

# Roots of the separation of disciplines: Viollet-le-Duc's instructions for the *Musées du Trocadéro* in Paris

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## Art and Ethnography, Classification of collections, racism, anti-Semitism

[Figure 1] The architectural theorist and restorer of medieval architecture, Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc whose restorations include the cathedrals of Notre-Dame de Paris and of Notre-Dame de Reims, contributed to selecting the site for the *Exposition universelle de 1878* / the World Fair of 1878 in Paris.<sup>1</sup> Compared with the Paris World Fair of 1867, the site was no longer limited to the Champ de Mars but extended across the river Seine onto the hill of the Trocadéro.

[Figure 2]. As in 1867, the 1878 World Fair, included an exhibition focused on an historical approach,<sup>2</sup> apart from the presentation of present time commodities. In the wings of the Palais du Trocadéro, the "Exposition historique de l'art ancien dans tous les pays et de l'ethnographie des peuples étrangers à l'Europe" ["Historical exhibition of ancient art in all countries and of the ethnography of people foreign to Europe "] was shown. Compared to the previous exhibition aesthetic aspects were now of importance.

Moreover, an ethnographic section was newly created. The art critic Edmond Bonaffé stated on this exhibition which resulted primarily from private collections [Figure 3]:

"According to some, the left wing would be best reserved for foreign museums, but why are there then so many Parisian collectors at this side? According to others, the right wing should be called *History of art*, and the left wing *Ethnographie*, hence the conclusion that the weapons, ceramics, bronzes and the rest are *ethnographic* when they originate from Spain, China and Belgium, but *historical* when they hail from France, Italy and Germany."<sup>3</sup>

Bonaffé replied to this arbitrary classification:

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<sup>1</sup> See Mersmann, S. 2012: Die Musées du Trocadéro. Viollet-le-Duc und der Kanondiskurs im Paris des 19. Jahrhunderts. Berlin: Reimer, 35-42.

<sup>2</sup> See Ibid. 42-44 and Charpy, M., 2012, Les "techniques archaïques". Produits d'un autre temps et produits artisanaux dans les expositions universelles, in Carré A.-L., Corcy M.-S., Demeulenaere-Douyère C., Hilaire-Pérez L., ed., *Les expositions universelles en France au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Techniques Publics Patrimoines*, Paris, CNRS Éditions, 279-297.

<sup>3</sup> Bonaffé, E.: Au Trocadéro. Causerie. In: Gazette des Beaux-Arts. Vingtième année. Vol. 18. 1878. Deuxième période. 1.9. Troisième livraison. S. 321–326. (Italics in original.)

"If you adopt the ethnological classification, install each nation to it; [...] Do you prefer the chronological classification? [...] Install each room one by one, methodically, without interpolations, regardless of latitudes, the north with the south, the east with the west. The fact that art of the same era is entirely confined in the same room, with its painters, its sculptors, its engravers, its goldsmiths, its upholsterers, its illuminators, its potters, its staff of artists and workers and tell me if the lesson will not be excellent<sup>4</sup>."

[**Figure 4**] In my presentation I'd like to demonstrate, how Viollet-le-Duc, who was a member of the first commission of the Musée d'ethographie du Trocadéro, developed for the Musée de Sculpture comparée, which was opened as the Musée d'ethnographie in 1882 in one of the wings of the Palais du Trocadéro, a classification scheme, based on transmitted stereotyped racist patterns, which separated artefacts from outside Europe apart from Egypt, from the discipline of art history. Since 1855 he tried to establish a museum of plaster casts from works of the French middle ages in Paris, as some of them were shown in Great Britain. [**Figure 5**] In July 1879, Rapports 1 and 2 for the posthumously realized Musée de Sculpture comparée, he died in September 1879, were written. As early as in 1866 Viollet-le-Duc mentioned the idea of a comparative museum concept highlighting the sculpture of the French 13th century.

[**Figure 6**] The research on the Musée de Sculpture comparée is in particular directed towards the second classification principle of Rapport 1 which deals with a chronology and a comparison of European sculpture. A globalized angle in Viollet-le-Duc's museum concept corresponds to the first classification principle of the Musée de Sculpture comparée. In the form of the formulation "belonging to various centres of art and various different times" it has been included in the subtitle of the museum's designation, as well as in the text of the law concerning the establishing of the museum and the first inventory catalogs. Under recourse to his earlier writings, the first classification principle will be explained now.

