

A “Global” Middle Ages in the Early 20th Century: Millet, Baltrušaitis, and the Caucasus

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This paper investigates the role that Gabriel Millet and Jurgis Baltrušaitis played in the study of the arts of the South Caucasus, as art from the Christian East became a scholarly field and fascinated the collectors worldwide¹. This enthusiasm climaxed in the 1931 exhibition in Paris at the Musée des Arts décoratifs, where the paths of the two scholars crossed without any special interaction. Stemming from the observation that a significant number of illustrations in Millet’s seminal book *L’École grecque dans l’architecture byzantine* are photographs of churches from Armenia and Georgia taken by photographer from Tbilisi Dimitri Ermakov, this paper attempts to assess the scholar’s art historical criteria and views within the intellectual framework of the time, sealed by the influence of Josef Strzygowski’s diffusionist approach. In spite of their common interest, Baltrušaitis appears to develop his own kind of formalism, focusing on specific motifs and decorative devices addressed primarily for their intrinsic aesthetics and meaning. Although the paths of the two art historians went parallel without a proper encounter, their different approaches betray a common concern in mapping the visual heritage of humankind and its creative dynamics from the broad and modern perspective of a world connected and concerned by its past.

Keywords: Byzantine architecture, modernism, Balkans, Armenia, Georgia

Byzantine Rise

“The Show closed yesterday in a blaze of glory; most of the Byzantinists of Europe

there and great enthusiasm.”² This comment sent by Royall Tyler to Mildred Bliss about the Byzantine exhibition at the musée des Arts décoratifs in 1931 aptly reflects the rising fascination for Byzantine art. From Paris, a major hub for the circulation and dissemination of the arts of the Eastern Mediterranean, the excitement

1 I am grateful to the organisers of the conference, to Claire Guttinger at the Archives of the Collège de France and to Jérôme Delatour at the Archives of the INHA for their valuable help. I would also like to thank Léa Krief and Laure Haberschill at the Musée des Arts décoratifs for their help with the illustrations.

2 Royall Tyler to Mildred Barnes Bliss, July 10, 1931, <https://www.doaks.org/resources/bliss-tyler-correspondence/letters/10jul1931>.

about empress Theodora or the repentant prostitute saint Theiss was expanding as a global fashion.³ A new world of images and objects was meant to rise from the clash of the great antique civilizations. This long-overlooked art highly appealed to connoisseurs and aesthetes willing to break away from established rules and met the taste of an era “eager for trouble and violence.”⁴ Beyond the ambient enthusiasm, Tyler’s note further reveals that common artistic interests did not only shape the community of Byzantinists but also demonstrated divided attitudes toward the very discipline of art history and its objects.⁵ The display of no less than 796 exhibits in the halls of the Pavillon de Marsan showcased the broadest panel of Eastern medieval art, from the Islamic fringes of the Mediterranean to Sicily and Gaulle, from the earliest expressions of Christianity to the 16th and 17th centuries. Though the show was somehow indebted to the taste of the *Expositions Universelles*, the venue did not allow architectural in-

stallations. This lack of architecture was compensated by photographs from monuments and copies of wall-paintings that hardly appear in the background of the few photographs from the exhibition (figs 1-2). Unfortunately, photographs and copies are not listed systematically. As they were implicitly ranked as secondary exhibits they, remained unacknowledged for their modernity and artistry. The last section of the catalogue titled “moulages, copies, relevés, photographies” gives a very scant idea of these specific items, which likely staged the display⁶. The authors of the short essays also regret the impossibility of showing the achievements of the medieval builders.⁷ While the copies of the mosaics brought from institutions such as the Byzantine Museum of Greece or the cathedral of San Marco in Venice are carefully listed in the organization’s records among the loans and were properly insured, the evidence is scant about other contributions, which were extensive.

It is in the framework of this Paris exhibition that the paths of Gabriel Millet and Jurgis Baltrušaitis crossed, although we are not aware if they had indeed interacted⁸.

3 Olivier Delouis, “Byzance sur la scène littéraire française (1870–1920)”, in: *Byzance en Europe*, Marie-France Auzépy (ed.), Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 2003, p. 112–115. Rémi Labrusse, “Modernité byzantine: l’Exposition internationale d’art byzantin de 1931 à Paris,” in: *Le double voyage: Paris-Athènes (1919–1939)*, L. Arnoux-Farnoux, P. Kosmadaki, S. Jollivet (eds.), Athens, 2018, pp. 221–242.

