Lombard Sculpture: Archaeology of a Historiographical Concept

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This article explores the formation and affirmation of the myth of the «Lombard style» examining two centuries of literary production in Great Britain and in the United States. It aims to excavate how the concept of Lombard art was shaped and transformed across time, and the historical, cultural, or artistic motivations that led scholars to regard it as an exceptional style.

Keywords: Historiography, Lombardy, Lombard Art, Romanesque, Freemasons

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> The medieval arts of that part of Italy which was invaded and colonised by the Longobards at the time of the barbarian inroads must always attract the special attention of the art historian, because it was in that region that the mingling of the new barbarian spirit with old classical forms and traditions generated a new style, notably in architecture and sculpture, and this Lombard style formed a most important tributary to the stream of architectural development flowing on toward Gothic[1].

With these words Sir Martin Conway opens his review of Arthur Kingsley Porter's *Lombard Architecture*, published in *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* in 1919. In these few lines, Conway synthesises crucial ideas attached to the medieval art of Lombardy, that is, a melting pot between «the new barbarian spirit with old classical forms and traditions», one that produced a new style – the Lombard style – that was central to the development of medieval art.

This article explores the formation and affirmation of the myth of the «Lombard style», examining two centuries of literary production in Great Britain and in the United States. It aims to excavate how the concept of Lombard art was shaped and transformed across time, and the historical, cultural, or artistic motivations that led scholars to regard it as an exceptional style. This study builds upon two different, intertwined rich debates: on the origins of Romanesque as an intellectual and art historical category, and the historiography of medieval art in Lombardy[2].

Discussions on Romanesque art have often sidelined the question of why Lombardy came to hold such a central place in early scholarship, and the historiography of art in Lombardy has likewise tended to overlook the earliest contributions to this discourse – particularly those written in English – which were instrumental in shaping the so-called 'Lombard myth'. Re-examining these early voices sheds light on the construction of Lombardy as a key centre of medieval artistic production and contributes more broadly to discussions about the emergence and formation of art history as a discipline.

Methodologically, while this article centres on sculpture, it also engages with architectural history, reflecting the close relationship between the two disciplines in the early stages of art historical writing[3]. The reference to archaeology in the title evokes not only Foucault's conceptual framework but also the metaphorical excavation of texts, historical layers, and textual stratifications[4]. Indeed, 'Lombard' is a stratified concept that changed over time, reflected also in the varied terminology associated with it (Lombard, Longobards, Longobardi). For this reason, this article will adhere to the terms employed by the authors themselves. Within the context of this special issue, the article focuses primarily on English-language scholarship, setting aside, for the most part, the broader transnational and translinguistic exchanges that these debates have generated. By concentrating on the English discourse, the article aims to highlight both continuities and ruptures in the construction and evolution of the Lombard myth.

1 Conway 1919.
2 See, amongst others: Bizzarro 1992; Bleeke 2012; Fernie 2014: 5-28; Maxwell 2019; Houriane 2019. Quintavalle 2004; Gandolfo 2006; Peroni 2013.
3 Payne 1999.
4 Foucault 1969.

1. Lombard Architecture: The Formation of an Idea (Origins-1835)

Since the sixteenth century, the architectural heritage of medieval Britain has been at the centre of attention of numerous travellers, writers, and intellectuals, as Tina Waldeier Bizzarro has shown in *Romanesque Architectural Criticism: A Prehistory*[5]. These texts belong to several genres, from topographical or antiquarian essays to architectural treatises. Yet, many of these early writers show an interest in the distinct phases of the architectural history of the country, as demonstrated, for example, by the terminology used to describe the differences between the round arch occasionally termed 'Saxon', and the pointed arch. Some authors linked British medieval architecture with buildings in other parts of continental Europe, particularly Normandy. Already in 1598 John Stow, in describing the Norman construction of St. Paul's Cathedral, explains that the key elements of the building, namely, arches and stone vaults, were «brought by the French» and, similarly, also the stones were imported from Caen in Normandy[6].