Viollet-le-Duc's systematization for the *Musée de Sculpture comparée* is composed as before with Johann Joachim Winckelmann of a periodization which, with Viollet-le-Duc, rests upon a three-phase model of the creation of art. Two interlocking strands of argumentation constitute the foundation of the three-phase model. [**Figure 7**] Firstly, Viollet-le-Duc relied upon a predetermined sequence of state forms defined by Victor Hugo. Viollet-le-Duc considered this scheme, following Victor Hugo, as to perpetuate in the history of mankind. Hugo states:

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<sup>4</sup> Bonnaffé E., 1878 324.

"Every civilization begins with theocracy and ends with democracy."<sup>5</sup>

Secondly, Viollet-le-Duc constructed imaginary communities which he summarized under the term "race". In France, the term "race" was initially applied within an aristocratic context, referring to the genealogical tree of noble families. In around 1684, François Bernier introduced the term into a discourse of natural sciences.<sup>6</sup> Viollet-le-Duc had himself as the first professor of art history and aesthetics at the *École des Beaux-arts*, in his repeated criticism aimed at this institution, demanded the introduction of current scientific points of view to the curriculum.<sup>7</sup>

In his construction of imaginary communities, Viollet-le-Duc [Figure 8] relied partly on the book "Le Règne Animal" written by Georges Cuvier and partly on Arthur de Gobineau, one of the key exponents of the ideology of *Racial Thought*<sup>8</sup>. At the core, as with these two writers, Viollet-le-Duc distinguished three large "races humaines"<sup>9</sup>. In his narrative, he ascribed immutable traits to them. The French researcher Eric Michaud has underlined the insistence on consistent essential characteristics of groups of people, considering it a basic narrative of the 19th-century art historiography.<sup>10</sup> Unlike François Bernier, Viollet-le-Duc attributed a hierarchical system to his concept of "races", the lowest rank of which should fill out a "race noire" and the uppermost rank a "race blanche".

"This, the Aryan race [sic!], the white race by excellence, is provided with warrior instincts; it gives birth to heroes; it dominates, *it rules*; it establishes the first religions, it rules their worship; it despises manual work and forms societies consisting of shepherds and warriors, with patriarchy as principle of any government.

This other, the yellow race, the largest perhaps on our planet, is industrious, engaged in business, calculating, agriculture, manual work; it is skilled in metalworking; it lends itself easily to any work, provided it catches a glimpse of a purely material well-being; devoid of high aspirations, of philosophical foundation, with little concern for the unknown, it remains calm during the day in hand, thanks to its work and its industry, raised to a fair social order.

The third, the black race, is ardent, violent, *recognizes no other power than physical force*, superstitious, guided by its physical needs or by its mobile and disordered imagination."

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<sup>5</sup> „Toute civilisation commence par la théocratie et finit par la démocratie.“ Hugo, V., Notre-Dame de Paris, (1832) 1880, 275. English translation from Hugo, V., Notre Dame de Paris. Book V II. This Will Destroy That, 13. The Harvard Classics, Shelf of Fiction. 1917.

<sup>6</sup> See Blanckaert, C., Les conditions d'émergence de la science des races au début du XIX e siècle. In: Moussa, Sarga (ed.): L'idée de «race» dans les sciences humaines et la littérature. (XVIIIe–XIXe siècles). Actes du colloque international de Lyon. 16–18.11.2000. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003, 136.

<sup>7</sup> See Mersmann, S. 2012, 67-82.

<sup>8</sup> See Messling, M., Von der Adelsranküne zur Rassentheorie: Gobineaus Sprach- und Kulturanthropologie. In: Krämer, Philipp, Lenz, Markus A. and Markus Messling (ed.): Rasseddenken in der Sprach- und Textreflexion. Kommentierte Grundlagentexte des langen 19. Jahrhunderts. Paderborn: Fink, 2015, 189-209.

<sup>9</sup> Viollet-le-Duc 1866, 98.

<sup>10</sup> See recently Michaud, É., Introduction. Sur un fantasme de filiation. In: Michaud, E., Les invasions barbares. Une généalogie de l'histoire de l'art. Paris: Gallimard, 2015, 11-26.

