

JOSEF STRZYGOWSKI



J.Strzygowski was a Polish-Austrian art historian, who is well known for his fundamental studies in the field of Medieval Oriental art.

J.Strzygowski was born Biala, Austrian Silesia (today in Poland) in March 7, 1862. After a brief involvement into cloth manufacturing he entered the University of Vienna, then Munich where he studied art history. In 1885 he completed his dissertation entitled as "Baptism of Christ". Soon after Strzygowski visited Rome, Italy, where undertook a thorough study dealing with the Byzantine sources of Italian painting.

The next seven years Strzygowski's travelled to Greece and Russia, where he studied Byzantine and Russian art. In 1892 he entered the University of Graz, Austria, but soon after left for Egypt (1894-1895) focusing his scholarly interests to early Byzantine and Islamic arts (including Coptic art). By his return to Austria Strzygowski published numerous studies devoted to Byzantine and Islamic arts. Among them his "The Orient or Rome: contributions to the history of late antique and early Christian art" (1901, in German) where he tried to evaluate the negative impact of Oriental or Semitic art on Greek, a theory which triggered many art historians to oppose his attitude.

J.Strzygowski retired from the University of Vienna in 1933 and died there in January 2, 1941.

Armenian art and culture occupy a considerable place in J.Strzygowski's studies. He visited Armenia twice, in 1889 and 1915. He contacted with the leading Armenian architects T.Toramanyan and L.Lisitsyan, as well as with N.Marr and H.Ter-Movsesyan. Under his direct assistance in 1913 was organized an exposition of T.Toramanyan's photos and measurements of medieval Armenian churches. Inspired by Toramanyan's studies J.Strzygowski suggested to undertake a large program dedicated to medieval Armenian architecture after his expected visit to Armenia.

At the end of World war I J.Strzygowski published his two-volume monograph «The architecture of the Armenians and Europe» (Vienna, 1918), in which he claimed to have traced the origins of Gothic architecture to Armenia. He treated the Armenian medieval architecture on par with Greek and Northern (Gothic) architecture and caused western art historians to regard it as a highly developed and independent phenomena, but not provincial one, as it was regarded in Europe. Strzygowski formulated a monumental comparative study in which he defined Armenia's position within the architectural developments of Byzantium, Iran, and Western Europe.

In his monograph J.Strzygowski suggested a periodization of early medieval Armenian architecture as follows:

IV century - centrally-planned buildings (church architecture).

V century - the end of this form and the introduction of as the basilica was exported into Armenia from the Mediterranean. This was the result of the introduction of foreign architectural elements which corrupted the "purity" of the fourth-century national forms.

VII - revival of the centrally-planned form which reflects the strengthening of national feeling.

There is compelling evidence for Strzygowski's specific attraction to Armenia. Although being an author of numerous works on eastern regions such as Asia Minor, Syria, and Iran, Strzygowski found in Armenia something quite unique; a Christian (unlike Iran) and Aryan (unlike Asia Minor and Syria) land which had existed as an ethnic and/or national unit since the pre-Christian era. Armenia, according to Strzygowski, constantly struggled to repel foreign influences and maintain its national character.

Although some ideas regarded the origins and development of Armenian art and architectures put forward by J.Strzygowski were disputed by later scholars, his impact on Armenology is great.