4 See the introductory essay by Georges Salles in W. F. Volbach and G. Duthuit, *Art byzantin*, Paris (1931), an annotated album of photographs of selected exhibits accompanied by an overview of the techniques and media.

5 Royall Tyler to Mildred Barnes Bliss, July 10, 1931, <https://www.doaks.org/resources/bliss-tyler-correspondence/letters/10jul1931>. In the same letter cited at the beginning of the paper, Tyler criticizes the German method of art history.

6 Cf the short comment at the last section of the catalogue. Photographs and plans, but note casts and copies of frescoes, are called synopsis on the History of Byzantium and its art by Royall Tyler, *Exposition internationale d’art byzantin*, 28 mai – 9 juillet 1931 (exhibition catalogue), Paris, 1931, pp. 45–53.

7 *Exposition internationale d’art byzantin*, 28 mai – 9 juillet 1931 (exhibition catalogue), Paris: Musée des Arts décoratifs, Pavillon de Marsan, 1931, p. 22, 29.

8 See Ivan Foletti, Adrien Palladino, et al., *Cultural Interactions in the Medieval Subcaucasian Region: Historiographical and Art-Historical Perspectives Vol. I: The Othering Gaze: Imperialism, Colonialism, and Orientalism in Studies on Medieval Art*

Fig. 1. Exhibition of Byzantine Art, Musée des Arts décoratifs in Paris, Pavillon de Marsan, 1931. MAD Album 309 bis 5, p. 5



Millet then held the distinguished position of vice-president of the exhibition's organizing board. He was at the height of his academic career at the *École Pratique*, distinguished by his election to the *Collège de France* and the *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*.⁹ Millet delivered one of the prestigious lectures that accompanied the exhibition and provided material from the Byzantine and Christian Collection, founded by himself at the *École pratique*

in the Southern Caucasus (1801–1991), Milan, 2023, esp. pp. 135–136.

9 <https://www.inha.fr/dictionnaire-critique-des-historiens-de-lart-actifs-en-france-de-la-revolution-a-la-premiere-guerre-mondiale/millet-gabriel-inha/>; for a long bibliography on Millet, see: Ioanna Rapti, “L’objectif à la recherche de Byzance: les photographies de la collection Gabriel Millet,” in: *L’École pratique des Hautes Études. Invention, érudition, innovation de 1868 à nos jours*, Patrick Henriët (éd.), Paris: Somogy-EPHE, 2018, pp. 651–657; Catherine Jolivet-Lévy, “L’héritage scientifique de Gabriel Millet,” in: *Gabrijel Mije i istraživanja stare srpske arhitekture* (Gabriel Millet and the Study of Medieval Serbian Architecture), D. Preradović, M. Marković (eds.), Belgrade: Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 2021, pp. 62–95.

des Hautes Etudes upon his appointment in 1899. Some watercolors copying frescoes from the churches of Mistra can be distinguished around the copies of mosaics from St. Demetrios in Thessaloniki, exhibited in the walls around showcases with ceramics and manuscripts (Fig. 2). According to the exhibition catalogue, the pictures of monuments from the Caucasus were contributed by Baltrušaitis¹⁰. Indeed, he had recently returned from the newly established Soviet republics of Armenia and Georgia, where he collected material for his *Études sur l’art médiéval en Géorgie et en Arménie*, published two years before the exhibition.¹¹ A letter of his, which by late July had been sent to Paul Alfassa, curator of the Musée des arts décoratifs,¹² states the donation of the photographs to the museum that produced the prints but reserves the right of publication for his

10 *Exposition internationale d’art byzantin*, pp. 185–186.

11 Jurgis Baltrušaitis, *Études sur l’art médiéval en Géorgie et en Arménie*, Paris: E. Leroux, 1929.

12 <https://www.doaks.org/resources/bliss-tyler-correspondence/annotations/paul-p-alfassa>



Fig. 2. Exhibition of Byzantine Art, Musée des Arts décoratifs in Paris, Pavillon de Marsan, 1931. MAD Album 309 bis 5, p. 4

Georgian collaborators.¹³ The number of the photographs cannot be established, but some can be recognized on the wall facing the large copies of mosaics from the Great Mosque of Damascus (fig. 1).¹⁴ Views of monasteries, landscapes, and architectural

features had introduced to the exhibition a glimpse of the Christian East.