Another, and more profound connection with the Continent, is explained by Roger North at the beginning of the eighteenth century:

> The distinction now of building in the world, is reducible to Gothick and Regular. The former (Gothik) was a mode introduc't by a barbarous sort of people, that first distres't, then dissolved the Roman Empire. These fell into a new way of great buildings, which was mixt of their owne invention, and what they found, and had for the most part destroyed among the Greeks and Romans. And this manner is most eminent in our cathedral churches[7].

This passage is noteworthy for two reasons. On the one hand, North ultimately acknowledges the Continent's contribution to the development of «a new way of great buildings» introduced «by a barbarous sort of people», one eminent in English cathedrals. On the other, the contributions of these «barbarous people» seem to evoke, although it is not explicitly referenced, the pages that Giorgio Vasari wrote about the «barbarous races [...] that manner of buildings that are called by us to-day German» (that is, the great part of medieval art in general). Yet, in comparison with Vasari, North has a very positive outlook on such architecture[8].

The significance of the Continent and of the Italian peninsula in the artistic developments of medieval art in Britain was highlighted also by Francis Grose at the end of the eighteenth century. In quoting the *Historia Ecclesiastica* of Bede and the *Vita Sancti Wilfridi*, Grose suggests that the Saxons «procured workmen from the Continent to construct their capital buildings "according to the Roman manner"» and that «what we commonly call Saxon, is in reality Roman architecture». Furthermore, Grose explains that the «style [...] called the Gothic» was introduced to Britain towards the end of the reign of Henry II, and that previously there was only one style of building «practiced all over Europe»[9].

5 Bizzarro 1992.

6 Stow 1842: 121: «the same was built upon arches (or vaults) of stone, for defence of fire, which was a manner of work before that time unknown to the people of this nation, and then brought in by the French; and the stone was fetched from Caen in Normandy». Bizzarro 1992: 57-62.

7 North 1981: 109-110. Bizzarro 1992: 62-65.

8 Giorgio Vasari, *Lives*: 40.

9 Grose 1783-1797, I: 109-110. It should be noted that also James Essex acknowledges the indebtedness towards Rome: Bizzarro 1992: 79-80.

Similarly, James Barry (1741-1806), historical painter and intellectual, whose writings were published posthumously, explores the connection between medieval architecture and the Goths. However, Barry argues that the so-called «barbarous architecture» referred to as Gothic can be traced in Italy from the artistic decline of Late Antiquity, well before the arrival of the Goths, thus, it was not an invention of this population. Even more interestingly, from there, Barry continues, this architecture became a model for Christian churches across Europe: «so that this kind of architecture went northwards from Italy, instead of being transplanted from the north into Italy»[10]. The analysis of these early voices highlights two crucial concerns: the importance of textual sources, from medieval texts to Vasari – evoked by North and openly contradicted by Barry, and the emergence of a clear idea that medieval art had European, Continental origins, and more precisely, Italian roots. Yet, it is worth highlighting that, in these sources, there are no references to Lombardy or to the Lombards.

The early decades of the nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of more extensive studies on medieval architecture. Among these, William Gunn stands out as one of the first to systematically propose the category of «Romanesque» in his *An Inquiry into the Origin and Influence of Gothic Architecture*, published in 1819[11]. In this work, in the section on the Italian peninsula, Gunn discusses the flourishing of Italian cities from the tenth century onwards, mentioning Genoa and Pisa, with its cathedral and baptistery, the tower of San Marco in Venice and the Asinelli Tower in Bologna, as well as the city walls of Milan, Cremona, Pisa, Ferrara, and Genoa. Significantly, Gunn moves from the buildings to the builders, describing «a host of artificers, out of whom, in imitation of the confraternities which for various purposes had existed from ancient times, companies were formed, academies, schools, and lodges were established»[12]. Not only does Gunn mention the ideas of companies, schools and academies for the builders, but also that «An oath of secrecy was administered to the noviciates, a veil of mystery pervaded their meetings, which in an age where many were ignorant conferred importance»[13]. Thus, Gunn suggests the idea that builders were trained and linked in academies, schools and lodges, but yet they were bound by an oath of secrecy. Gunn references the works of Girolamo Tiraboschi and Antonio Ludovico Muratori, who both provided early editions of medieval documents and commentaries, including those mentioning the *Magistri Comacini*. Indeed, Gunn suggests that «schools were established for the sister arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture» and, in Tuscany, primacy was given first to the school of Pisa, then Siena and afterwards Florence[14].