Source: Viollet-le-Duc, article "Sculpture", 1866, 99

Against the background of these racist stereotypes which were widespread in Europe during the 19th century Viollet-le-Duc imposed strong evaluative attributes on the human combinations he created. Domination and subjugation are hereby argumentations originating from the Enlightenment, as reflected in the characterization of the "race blanche" ("it rules") and the "race noire" ("*recognizes no other power than physical force*"). Apart from the equality claim of Enlightenment philosophy they were applied in order to justify the enslavement of people.<sup>11</sup>

Just as Cuvier, Viollet-le-Duc assumed that the ascribed personality traits are not to be considered as individual or changeable, but rather as genetically implied factors. Whereas Cuvier created a background for Viollet-le-Duc biologicistic constructions, other sources can be mentioned which inspire his orientation towards linguistic - Viollet-le-Duc applied the term "*aryane*" - assumptions.

The Englishman Sir William Jones (1746-1794) had, within the scope of his work for the Asiatic Society of Bengal, established foundations as to the recognition of the relationship between the Indian - mainly Sanskrit - and the European languages. In his writings, we see a linguistic distinction between "Semites" on the one hand and "Persians and Indians" on the other. Jones regarded language as an essential criterion for the assessment of peoples.<sup>12</sup> Herein he was followed by in particular German authors such as the Schlegel brothers and Herder.<sup>13</sup> As Léon Poliakov has indicated they laid the cornerstone for the myth of a supposedly superior "Aryan race".<sup>14</sup> In his three-phase model Viollet-le-Duc resorted to biological as well as to linguistic constructions of race.

**[Figure 9]** A phase of 'imitation de la nature' formed the starting point of his classification of eras. This phase is followed by an "époque hiératique" and an "époque d'emancipation". He described the latter phase as the point of culmination. Viollet-le-Duc omitted the "imitation de la nature" from the spatial implementation. He did not provide any status of art to the objects ascribed to this phase. The spatial design immediately begins in Room 1 with the second phase. Room 2, twice as large, he dedicated to the "époque d'emancipation". In contrast, he

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<sup>11</sup> See Zerger 1997, 23-24. (Voltaire 1768: 83).

<sup>12</sup> See esp. Jones, Sir William, Third anniversary discourse (1786). See Ballantyne 2002, 26-30.

<sup>13</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Inder. Heidelberg, Mohr und Zimmer, 1808.

<sup>14</sup> Poliakov, L.: Der arische Mythos. Zu den Quellen von Rassismus und Nationalismus. Aus dem Französischen (1971) von Margarete Venjakob, ed. by Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, Hamburg: Junius, 1993.

described Rooms 3, 4 and 5 as eras of decadence. Only for Room 4 did he plan an exhibition of works originating from the Italian Renaissance. In the final Room 6, Viollet-le-Duc transferred the three-phase model initially applied to "statues" to "ornamental sculptures".

### ***Imitation of nature***

The fact that Viollet-le-Duc did not intend the phase of "imitation de la nature" ["imitation of nature"] for the spatial implementation did not indicate to him it was marginal. The basis of his historical narrative is found in the comments on this phase. Only at relatively later point in his lecture at the *École des Beaux-arts*, the term "hiératique" is inserted. We read at the start of the relevant paragraph of the text:

**[Figure 10]** "In the most ancient monuments of history, ... "<sup>15</sup>

This formulation, however, is not meant to be the beginning of Viollet-le-Duc's chronology. Instead Viollet-le-Duc put forward here:

"... a kind of return to the earliest times"<sup>16</sup>

referring to a prehistoric era<sup>17</sup>, at the beginning of his narrative. In a lecture at the Sorbonne, Viollet-le-Duc characterized the three "races" he had adopted by means of the attribution of dwellings which he considered original to them.<sup>18</sup> The "race noire" he described as the one to least interfere with nature and who would choose to inhabit caves. As a template for the dwellings of the "Jaunes" a beaver lodge would have served, hereby referring to the combination of various materials applied. The "Aryas", however, would have from the start processed the nature they encountered the strongest and built huts using wood. Viollet-le-Duc described the sketched preliminaries of his lecture as:

"... presentation preceding historical times"<sup>19</sup>

The "imitation of nature" can be located during this epoch. It can be found here with regard to the allocation of a different developmental ability of people, a topos of historiography which

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<sup>15</sup> Viollet-le-Duc, *ibid.*, 15.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.

<sup>17</sup> See concerning the term „préhistoire“ especially the research of Sophie de Beaune and Debray, C., Labrusse, R. and M. Stavrinaki : Introduction. And Moro-Abadia, O, L'art dans les premiers discours sur la préhistoire. In : Préhistoire. Une énigme moderne. Ed. by Cécile Debray, Rémi Labrusse and Maria Stavrinaki. Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2019, 15-18 and 57-59.