Baltrušaitis's Gaze

Whether the photographs were commissioned by the organizers or proposed to them remains unclear, but their selection and display show a broader interest, shared among the Parisian scholars and exemplified by Baltrušaitis's book. While some general views of majestic monastic complexes recall the photographs by Georgian photographer Dimitri Ermakov, the close-up shots of blind arches and door frames or architectural fragments fit with the aesthetics of Baltrušaitis's published photographs. In *Études sur l'art médiéval en Géorgie et en Arménie, the elegant illustrations* authored by Baltrušaitis clearly focus on the motif discussed *per se*, just as the scholar argues again in his essay *Art sumérien, art roman*, where the South-Caucasus presents an important matter for

13 Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Archives, D1/182

Aix les Bains
Villa de le Tour
30 juillet 1931
Monsieur,

Après avoir vu les auteurs des photographies géorgiennes, j'ai le plaisir de vous annoncer que nous sommes mis d'accord pour laisser au musée les agrandissements que vous avez faits pour l'exposition. Il est bien entendu que la publication de ces documents ne pourra pas se faire en dehors de leurs auteurs. Je suis très content d'avoir pu arranger cette affaire et de vous redire par la même occasion comment nous étions heureux de pouvoir participer à cette exposition si belle et si importante. En vous remerciant encore, je vous prie, Monsieur, d'accepter l'assurance de mes respectueux sentiments.

[signature] Jurgis Baltrušaitis

14 Simonis Loreline, *Les relèves des mosaïques de la grande mosquée de Damas*, Paris: Somogy, Louvre éditions, 2012.

Fig. 3. Humathèque, Campus Condorcet, Paris. Centre Gabriel Millet, dedication note by Baltrušaitis for the *Études sur l'art médiéval en Géorgie et en Arménie*

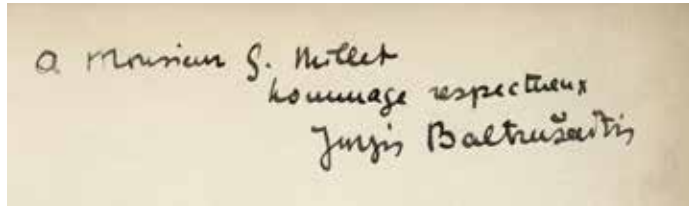
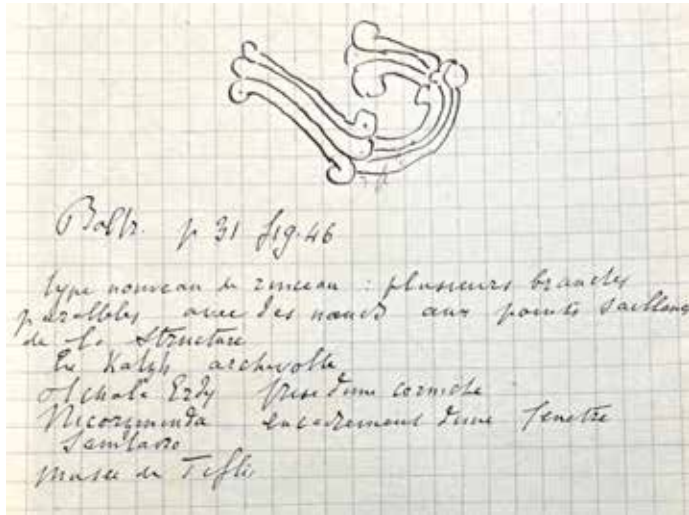


Fig. 4. Collège de France, Paris, 51 CdF 85/3. Fonds Gabriel Millet, autograph note



comparison¹⁵: Baltrušaitis's book on Armenia and Georgia was praised by Byzantinist Louis Bréhier and Western medievalist Marcel Aubert.¹⁶ The presentation by George Balș, member of the Romanian Academy,

at the 1930 Byzantine Congress in Athens, also dedicated to the Armenian and Georgian influences on religious architecture in Romania, shows how topical and impactful Baltrušaitis's book had been¹⁷. Millet has not published any review of that book, a copy of which he possessed, complete with a formal dedication by its author (Fig. 3). However, Millet's notes testify to his interest in the subject matter and some engagement with the book, further confirmed by the interlaced pattern drawn after it, likely an effort

15 Jurgis Baltrušaitis, *Art sumérien, art roman*. Paris: Leroux, 1934: "La sculpture inscrite dans le bloc de l'église ne contribue pas à mettre en valeur sa stabilité. Elle le détruit, au contraire. Ces dalles majestueuses restent extérieures à l'édifice."

16 Aubert highlights Faucillon's introduction and the interest of the publication. He agrees to common elements between the Transcaucasian and the Romanesque sculpture and accepts their common origins, however without opposing the Hellenistic and Oriental stylistic features. He also acknowledges Strzygowski's and Kondakov's contributions to the study of Armenian architecture, emphasizing their importance for making the Georgian material available.