Only a few years later, William Whewell followed Gunn in the use of the term Romanesque as designing «a corrupted imitation of the Roman architecture». Furthermore, he remarks that «this same kind of architecture, or perhaps particular modifications of it, have been by various persons termed Saxon, Norman, Lombard, Byzantine, etc.». While Whewell explains that «these names imply suppositions with regard to the history of this architecture which it might be difficult to substantiate», they «do not describe the style in that generality which we learn to attribute to it», a type of architecture «diffused over the whole face of Europe»[15]. While the role of the Italian peninsula had already been acknowledged in relation to the rise of medieval

10 Barry 1809: 125. Bizzarro 1992: 82-85.
11 Bizzarro 1992: 12.
12 Gunn 1819: 60-61. Bizzarro 1992: 134-136.
13 Gunn 1819: 61.
14 Gunn 1819: 59-61.
15 Whewell 1830: 1-2. Bizzarro 1992: 148. Watkin 1980: 63-65.

architecture, it is only with Whewell that we witness the appearance of the term Lombard. In this context, however, Lombard is understood as one of the «variations according to time and place» of Romanesque architecture[16].

The critical appreciation of the role of Lombardy in the rise of medieval architecture and sculpture changed dramatically with the contributions of Thomas Hope. Of Dutch origins and established in England in 1795, Hope – philosopher, banker, art collector, interior and regency designer – wrote in the early nineteenth century his *Historical Essay on Architecture*, defined by David Watkin as «one of the most impressive and eccentric publications of its time», published posthumously in 1835[17]. In this work, Hope identifies the «Lombard style of architecture», identifying the place where this «new system of Latin church architecture was first matured», and from which it was subsequently appropriated universally. For this reason, Hope prefers to adopt this term over Saxon – as, in his opinion, the Saxons merely adopted the architecture of Christian Rome – and also over Norman, «which only describes the least and most circumscribed Continental provinces, whence this architecture was more proximately wafted to the British shore»[18].

Hope's argument is based on a historical perspective. After Constantine, Rome entered a period of decline, and «in population, in industry, in means, in activity of the vital principle, it had become inferior to many other cities of the peninsula, which, in their turn, had risen to be the capitals of kingdoms, or the residences of courts – to Milan, to Ravenna, to Venice, to Verona, and to Pavia»[19]. Hope explains that Rome, the original capital of the empire, was abandoned also by its sovereigns, for Milan and Ravenna, and even Pavia, «the still more secondary city» became the seats of new courts, and these cities became also «the capitals of new kingdoms»[20]. Hope offers a metaphor, comparing the Italian peninsula to new soil, with few seeds «from an ancient civilisation» scattered on it. It is on this new soil, «in the fertile tracts of Northern Italy», that «a rude and barbarous nation – the *Longobardi*» ultimately settled, «reaching in industry of every description [...] new developments so great»[21].

For Hope, the economic innovations are an important factor in the development of the Lombard industry, but not the only one. He suggests that, as the *Longobardi* were «eager to signalise their zeal in their new Christian faith», Lombard kings and queens were «filling their dominions with churches and monasteries»[22]. For this reason, he continues, «it may be supposed that, among the arts exercised and improved in Lombardy, that of building held a pre-eminent rank», but also the lack of «materials already wrought», easily found in Rome, «made the architects of these more remote regions dependent on their own skill, and free to follow their own conceptions»[23]. Thus, Hope argues that this combination of different factors – the industriousness of the Lombards, the number of new religious foundations, and the absence of materials that could be reused – contributed to the rise of a new architecture. Drawing on the publications of Muratori, he explains «that already, under the Lombard kings, the inhabitants of Como were so superior as masons and bricklayers, that the appellation of *Magistri Comacini*, or masters from Como, became generic to all those of the