<sup>18</sup> Viollet-le-Duc 1866c, 353-354.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

Viollet-le-Duc in his lecture transferred onto a "race noire" he had constructed. Here he comments:

**[Figure 11]**

"The first (meaning "the white race") have a regular history, a series of more or less advanced civilizations, moments of surprising splendour... "

With regard to the constructed "race noire" Viollet-le-Duc stated:

"...others are now what they were 20 centuries ago, and their contact with the civilization of the European peoples has had no other result than communicating to them the needs and vices they were unaware of, without bringing them on the path of true progress."

Viollet-le-Duc's presentation comprise structures of the topos of ahistoricity mainly transferred onto Africa.<sup>20</sup> With simultaneous claim of writing the history of the world, an extra-historical existence was attributed to a large part of the earth's population. The German philosopher Hegel has commented with emphasis:

"**[Figure 12]** [Africa] is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit ... What we properly understand by Africa is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World's History.

Having eliminated this introductory element, we find ourselves for the first time on the real theatre of History."<sup>21</sup>

In the lecture at the *École des Beaux-arts* (1864) and the presentation at the Sorbonne (1866) the outset of the history of art is connected with the occurrence of a first form of government. Viollet-le-Duc opined that only the "race blanche" was able to govern,<sup>22</sup> in contrast to the "race nègre", which is deprived - in his view - of being able to establish regulations. Already at this point Viollet-le-Duc **excluded** the largest part of Africa from the history of art history.

## ***Epoque hiératique***

In the comments on the first Room **[Figure 13]** it is explained as to the limits of the northern space that he envisaged to display Egyptian, Assyrian and then subsequently early Greek sculpture.<sup>23</sup> The entire southern space he reserved for the presentation of works of the French

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<sup>20</sup> See for example concerning Immanuel Kant (1724-1804): Sonderegger 2002a, Schmidt 2002, Sutter 1989 and Firla-Forkl 1994. With a view to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) see: Sonderegger 2002b, Henn 1988 and partially Buck-Morss (2000) 2004. See also Eckert 2002.

<sup>21</sup> Hegel [1822-1830] 1998a, 178.

<sup>22</sup> Viollet-le-Duc 1866a, 97.

<sup>23</sup> 1 = Egyptian; 2 = Assyrian; 3 = Greek. See Viollet-le-Duc 2<sup>e</sup> Rapport [1879], 4.

Romanesque era. Because of their exhibition at the Louvre in 1827, objects of ancient Egyptian and, from 1847 on, Assyrian culture had already entered into the context of art.

**[Figure 14]** In his writings, Viollet-le-Duc linked the concept of the beginning of the history of art, which he situated geographically in Asia and explicitly in India to the "époque hiératique".<sup>24</sup> We are speaking of the myth of "a superior Aryan race", as represented by the French linguist Ernest Renan in his writings<sup>25</sup>. Viollet-le-Duc described "la race aryane" as legitimizing the hierarchical caste system of the Hindu religion.<sup>26</sup> In his art-historical considerations he included views from *Du génie des Religions* by Edgar Quinet.<sup>27</sup> In the chapter "De la Renaissance orientale" Quinet treated the discovery of Hindu manuscripts equal to the discovery of the Iliad and the Odyssey. In many parts of Viollet-le-Duc's lecture at the *École des Beaux-arts*, the Hindu religion forms the guide of the narrative.

Viollet-le-Duc's consideration of Indian art is however dialectical: as the alleged beginning of art history it is given a special place, on the other hand Viollet-le-Duc did not confess to a progress of their creations. Under the term "peuples orientaux" Viollet-le-Duc let the population of India remain within a conglomerate consisting of divergent peoples at the stage of "époque hiératique".

The determinations for the "époque hiératique" is based on a model of history which rest on two factors: the properties attributed to the constructed "races" on the one hand and their encounter on the other hand. Together they form the argumentation framework of the "époque hiératique" as well as of the "époque d'émancipation".

In his lecture at the Sorbonne Viollet-le-Duc stated:

**[Figure 15]** "From the standpoint of art, .. two social conditions produce opposite results: the regime of the upper castes art develops very quickly but takes a hieratic form; as to the regime struggles which in the long run leads to mergers, art develops slowly, step by step, seeking its ways, but grows every day reaching a point of culmination at which it even does not know how to stop, and rather than stay calm, loses the great and beautiful ways to fall in research."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See Viollet-le-Duc (1864) 1984, 15-16, Viollet-le-Duc 1866c, 353-354.