17 Georges Balș, "Influences géorgiennes et arméniennes sur l'architecture roumaine", Communication au IIIe Congrès international des études byzantines, Athènes, 1930, *Bulletin de la Commission des monuments historiques*, 1931, pp. 5–17.

to follow Baltrušaitis's argument (Fig. 4)¹⁸. In fact, Millet dedicated some of his lectures at the Collège de France to the Armenian and Georgian Christianity in the same period while Armenian monuments have been of particular importance in his seminars at the EPHE during the academic years of 1930–1931 and 1932–1933.¹⁹ He had requested some reproductions from Baltrušaitis's book for these lectures.

Millet's Byzantine Greece and the Caucasus

Nevertheless, Millet's involvement with the Caucasus goes further back to the formative period of his scholarship. In 1896, his request for funding from the French Ministry of Education was supported by the Director of the École française d'Athènes, Theophile Homolle, arguing in his recommendation that in Armenia "the monasteries preserve precious treasures."²⁰ There is, however, no evidence of Millet getting to either the Ottoman or the Russian side of Armenia's historic lands. The scant mentions of the project, the lack of photographs, or any other evidence of such a trip may suggest that it had to be postponed. However, Millet's early interest in the Caucasus, obviously stimulated by his

exchange with Russian scholars²¹, was sustained, nourishing his seminal work *L'École grecque dans l'architecture byzantine*. Quite surprisingly, this pioneer study on Byzantine architecture published in 1916 comprises a considerable number of photographs from churches in Armenia – sixteen) out of the 146 illustrations in the book – mostly in today's Republic of Armenia and three major monuments in Georgia (Zarzma, Mtshkheta, and Sap'ara) –. This emphasis on the architecture from the South Caucasus obviously raises questions about the role that these monuments had in the study of an architectural phenomenon labeled by a term with distant geographical, historic, and "ethnic" connotations.

The *Recherches sur l'iconographie de l'évangile*, published in the same year with the *École grecque*, illuminate Millet's concern to encompass a complex and changing world into a comprehensive view of Christian iconographic heritage, from its origins to the beginning of the modern times.

Millet's knowledge of the South Caucasus is indeed impressive. It seems based rather on readings and photographic documentation. All the photographic illustrations from Armenia and Georgia published in his book are by Dimitri Ermakov, a successful professional photographer from Tbilisi who took part in several scientific expeditions in the broader area either with scholars or the Russian armed forces.²² Four photographic

18 Millet, as he notes, copied this "new type of scroll, shaped by several lines with knots at the main points of the form" and lists the monuments in Georgia where this type of scroll is encountered.

19 Collège de France, archives, 51-CDF-80-6, 51CDF 81-1, 51CDF81-2. He invited, among other participants, Father Jean Mécérian: *Annuaire de l'EPHE* 44, pp. 71–73 and 45, pp. 61–63.

20 Archives nationales F/17/2992, Lettre de Homolle du 28 septembre 1895. Quote translated by the author.

21 Mainly Ivan Nocodim Kondakov, see *Мир русской Византистики: материалы архивов Санкт-Петербурга*, Igor Pavlovitch Medvedev (ed.), Saint Petersburg, 2004, p. 623–640.

22 *Masters of 19th Century Photography: Dimitri Ermakov, Photographer and Collector* (exhibition

albums in the Byzantine and Christian Collection of the EPHE contain photographs from the Caucasus produced in the early 20th century. It is not established how Millet became acquainted with Ermakov's work. The Russian connection is most likely, as Millet communicated extensively with Nikodim Pavlovitch Kondakov, especially discussing monuments and the exchange of photographs. Apart from Ermakov's pictures, Millet's Caucasian acquisitions comprised pictures by photographer Ivan Bartchevski providing a tiny sample of the rich material although they were not published among the illustrations of the *École grecque*. Millet purchased Ermakov's photographs in 1909 thanks to the sponsorship of Jacques Doucet, a Parisian fashion tailor and founder of an ambitious personal library of universal art history that became the core of the National Institute of Art History (INHA).²³ A letter by Armenian ethnographer Eghvard Lalayan, informing Millet about the possibility to supplement his collection with another series of Ermakov prints reveals how the network functioned and confirms Millet's interest in the photographer's work and the material from the Caucasus.²⁴