16 Whewell 1830: 2.
17 Stephens 1996: 135, 145-146. Watkin 1980: 61.
18 Hope 1835, I: 250-251.
19 Hope 1835, I: 192.
20 Hope 1835, I: 224.
21 Hope 1835, I: 224, emphasis mine.
22 Hope 1835, I: 228.
23 Hope 1835, I: 228-229.

profession»[24]. Thus, Hope understands the primacy of Lombard architecture as a historical phenomenon, in relation to the growth of industry in the north of Italy, and links it to the documents concerning the *Magistri Comacini*.

Yet, a further, crucial moment emerges in Hope's narrative. As Lombardy became saturated with buildings, the builders moved toward Northern Europe, where the gradual spread of Christianity created a growing demand for churches and monasteries. Thus, as «Italian corporations of builders» moved north, «a certain number united, and formed themselves into a single greater association, or fraternity, which proposed to seek for occupation beyond its native land»; furthermore, these corporations were «seeking a monopoly [...] over the whole face of Christendom», becoming religious vassals of the Pope, and, in turn, receiving protection from the pontiffs[25]. The Romans «in great number, joined these *masonic* associations» (*emphasis mine*), then many Greeks, some who fled Constantinople during the iconoclasm, «were likewise taken into the gradually increasing circle of their lodges and filiations», and then, later on, «even natives of the countries north of the Alps became gradually admitted into these bodies»[26]. Indeed, missionaries were followed by a tribe of itinerant freemasons «to provide the inhabitants with the necessary places of worship or reception»[27].

Hope articulates the idea of a centralised and interconnected network of builders: «The architects of all the sacred edifices of the Latin church, wherever such arose – north, south, east, or west – thus derived their science from the same central school; obeyed, in their designs, the dictates of the same hierarchy; were directed in their constructions by the same principles of propriety and taste; kept up with each other, in the most distant parts to which they might be sent, the most constant correspondence; and rendered every minute improvement, the property of the whole body, and a new conquest of the art»[28]. Thus, Hope argues for the centrality of the Lombard builders, organised in *masonic* associations, all interconnected, all designing and erecting churches following the same principles and ideas.

Hope places significant emphasis on sculpture, a key feature of the Lombard Style. Hope mentions several buildings across Europe such as San Ciriaco (Ancona); the Cathedral and San Zeno in Verona; San Michele (Pavia); St. Trophime (Arles); Saint-Sernin (Toulouse); Sainte-Croix (Bordeaux); Saint-Pierre (Angoulême); Notre-Dame la Grande (Poitiers). According to Hope, these churches share the presence of sculptures at the exterior, but they «exhibit an interior comparatively plain»[29]. The reason for this choice, he explains, is a «remaining scruple as to the propriety of connecting imagery with worship». In fact, «The saints and sovereigns of stone and marble are still, like the penitents of old, kept in the porch out of doors, nor suffered to penetrate into the nave, or to approach the altar»[30]. Hope explains that the number of images and sculptures in churches multiplies after the schism. Then he discusses some of the main themes: images of saints, Christ, and the Virgin; founders; hunting scenes (in particular in Pavia); allegorical or moral scenes with apotropaic functions. Furthermore, Hope lists other characteristics of Lombard sculpture, such as the imitation of ancient Roman

24 Hope 1835, I: 228-229. On the reality of the *Magistri Comacini*, see Lomartire 1996 and Lomartire 2010.
25 Hope 1835, I: 230-232.
26 Hope 1835, I: 233.
27 Hope 1835, I: 236-237.
28 Hope 1835, I: 238.
29 Hope 1835, I: 193.
30 Hope 1835, I: 193.

sculpture, «*grotesque*» figures, frequently carved by Lombards, but also figures in low relief, such as at Ancona, Torcello, and Toulouse, «which might pass for those of the early Greek style»[31]. The final chapter of the book presents a list of churches in the Lombard style, organised by city, starting from Pavia and moving through the Italian peninsula to France, Germany, and England[32].

