

Jeanne-Marie Musto

(Fordham University Center for Medieval Studies, New York, US)

Revisiting Josef Strzygowski's Debt to German Romantic Cultural Geography

Abstract

Josef Strzygowski advocated stridently for the significance of the East and, especially, of the North as missing keys to the development of Indo-European culture. Looking back over his career in 1936, he located his start along this path some three and a half decades earlier, in what remained his single most influential work, *Orient oder Rom* (1901). Curiously, the cultural geography with which Strzygowski had begun strongly echoed that of German Romantic writers, patrons and architects of the previous century.

During the Napoleonic era Friedrich Schlegel had traced the roots of German culture to India, and had suggested Byzantine precedents for Rhenish architecture. These sources helped to lessen the unwelcome perception of German cultural debt to the Roman Empire and to France (which Napoleon, as much as anyone else, considered Rome's heir). Schlegel's ideas were accepted and developed during the first half of the nineteenth century, in advance of the establishment of art history as an academic discipline. By mid-century, however, it had been largely discredited.

Strzygowski's revival and transformation of that cultural geography into a racial geography, and one in which the North took primacy over the East as the point of cultural origin, speak to his German-identified, Austro-Hungarian sympathies for the National Socialist party – sympathies which were all too widely shared. This paper explores the ways in which Strzygowski's racialization and re-orientation of German Romantic cultural geography inverted how and why it had once proven so compelling. At the same time, this paper reflects on the surprising continuities between Strzygowski's vision – supported as it was by new material evidence (often first published by Strzygowski himself) – and that of the preceding century.