The photographs of the Caucasian medieval churches are distributed throughout the five chapters of the *École grecque* without specific chronological or geographical criteria. The "Helladic paradigm," according to the updated translation by late architectural historian Robert Ousterhout,²⁵ is built in two fundamental though problematic notions: *School* and *Greek*. *School* is an established concept in art history studies, while *Greek* has cultural, ethnic, and political significance. The theater of the phenomenon, that is the *École grecque* or the "Helladic paradigm," is defined between Crete and Macedonia, two liminal areas of the Empire deeply penetrated the former by Islam and the latter by the Slavs and which joined again the Helladic space under the authority of Byzantium. In these words Millet not only maps the *École grecque* but also sets in within a broader scheme of artistic development marked by the Slavic invasions and the Arab conquests and the recovery of these lands by the Macedonian dynasty in the 10th century.²⁶ Although he focuses

collection des photographies des Antiquités de Nor Bayazit et Daralaguène photographié personnellement par M. Yermakoff sur place ? Si vous souhaitez, je peux vous l'envoyer pour le prix de 300 frnacs."

catalogue, Nederlands Fotomuseum, Rotterdam, 14 June – 31 August 2014), Lika Mamatsashvili, Herman Maes et al., Rotterdam, 2014.

23 INHA, Archives, Autographes 144, Correspondance René Jean. Bernard Comment, François Chapon, *Doucet de fonds en comble: trésors d'une bibliothèque d'art*, Paris: Institut national d'histoire de l'art/Herscher, 2004.

24 Collège de France, Archives, 51CDF 81-1: "[...] Je vous envoie la description du monastère d'Aghtamar ainsi que les listes des photographies concernant le villayet de Van, au nombre de 220 dont le prix est 200 francs. Vous me dites que vous avez déjà une belle collection de photographies Yermakoff. Mr Yermakoff en a plusieurs. Est-ce que vous possédez la

25 Robert Ousterhout, "The 'Helladic Paradigm' in a Global Perspective," in: *Global Byzantium Papers from the Fiftieth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, L. Brubaker, R. Darley and D. Raynolds (eds.), London, 2022, pp. 255–271. Slobodan Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans from Diocletian to Süleyman the Magnificent*, New Haven London: Yale University Press, 2010, pp. 413–414.

26 Millet, *L'École grecque*, p. 13. "Les deux provinces frontières, les deux marches de la Grèce, à savoir la Crète au sud, la Macédoine occidentale au Nord, longtemps retranchées de l'Empire et profondément pénétrées l'une par l'islam, l'autre par les Slaves

on the development after late Antiquity, he is above all interested in the origins and the continuity of the tradition.

Millet, who before his years at the French School at Athens had been trained in classics and history, would remain attached to Hellenism throughout his life. He eventually committed himself to the study of the medieval Balkans and Serbia and he is still celebrated for his pioneering contributions to defining national medieval Serbian art. However, Millet rarely refers to contemporary events in his work and does not outline any theoretical framework or purpose for his analysis of the monuments. His analysis seems primarily moved by aesthetic and historic criteria as well by an acute sensitivity to liturgical sources and practices. The architectural trends studied as “Greek” through a very large cluster of buildings do barely meet the developments of the history of Greece. During the process of writing, the Greek state grew until the liminal outposts mentioned above. The gap between the announced publication (1911) and the effective print of the book (1916) coincides with dramatic developments, but it is difficult to contend if and to what extent his views had been informed by geopolitics. Trained as a historian, Millet pays much attention to the political and military events of the periods under study, but he applies formal criteria: plans, vaults and roofs, masonry, while a secondary role is given to the components of the churches adorned with sculptures on their façades, windows, and doors.²⁷ He implicitly suggests the primacy, if not the su-

reprentent contact avec elle [la Grèce] sous l'hégémonie de Byzance”.

27 *Ibid.*, *passim*.

periority of the “Eastern basilical type” of the strong and solid walls, which he considers to be the seminal or uppermost architectural type for all building traditions: he visualizes the migration of the form in two directions, westwards to Crete and eventually to France, and to the northeast, toward Crimea and Georgia.²⁸ A series of Armenian churches are mentioned in this respect even if their plan is not properly that of a basilica: the 14th century church in the town of Eghegis (Fig. 5), known after the later name Zorats and rather overlooked in scholarship, is the most inappropriate example: the shrine is limited to a high tripartite sanctuary opening to a large plateau meant to host large gatherings.²⁹ The church at Odzun similarly exemplifies in this study the possibilities of the basilica, here with a blind nave and transept and a cruciform dome.³⁰ Another series of churches within monastic complexes (Haghpat, Noravank', Ketcharis) are discussed as examples of combination of the cross-domed hall, that is a combination of

28 *Ibid.*, p. 40: “l'une vers le Caucase, l'autre vers l'ouest, la Crète est le parcours où passe la grande nef aveugle [...] pour prendre avec bien d'autres procédés orientaux, le chemin de l'Occident [jusque dans le centre de la France]; p. 43: “Géorgie et Crimée d'un côté, Chypre et Crète de l'autre forme un prolongement du domaine asiatique [...] double étage de petits sanctuaires.”

