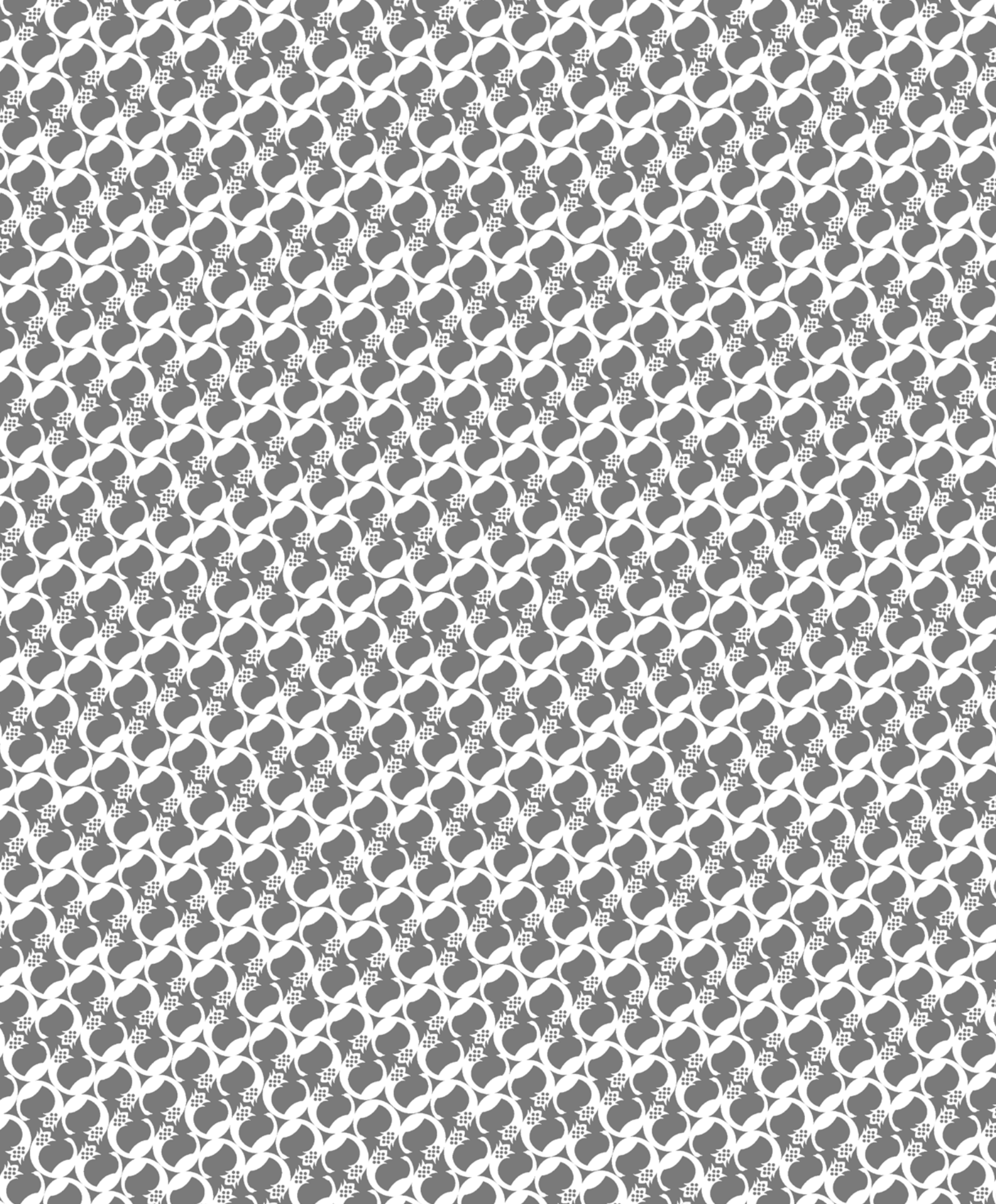

CONVIVIUM

Exchanges and Interactions in the Arts of Medieval Europe, Byzantium, and the Mediterranean

Seminarium Kondakovianum, Series Nova

Université de Lausanne • Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic • Masaryk University •

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Medieval Art History in Prison

edited by **Xavier Barral i Altet** & **Ivan Foletti**
with the collaboration of **Veronika Tvrzníková**

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Medieval Art History in Prison

