Signum einer Epoche. Das expressionistische Jahrhundert* (Vienna, 1985), as well as her pioneering investigations of Thomas Mann and his literary models "Ägypten in Thomas Manns Josephsroman. Zum Problem des 'Bildzitates'," *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies* X (1974), 116-30.