29 The classical references for this church are brief: Paolo Cuneo, *Architettura armena: dal quarto al diciannovesimo secolo*. Roma: De Luca, 1988, No. 193 and Jean-Michel Thierry, Patrick Donabédian, *Les Arts arméniens*, Paris: Citadelles & Mazenod, 1987, p. 132. For a reassessment Ioanna Rapti, “In the Shadow of the Temple: Memory, Property, and Shrines between Christians, Muslims, and Jews in 13th Century Armenia,” in: *Synagogue, Church, Mosque*, S. Frommel (ed.), forthcoming; Rapti, *Annuaire de l'EPHE 2022–2023*.

30 Fig. 31, p. 73. L'église is labeled Ouzunlar.



Fig. 5. Zorats Cathedral, Eghegis, Armenia. Photograph by the author, 2021

the cross and the basilica. Without considering their function and context, and ignoring later transformations or any comparisons with Islamic architecture, Millet's concern is formal classification, according geographical and, implicitly, cultural criteria. The taste for such « simple formes » is he argues because of the inability to reach the wise equilibrium of the Hellenistic and Byzantine buildings.³¹ This sober elegance is regarded as an Armenian feature, imitated by the earliest churches of its neighbor Georgia. Nevertheless, unlike Strzygowski, Millet does not assimilate the Orient exclusively with Armenia³². The Orient, as opposed to the Hellenistic and Byzantine traditions, is that of the Ancient Near East – a particularly Persian element vanishing in the realm of Constantinople yet vivid in the Armenian school, which does not admit any protruding forms such as the apse or narthex.³³

31 Millet, *L'École grecque*, p. 79. "L'Orient qui se plaît aux formes simples, ne pouvait réaliser le savant équilibre des constructions hellénistiques et byzantines".

32 Cf. Christina Maranci, *Medieval Armenian Architecture. Constructions of Race and Nation*, Louvain: Peeters, 2001, p. 129.

33 Millet, *L'École grecque*, p. 115, p. 121.

Millet does not insist on the architectural ornamentation of the buildings. His perspective is mainly planimetric and secondarily evolutionistic. In his recent aforementioned study revisiting the *École grecque*, Robert Ousterhout enhanced the identification of the Helladic school as a still pertinent category of architectural principals and craftsmanship distinguished by common decorative and structural features. Nevertheless, he ignored the issue that underpins the argument of Millet's book and explains the reason and the function of his South Caucasian comparanda: the Greek school faithfully preserves the old traditions of the East, an Orient which is traced back to pre-Christian Anatolian civilizations, namely Persia and Mesopotamia. The issue of the origins and the beginnings is not put to the fore but discreetly addressed throughout the study: Millet opposes the Greek school to the tradition of Constantinople and the Aegean. In this mental scheme, the Roman tradition of the capital, Asia Minor, and the islands clash with mainland Greece, a heritage valued by its implicit assimilation with the purity of the *urform* in earlier great civilizations.

The sympathy for Strzygowski's migration theories is indeed true. It is confirmed by Millet and attested in their correspondence as late in the 1930s, when the theories of the Viennese scholar had clearly turned to racial and racist positions. However, it should be noted that the *École grecque* was published before Strzygowski's *Baukunst* but did not really influence the Viennese scholar³⁴.

The *École grecque*, as eloquently suggested by Hugo Monneret de Villard,³⁵ was not the final word but a great amount of information for the understanding of world's architectural history, between East and West and various religious traditions.

Armenia, of which Millet has only indirect and remote information, played a role similar to that of a fantasy.³⁶ It enabled to ascribe the heritage of Hellenism, dear to Millet, to the lineage of the purest ancient forms. Millet writes at the time of Strzygowski's *Orient oder Rome* whose methods and views were radically opposed to Alois Riegl's Roman-centered *Kunstindustrie*³⁷.

*The quarrel between two theoretical systems of analysis embodied by outstanding figures of authority remains intriguing in many respects. However, this is only the top of the iceberg of art historical erudition in a time of crisis*³⁸. The debates, ideas, and relationships between scholars cannot be limited to such a dual scheme opposing two names. They rather meet their shared obsession for origins and beginnings, which, along with scientific progress, had emerged as a driving force in the humanities since the second half of the 19th century.