Xavier Barral i Altet & Ivan Foletti

From 1917 to 1991, Europe was affected by totalitarian regimes of varying duration and brutality: from Italy's twenty years of Fascism to the twelve years of National Socialism in Germany, from the brief but harsh period of Vichy in France to the forty years of Franco dictatorship in Spain, to the more than seventy years of Communist regime in the Soviet Union and the almost half a century of real socialism in the so-called Eastern-European countries, geographically coinciding, in part, with the area of *Mitteleuropa*. The aim of this volume is to explore the ways in which medieval art history was a subject of research and theorizing, or simply how the discipline survived in European countries that, throughout the 1900s, were scenes of totalitarian or authoritarian regimes. The scholars participating in this issue of *Convivium* have therefore analyzed the way intellectuals in many of these territories altered the construction of the discipline, conveying a perception of medieval art that was often connected, in one way or another, to the particular nature of the regime where they worked and the cultural policy that it expressed.

The situation of intellectuals, art historians or otherwise, finding themselves living in these circumstances can be very different, depending on their personal and political choices, on State impositions and on vital urgencies. In this regard, while keeping in mind that the ideological foundations of Europe's twentieth-century totalitarian regimes were quite distinct, as were the behaviors adopted by the scholars of the various countries, we could succinctly identify five types of behavior, each one extremely rich with nuances, from the individual cases examined here. The first type is pure and simple adhesion to the new regime; the second could be labelled as collaborationism, an ambiguous situation occurring when, out of opportunism, the scholar transforms the data from his research in the name of the regime's ideology, or produces a history of art in line with the official cultural policy of his country, reinventing the past in light of the present. The third type could be defined as "honest dissimulation", that is, the attitude – often for reasons

of mere survival – of those who did not expose themselves on the issues or on subjects addressed, trying not to compromise themselves to the regime, but without opposing it and without entering into an open conflict. As for the fourth type, these we can bluntly describe as the intellectual resistance to the regime: real heroic gestures in this case are joined by behaviors of those who preferred to express their opinions, despite being aware of possible tragic consequences for their public and private lives. The fifth type consists of the various forms of exile.

In truth, the resisters who opposed totalitarian regimes from the inside to avoid underwriting their politics or to express their own ideas without ideological influences were few. One example is the Italian Lionello Venturi, introduced in the article by Mariana Aguirre. Venturi's book, *Il gusto dei primitivi*, published in 1926, four years after Mussolini's march on Rome, challenged Italy's artistic and political return to order, since the author, instead of comparing the Italian primitives to Classicism and the Renaissance, argued that these artists were devoted to mystical *creazione* rather than to the representation of nature, and associated *creazione* with individual freedom, which clashed with Fascism's call for artists to support its politics and rely on Italy's native styles. Faithful to his principles, Venturi chose exile in France and in the United States rather than to say the following statement, which almost all other university professors swore without hesitation: "*Giuro di essere fedele al Re, ai suoi Reali successori e al Regime Fascista, di osservare lealmente lo Statuto e le altre leggi dello Stato, di esercitare l'ufficio di insegnante e adempire tutti i doveri accademici col proposito di formare cittadini operosi, probi e devoti alla Patria e al Regime Fascista. Giuro che non appartengo né apparterrò ad associazioni o partiti, la cui attività non si concilii coi doveri del mio ufficio*". Of the approximately fifteen professors who refused to swear, or who went into exile to evade swearing an oath, only one of them, that very Lionello Venturi, was an art historian. The secular nature of the Italian oath is different from the oath that Franco's Spain demanded from academics that were to become part of the new Instituto de España, which from December 1937 brought together the Royal Academies of Language, History, Sciences, Fine Arts and Medicine: "*Señor Académico: ¿juráis en Dios y en vuestro Ángel Custodio servir perpetua y lealmente al de España, bajo Imperio y norma de Tradición vivo; en su catolicidad, que encarna el Pontífice de Roma; en su continuidad, representada por el Caudillo, Salvador de nuestro pueblo?*"

In this context, moving toward Central Europe, we can also think of the founding members of *Seminarium Kondakovianum* (analyzed in the article of Francesco Lovino), who belonged to the numerous Russian communities that, fleeing from the Bolshevist Revolution, were established in Prague in the early 1920s: a group of intellectuals who, starting in 1927, suffered restrictions from the VOKS [All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries], an entity specifically created by the Soviet government in 1925 to promote international cultural contact between the USSR and foreign countries. Another example is the Czech scholar Jaroslav Pešina, expelled from the University after the Prague Spring of 1968.