Hope's arguments on the centrality of Lombardy and of «Lombard Architecture» were strongly rejected by Whewell, who explains that Hope's «historical grounds for this name are, I conceive, altogether visionary, at any rate when we go beyond the limits of Italy»[33]. Nevertheless, Hope's volume, defined by Watkin as «a work of major importance because of its impressively broad European scale», was consulted by several writers and scholars, including John Ruskin and Arthur Kingsley Porter[34].

Hope's theory on the key role of Lombardy in the rise and affirmation of medieval architecture and sculpture hinges, as this analysis has shown, on several factors: first, on the historical and economic conditions of the region; second, on the presence of the *Magistri Comacini*, seen as the point of origin of the Lombard style; and third, on the stylistic and decorative similarities between various churches – often geographically distant – that Hope highlights in several passages, thereby adopting art-historical methods and categories. It should be noted that the *Magistri Comacini*, lodges and schools, had already been mentioned by Gunn more than a decade earlier. Indeed, these groups are seen as foundational elements of medieval architecture.

In England, the connection between freemasons and architecture found particularly fertile ground. The notes and writings of the architect Christopher Wren (1632-1723), collected by his son, were published in *Parentalia* in 1750. The *Tracts on Architecture*, included in this volume, are defined by Lydia M. Soo «the first "history" of architecture because it demonstrates, for the first time, a historical consciousness»[35]. In Wren's text, emphasis is placed on the freemasons, in relation to the use of buttresses and vaults. More significantly, they also appear in his discussion of Gothic architecture[36]. As it is well known, Wren argues that Gothic Architecture «ought properly and truly to be named the Saracenick Architecture refined by the Christians». Wren claims that this architecture started in the East, following «the Fall of the Greek Empire by the prodigious Success of those People that adhered to Mahomet's Doctrine», but then «The Holy War gave the Christians, who had been there, an Idea of the Saracen Works, which were afterwards by them imitated in the West», thus arguing for an Eastern origin of Gothic architecture, transmitted to the West during the Crusades[37].

Then, Wren explains:

> The Italians (among which were yet some Greek Refugees) and with them French, Germans, and Flemings, joined into a Fraternity of Architects, procuring papal Bulls for their Encouragement, and particular Privileges; they stiled themselves Free-masons, and ranged from one Nation to another, as they found Churches to be built (for very many in those Ages were every where in Building , through Piety or Emulation)[38].

31 Hope 1835, I: 202.
32 Hope 1835, I: 300-344.
33 Whewell 1842: 16.
34 Watkin 1980: 62.
35 Soo 1998: 131.
36 Wren 1750: 356-357.
37 Wren 1750: 306. See also Soo 1998: 82-83 and Wood 2019: 146.
38 Wren 1750: 306.

Furthermore, Wren describes their form of government, with «a Surveyor govern'd in chief; every tenth Man was called a Warden, and overlooked each nine»[39]. The account is clear: these builders were joined in a fraternity, obtained papal bulls, and moved across different regions as opportunities arose.

It should be noted, as Lydia M. Soo discusses, that by Wren's time the term freemasons had acquired several meanings, «operative masons who worked in freestone [...] nonoperative members of masonic lodge, admitted for their architectural and antiquarian knowledge [...]» but also «societies of accepted freemasons [...] completely nonoperative in nature, coming together for social reasons»[40]. The first Masonic lodge was established in England in 1717, and the *Constitutions* of 1723 present a long historical narrative linking humanity, geometry, and architecture, beginning with Adam[41]. However, it is significant to note that neither the *Constitutions* nor Wren mention Lombardy or the Lombards in relation to the freemasons.