In Search of the Origins

The scientific approach to the creative mechanisms of the human mind, based on the accuracy of data, firsthand observation, efficient methods, and objective means – one of them was photography – is the primary trend in art-historical scholarship.

With today's distance, and backed by several studies on art-historical criticism, perhaps the ideological issues and problems behind the construction of the art-historical narratives during the first decades of the 20th century may seem clearer; they aimed at a comprehensive understanding of medieval European art as the offspring of earlier traditions.³⁹ In spite

34 Josef Strzygowski, *Die Baukunst der Armenier und Europa : Ergebnisse einer vom Kunsthistorischen Institute der Universität Wien 1913 durchgeführten Forschungsreise*, Wien: Schroll, 1918, pp. 748–749.

35 de Villard, U. M. (1918), Review of *L'école grecque dans l'architecture byzantine*. *Bibliothèque de l'école des hautes études. Sciences religieuses*, XXVI vol, by G. Millet, *Archivio Storico Italiano*, 75(3/4 (287/288)), pp. 200–205.

36 In a similar way, though backed by a different constellation of references and theoretical tools, Rivoira's Armenia, similarly virtual, was elaborated as a construct to legitimate the influence and the glory of Roman architecture celebrated through its Caucasian emulations, as has argued the recent dissertation of Beatrice Spampinato, Venice 2023.

37 Jaś Elsner, "The Birth of Late Antiquity: Riegl and Strzygowski in 1901," *Art History* 25(3), 2002, pp. 358–379; Talinn Grigor, "Of Aryan Origin(s), Western Canon(s), and Iranian Modernity," in: *Repenser Les*

Limites: L'architecture À Travers L'espace, Le Temps Et Les Disciplines, Paris: INHA, 2005, online, assessed the 30 June 2025.

38 Rémi Labrusse, "Délires anthropologiques : Josef Strzygowski face à Alois Riegl," *Les actes de colloques du musée du quai Branly Jacques Chirac*, 1, 2009, assessed 30 June 2025.

39 Roland Recht, "Postface," *Louvre*, J. Desclaux (ed.), Paris: Collège de France, 2020. DOI: 10.4000/books.cdf.10192

of the distance between the comparative formalism of Henri Focillon in the steps of Riegl and the diffusionist essentialism of Strzygowski, they all responded to a shared question: the meaning of the past and its heritage. Thus, the reflection of societies and people through art and images could serve either the European-centered hierarchy or the national art histories emerging in the new nation-states that were popping up in Europe and the Balkans.

Gabriel Millet's scholarship is imprinted with the modernist views of 19th-century France but was also sensitive to the concerns of his colleagues, fellows, and students who were experiencing and working within the troubled context of the Balkans and the Near East. In the same context, Baltrušaitis's career in Paris is both interesting and puzzling, as his view on the South Caucasus develops next to the Byzantine circles but rather disconnected from them. Long after the *École grecque* Millet kept studying, teaching, and thinking on the Caucasus: his notes testify that he was a passionate reader of Strzygowski. Millet has not published all of his lessons on Armenia and Georgia at the Collège de France, but he kept teaching and dealing with questions related to the history of religion. Millet's perspective is, however, constantly that of a Byzantinist, and his major objective, unlike Strzygowski's, is not to defend the racial superiority of Armenia but to explain its specific features. Though he challenges the dependency on Byzantium, he also integrates his assessments into the knowledge of the art of the empire, as he had contributed to outlining it.

In her seminal study on Strzygowski's scholarship on Armenia, Christina Ma-

ranci deconstructed Baltrušaitis's theory and, at the same time, showed how close his approach was to that of the Viennese scholar.⁴⁰ However, it is worth noting that Baltrušaitis barely refers to Strzygowski's work. His scholarship is carried under the patronage and the legacy of Henri Focillon, his mentor and father-in-law, in the margins of French art history but with popular publications by distinguished publishing houses. The posthumous tribute to Baltrušaitis by Jean-François Chevrier, illustrated with pictures by Robert Doisneau and Dominique Auerbacher, is an interesting example of Baltrušaitis's reception. The emphasis on the artistic perspective of Baltrušaitis's writings rather than his scholarly input reveals him as the transmitter and the link between two different areas of scholarship: his approach was determined by French and Russian scholarship, which Baltrušaitis accessed through his bilingual aptitude, and his own philosophical and firsthand perception of the monuments he discussed.