The attitude defined above as "honest dissimulation" is well demonstrated in Adrien Palladino's study on Richard Delbrueck, director of the *Deutsches Archäologisches Institut* (DAI) in Rome and then professor of Classical archaeology in Germany, who, between the two wars, tried to remain in a neutral position, neither really for nor against the regime, a situation that affected his research as he tried to follow the nineteenth-century ideal of objective archaeology. Similar behavior characterized Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann, one of the greatest scholars of Late Antique and Proto-Byzantine archaeology and art history, studied here by Eva Staurenghi. Deichmann, while maintaining that the National Socialist Party exerted too much pressure on culture and the sciences, a fact that inevitably reverberated in the quality of research by scholars of archaeology and art history, was *Referent für die Christliche Archäologie* to the DAI of Rome without interruption between 1936 and 1974.

Equally well-illustrated in this issue of *Convivium* is the case of Nazi Germany, where the Middle Ages were celebrated as the golden age of German history and, through the cult of mythicized historical figures, like Charlemagne and Frederick II, there was a desire to establish a continuity with that period and at the same time use the reinterpretation of the past as a basis for identitary aspirations and nationalistic ideals. As the article of Gabriella Cianciolo Cosentino explores, medieval art history and the techniques of its crafts were thus put in service of the theory, formulated by the ideologues of the regime, based on the principle of continuity between the imperial Germany of Charlemagne and National Socialism. In Germany, medieval art history goes hand in hand with the creation of a new art, which we might call "art of victory". As happened somewhat all over Europe, many German artists close to the regime exercised their activities and their influence even long after 1945, also thanks to public and official art commissions. The biographies of Hermann Kaspar and Werner Peiner, artists of tapestries, stained glass and monumental mosaics, are emblematic examples of this continuity, which was not unheard of in other countries, both in Western as well as Central-Eastern Europe.

The Hungarian case is characterized by a similar issue, which is expressed especially from a historiographical point of view by Vinni Lucherini. The magazine *Corvina*, for example, was born just after the First World War in order to sustain, from a cultural point of view (scientific, literary and artistic), the nationalistic aspirations of a country, Hungary, controlled by an authoritarian regime personified by the admiral Miklós Horthy, leading a territory and a population then radically mutilated by post-war treaties. From this perspective, the artistic production of the Middle Ages was used by scholars, who wrote in *Corvina* for the construction of a medieval art history that aimed to project the aspirations of the present into the past. The great medieval kings, who had controlled a geographical area that stretched from Poland to Romania, were taken as symbols of Hungary's historical greatness: in the art they had made, the desire was to recognize, in some cases with considerable and explicit ideological forcing, Italian stylistic influences, since Hungary turned to Italy between the two wars to regain a revision of the treaties of 1920.

Two articles within this issue – that of Ileana Burnichioiu and Vladimir Ivanovici – are dedicated to Communist Romania, which also constitutes a very interesting case study. The analysis of original documents, of texts and of talks by medieval art history scholars illustrate the system the Communist regime tried to use to control both publications and topics of research, and how the scholars reacted to the request of revealing the role played by the masses in the making of history. These mechanisms aimed to stress the value of folk art in relation to high art, to show that folk art had millennial Romanian origins and to put emphasis on the elements that showed a unity between the historical provinces of the country, in order to produce a new national mythology. The weight of the past in the last decades of the twentieth century in the area of Central-Eastern Europe is also well illustrated in Klára Benešovská's study on the ideological assumptions that were at the base of the conception of the exhibitions and conferences devoted to Charles IV, which took place in Prague, Nuremberg, and Cologne in 1978.

This is the first issue of *Convivium* dedicated to the relationship between medieval art history and the regimes and totalitarian ideologies of the twentieth century, with particular attention paid to Central-Eastern Europe. The participating scholars favored Horthy's Hungary, the former Czechoslovakia and Communist Romania, with openings toward Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Much could still be written not only on these countries, but also on other cultural contexts where medieval art history has been written, for example, on the Iberian Peninsula, in France or in England: *Convivium* will continue to work in this direction.