Thus, while the relationship between Freemasonry and architecture had a relatively long history in England, it is only with Thomas Hope and William Gunn that a more precise and explicit link to Lombardy emerged[42]. The interest in the freemasons – and more specifically, Lombardy and the *Magistri Comacini* – appears to have been sparked by the historical and archival work of Antonio Muratori, cited by both authors. It is also plausible that the writings of Wren influenced Hope's theories. More difficult to determine is whether, and in what ways, these ideas might have been connected to modern Freemasonry. Suzanne Stephens has argued that Hope «was somewhat antipathetic to the organization, or at least not involved with it in any manner»[43]. Nevertheless, it is notable that Hope refers – albeit briefly – to the tradition in which Hiram, King of Tyre, sent architects to King Solomon to build his temple[44]. While this episode is mentioned in both *Parentalia* and *Constitutions*, Hope's wording more closely follows the latter source[45]. In any case, both Gunn and, more decisively, Hope linked the freemasons with Lombardy – an association that would later be adopted by writers more directly affiliated with the brotherhood[46].

2. Devotion, Myth, Knowledge: Lindsay, Ruskin, Gibbon, and Perkins

In the 1830s, the concept of Lombard architecture emerged beyond the circles of writers and connoisseurs, influencing the design and construction of sacred buildings in England. Amongst the medieval revivals of the period, the architect and architectural historian Edmund Sharpe adopted a specific neo-Romanesque style in his design. The external surface of St Mark's in Whitton near Blackburn (1835-38) is rhythmically articulated with lesenes and «Lombard friezes impressed under the string-courses», while small, simple monoforae pierce the wall[47]. The same elements – lesenes, arch corbel-tables, and monoforae – also appear in Christ Church in Chatburn, designed by

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39 Wren 1750: 307.
40 Soo 1998: 293, note 54. The author suggests that Wren would have used this term, in combination with modern, to reflect «his own experience with masons».
41 Anderson 1723: 1-48. On the history of the brotherhood: Jacob 1991.
42 For example, similar theories on the importance of Freemasonry have been advanced also in Pownall 1789, with no mentions of Lombardy.
43 Stephens 1996: 141.
44 Hope 1835, I: 233.
45 Wren 1750: 360. Anderson 1723: 10.
46 The earliest example I was able to identify is Scott 1899.
47 Bullen 2004: 151.

the same architect[48]. Sharpe explained that these churches found their models «in the plain Romanesque of Northern Germany»[49]. In the same period, another architect, John Shaw, in his *Letter on Ecclesiastical Architecture, as applicable to Modern Churches*, addressed to the Bishop of London, argued that Lombard medieval architecture was well suited for contemporary church construction. In fact, Lombardic architecture «contains in an eminent degree the qualities now so important. These appear to be, first, economy; secondly, facility of execution; thirdly, strict simplicity combined with high capability of ornament; fourthly, durability; fifthly, beauty». Shaw also advocated the use of brick and proposed a two-level elevation, with galleries above the aisles[50]. However, the popularity of «Lombard» neo-Romanesque architecture in Britain was short-lived, particularly after the establishment of the Cambridge Camden Society (1839), which declared that «GOTHICK IS THE ONLY CHRISTIAN ARCHITECTURE»[51].

1 Witton, St Mark the Evangelist (Steve Houldsworth, CC BY-SA 2.0)

The mid-nineteenth century brought several new developments in scholarship on Lombard architecture. Alexander Crawford Lindsay, Earl of Crawford – educated at Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge – explained in his monumental *Sketches of the History of Christian Art* that the European diffusion of Lombard architecture was due to the «exclusive monopoly in Christian architecture, conceded by the Popes, towards the close of the eighth century, to the masons of Como, then and for ages afterwards, when the title of *Magistri Comacini* had long been absorbed in that of "Free and Accepted Masons", associated as a craft or brotherhood in art and friendship», thereby

48 In the 1840s, Romanesque design – although not described as Lombard – was adopted also in the United States: Pierson 1986. Curran 1988.
49 Quoted in Bullen 2004: 152.
50 Quoted and discussed in Clarke 1969: 42-43. Curran 2003: 206. Bullen 2004: 154.
51 Quoted in Bullen 2004: 154, note 85.

underlining the centrality of the freemasons[52]. Lindsay places particular emphasis on Lombard sculpture, divided into two periods. The first – and most original – reached full development in the façade of San Michele, Pavia, described as «rude indeed to a degree, but full of fire and a living record of the daring race that created it»[53]. Notably, Lindsay draws a connection between «race» and artistic production. In describing the various scenes, he focuses on the multitude of combat figures and their interaction with humans – an aspect he interprets as characteristic of the nation. San Zeno and the Cathedral of Verona also belong to this initial phase, characterised by grotesque features, with monsters of various kinds decorating capitals and walls. Later, the capitals begin to imitate the Corinthian style, and, at the beginning of the second millennium, lions and griffins appear on church portals[54].