<sup>25</sup> See also: C. Blanckaert, Langues et races. Deux stratégies d'homologation de l'ethnologie, in : Sciences du vivant et représentations en Europe (XVIIIe-XXe siècles). Transferts culturels, ordonnancements des savoirs et visions des mondes, H. Jeanblanc ed., Montpellier, Presses universitaires de la Méditerranée, 2011, 93-113. C. Blanckaert, Le darwinisme et ses doubles: note sur la linguistique organiciste, in : Romantisme, n° 154, 2011, 65-75. C. Blanckaert, "La linguistique naturaliste: de l'exclusion à l'histoire", HEL. Histoire. Épistémologie. Langage, vol. XXXIII, fasc. 2, 2011, 15-31. 2012 C. Blanckaert, L'équation disciplinaire des sciences humaines. Paradigme ou problème pour une épistémologie vraiment historique?, in: La disciplinarisation des savoirs linguistiques. Histoire et Épistémologie, J.-L. Chis, D. Savatovsky, D. Candel, J. Léon dir., Paris, SHESL, 2012 (Les dossiers de HEL, n° 5), 1-21.

<sup>26</sup> See [Viollet-le-Duc] (1864) 1994.

<sup>27</sup> See also Ramos 2010.

<sup>28</sup> Viollet-le-Duc 1866c, 354.

In Viollet-le-Duc's descriptions racial constructions are linked to Victor Hugo's model of the succession of forms of government. Theocracy acquires validity in the „époque hiératique“. Viollet-le-Duc connects this, in direct compliance with Hugo, to the Hindu caste system.

Viollet-le-Duc marginalized, mainly in accordance with the afore-mentioned scheme, all those peoples of a higher development as to their artistic productions for the purpose of the „époque d'émancipation“, which he combined with an image of the "orient".

### ***Era of emancipation***

In comparison to Room 1, Viollet-le-Duc planned the double size hereof for Room 2 [Figure 16]. He hereby let it be understood that Room 2 embodied the culmination point of his three-phase model. Whereas the Greek sculpture dating from the Classical Era was to be placed in an axis in the middle of the room,<sup>29</sup> the French art dating from the 13th century should be placed along the walls. On this occasion Viollet-le-Duc differentiated between the French art of the first and the second half of the 13th century, subdividing each of them into the regional manifestations on the Ile-de-France, in Champagne, Picardy and Burgundy.

Viollet-le-Duc named the figure of the Prophet on the left doorjamb of the central west portal of the Reims Cathedral [Figure 17] as an example from Champagne. As to this figure, he spoke of a concrete resemblance with the Mausolus from Harlikanassos. In both figures, the prophet from Reims and the Mauolos from Harlikanassos, he opined to recognize individual portraits. Viollet-le-Duc thus dated the emergence of the individual portrait, usually linked to the Italian Renaissance, back to ancient Greece and 13th-century French art. He saw to it that the art of these two eras appeared to be the culmination of the history of art. In the same vein he excluded step by step all objects except Greek and French art from the 13th century from a higher development.

Viollet-le-Duc described the development of Greek sculpture as the encounter of Pelasgians and Hellenes which he both perceived as "Aryans". In this way the "époque d'émancipation" is reduced to people with a constructed same descent.

## **Conclusion**

By neglecting in the research on the Musée de Sculpture comparée the first classification principle, the museum concept is removed from its characteristic: the divergence on the one hand between the consciousness of the existence of various cultures which leads Viollet-le-

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<sup>29</sup> Viollet-le-Duc 2<sup>e</sup> Rapport [1879], 2.

Duc to globalized comparisons and on the other hand the exclusions based on 19th-century biologicistic and linguistic racial constructions. Viollet-le-Duc was a member of the first commission of the *Musée d'Ethnographie* which, as the Musée de Sculpture comparée, opened in 1882 in the Palais du Trocadéro. The topos of peoples without history implies that the African artifacts are only exhibited at the *Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro* which opened in the opposite wing of the building. As Edmond Bonaffé mentions in the first part of this paper, the first director of the *Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro*, Ernest-Théodore Hamy, was obliged by a commission to display the objects in the ethnographical museum not in a developing line but in a geographical manner.