The dedication of his study *Le problème de logive et l'Arménie* to the Bulgarian-born architect Toros Toramanyan is significant of the fruitful combination of positivistic and aesthetic investigation. Was this means to acknowledge the role and the contribution of Strzygowski's abused collaborator?⁴¹ Surprisingly, this study is focused on a single architectural feature, which is given a cardinal role for understanding the whole architectural tra-

40 Christina Maranci, *Medieval Armenian Architecture*, 2001, pp. 191–193.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 193.



Fig. 6a Capital for the Bagrati Cathedral published in *Études sur l'art médiéval en Géorgie et en Arménie*, pl. 57.



Fig. 6b Georgia, Bagrati Cathedral, the same capital, photograph by the author, 2016

dition. Few photographs and many drawings accompany this attempt to define the appearance of the “couverture nervée” as the source of visual language for the West, making Armenia the cradle of Western civilization. Opposing Strzygowski’s obsession with the basilica and the dome, Baltrušaitis defends, in Focillon’s way, the independence of forms and figures. Since his first publication, the *Études sur l’Arménie et la Géorgie*, Baltrušaitis sublimates the motif through word and image (Fig. 6a-b). His formalism is different from that elaborated by Millet and later André Grabar who proposed his own model of interpretation, based, like Millet, in formal, historic and religious criteria⁴². Baltrušaitis, instead, departs from the form to reach the intellect beyond time⁴³.

42 André Grabar, *Martyrium. Recherches sur le culte des reliques et l’art chrétien antique*, Paris: Collège de France, 1946.

43 Christina Maranci, *Medieval Armenian Architecture*, p. 127 observed Baltrušaitis’ disregard of chronology and history. She also criticized, p. 191, his shootings,

Thus, he becomes a kind of interpreter of the arts of the Caucasus for the French audience. The *Église cloisonnée* is the only publication in which Baltrušaitis deals with Byzantine monuments and relies on the work of scholars such as Millet and Strzygowski. He agrees with the former that the church of Skripou presents several common features with Transcaucasian buildings and enhances its kinship to the triple churches of the Caucasus.⁴⁴ He also extends this observation to Crete, where he detects the memory of the Armenian military immigration at the time of Nicephore Phocas in toponyms starting with *Armen-*.⁴⁵ However, Baltrušaitis overlooks the Balkans and the Aegean, ignores the

staged to support alleged similarities.

44 Jurgis Baltrušaitis, *Église cloisonnée en Orient et en Occident*, Paris: Les Éditions d’art et d’histoire, 1941, p. 43.

45 J. Baltrušaitis, *Église cloisonnée*, p. 45. In this book, where ground plans are the sole visual support, Baltrušaitis repeats and enhances comparisons between Eastern and European buildings, such as Saint-Etienne de Beauvais compared to Haghpat, or Horomos compared to Beauvais.

Crusades, but elaborates a visual language meant to connect the East and West, providing these worlds with a shared memory and heritage in spite the linguistic and religious and political discrepancies. If this approach can at first sight be discredited as ahistoric, Baltrušaitis's humanistic and utopian ambition foreshadows the *musée imaginaire* later promoted by André Malraux between humanist ideals, artistic otherness and colonial consumption). Today, Baltrušaitis's scholarship should be read and analyzed as a source rather as literature – this also applies to many of Millet's studies and their debatable dates or labels. Baltrušaitis's itineraries through the monuments and the territory provide some glimpses into how the arts of the Caucasus were perceived during the formative period of the local nation states. In contrast to the photographic records produced and collected by Millet, Baltrušaitis's own photographs illuminate the scholar's peculiar gaze, his focus on the motif that the light and the angle of view may transform and sublimate.

Epilogue

As their paths did not really cross through the Quartier Latin and the 14th district where Millet and Baltrušaitis lived, their common interest in the art of the Caucasus seems like an ironic coincidence, as does their “global” – though Christian limited– scope over the medieval world. Further study of archival evidence, scholarly networks, and photographic archives may enable scholars to restore the memory of a fragile and contested heritage from the fringes of the Mediterranean, the threshold between East and West. Rather than showcase an elusive cradle of Western art, Millet and Baltrušaitis presented a modern and inclusive approach to the architecture of the South Caucasus, developed by each of them in his own way, in the same European capital. Like in the halls of first major Byzantine exhibition in Paris, during the short time of humanistic excitement between the two World Wars, they idealized the modernity of premodern Christian Caucasus as a universal and inspiring treasure for all humankind.

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