The point of transition to the «Second Period of Lombard Sculpture», according to Lindsay, is marked in Modena with Wiligelmus, a celebrated artist active at the beginning of the twelfth century. As Lindsay observes, «the grotesque being everywhere abandoned for the serious, yet the serious as yet unennobled by a purer design or loftier expression; while the artist seems still to have sought for originality apart from the Byzantine compositions»[55]. The two key features distinguishing this new phase are the abandonment of the grotesque and the emergence of new compositions. However, another artist receives from Lindsay «the palm of superiority»: Benedetto Antelami of Parma. The relief of the Deposition in Parma Cathedral is praised for its beautiful composition, expressive figures, and refined craftsmanship. Furthermore, in discussing the sculptures of the Parma Baptistery, Lindsay comments that «his mind, if not his hand, may be recognised everywhere, within and without, in an exuberance of fancy and allegory akin to the earlier age of S. Michele rather than the commencement of the thirteenth century, yet admirably in keeping with the peculiar character of the architecture with which it is associated»[56].

Essentially, Lindsay proposed a framework for understanding Lombard sculpture divided into two phases, with Wiligelmus as the pivotal figure. It is somewhat surprising to find that the work of Nicholaus – whose name is not mentioned – at Verona is placed in the first phase, considering that it postdates Modena Cathedral. Nevertheless, Lindsay's approach considers composition, the quality of craftsmanship, and the relationship between sculpture and architecture.

A crucial pillar in the affirmation of the Lombard myth is John Ruskin's *Stones of Venice*, published between 1851 and 1853[57]. In this work, as it is well known, Ruskin suggests that the Christian art of the late empire is a continuation of the art of ancient Rome. Crude imitations were produced on the fringes of the empire by barbarian nations in the full vigour of their youth. While in the heart of Europe art was declining into graceful formalism, on its borders a new, vigorous art was emerging, particularly among the Arab and Lombard people. Ruskin saw Venice as the meeting point of these two cultures[58].

Ruskin discusses Lombard architecture at length, explaining that, on the one hand, it represented the culmination of the architecture of the barbarian nations of the North; on the other, it was the progenitor not only of Italian Romanesque and Gothic, but also

52 Lindsay 1847, II: 13-14.
53 Lindsay 1847, II: 44-45.
54 Lindsay 1847, II: 45-48.
55 Lindsay 1847, II: 49-50.
56 Lindsay 1847, II: 52-53.
57 On the Ruskin's attitudes towards Italian medieval architecture and art, see: Hewison 1976. Kite 2012. Tyack 2015. Wood 2019: 235. Melius 2023. On Ruskin's interest in Italy, Shrimpton 2015.
58 Ruskin 1903: 36-41

of the various Gothic styles of the North. Ruskin identifies San Michele in Pavia and Sant'Ambrogio in Milan as the two most important Lombard churches in Italy[59]. For Ruskin, artistic production reflects the character of a population, thus «The work of the Lombard was to give hardihood and system to the enervated body and enfeebled mind of Christendom; that of the Arab was to punish idolatry, and to proclaim the spirituality of worship. The Lombard covered every church which he built with the sculptured representations of bodily exercises – hunting and war»[60]. The carvings, for Ruskin, ultimately depict the Lombards' physical vitality and activity: «The old Lombard architects liked hunting; so they covered their work with horses and hounds, and men blowing trumpets two yards long»[61].

Ruskin describes at length the western façade of San Michele and its carvings, reputedly dating from the seventh century, noting in them the earliest signs of «excitement», which he links to the «Lombard's habits of eating and drinking, especially his carnivorousness»[62]. The description is highly evocative: «the state of mind represented by the west front is more that of a feverish dream, than resultant from any determined architectural purpose, or even from any definite love and delight in the grotesque. One capital is covered with a mass of grinning heads, other heads grow out of two bodies, or out of and under feet; the creatures are all fighting, or devouring, or struggling which shall be uppermost, and yet in an ineffectual way, as if they would fight for ever, and come to no decision»[63]. This passage is followed by a long list of the various creatures Ruskin identifies, to then conclude: «the Lombard animals are all alive, and fiercely alive too, all impatience and spring»[64]. Vitality, life, action, and movement are at the core of Ruskin's interpretation of the carvings of San Michele. Moreover, these observations resonate with his slightly later discussion of the griffin at Verona's Duomo, recently analysed by Jeremy Melius, who emphasises how «the depiction has the power of direct observation»[65].

Ruskin does not mention the freemasons, despite their prominent role in the anglophone discourse on Lombardy. Instead, he emphasises how artistic production mirrors the character of a nation. Ruskin's fascination with Lombardy can be understood not only in relation to his primary subject, Venice – which he perceived as the product of both Lombard and Arab elements. As Frances S. Connelly has noted, Ruskin's theories form part of a developing debate on artistic 'primitivism'[66].

That the Lombards might fall into this category has already been established in earlier historical discourses. For example, Edward Gibbon, in *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, originally published between 1776 and 1788, presents the Lombards as united by their common devotion to a leader who embodied both the virtues and vices of a wild hero. Alboin is described as a «savage hero», and yet the kingdom of this founder was «splendid and transient»[67]. Gibbon discusses the Lombards' language, attitudes towards agriculture, but also their fashion and appearance, all aspects showing, ultimately, their character: «Yet this strange apparel, and horrid aspect, often concealed a gentle and generous disposition; and as soon as

59 Ruskin 1903: 40.
60 Ruskin 1903: 38.
61 Ruskin 1903: 70.
62 Ruskin 1903: 427.
63 Ruskin 1903: 429.
64 Ruskin 1903: 429.
65 Melius 2023: 243-245.
66 Connelly 2015.
67 Gibbon 1836: 782-783. On Gibbon, see Wood 2013: 52-73.

the rage of battle had subsided, the captives and subjects were sometimes surprised by the humanity of the victor»[68]. Furthermore, he adds: «The vices of the Lombards were the effect of passion, of ignorance, of intoxication; their virtues are all the more laudable, as they were not affected by the hypocrisy of social manners, nor imposed by the rigid constraints of laws and education»[69]. Many of the concepts and expressions used by Gibbon resonate strongly in Ruskin's writings, particularly his emphasis on passion, intoxication and an innate freedom – qualities that seem to define Ruskin's interpretation of the façade of San Michele[70].

The first few decades of the nineteenth century were crucial in shaping the debate on Lombardy. The emphasis on Lombardy was driven firstly by its association with the Freemasons, seen as a generative force in Lombard architecture and sculpture. Ruskin, by contrast, focused on the character of the populations involved. At the same time, a progressively more scientific approach emerged in the discourse, specifically in the efforts to organise and categorise this rich artistic material.

Such a method was adopted by Charles C. Perkins, an American writer and intellectual, in his *Historical Handbook of Italian Sculpture* (1883). Although this work does not focus exclusively on medieval sculpture – extending its analysis through to the seventeenth century – the first section, dedicated to Lombard sculpture, discusses the period up to the "revival" beginning in 1240. While Perkins still emphasised the crucial role of the *Magistri Comacini*, he adopted a more systematic and methodical approach. His analysis includes not only stone sculpture but also stucco. He considered a substantial number of monuments, from the small chapel of Cividale to San Pietro in Civate – many of which appeared for the first time in an English-language publication[71].

Perkins discusses monuments city by city, including not only churches – with San Michele in Pavia finally dated around 1100 – but also other carvings, such as the Odoardo di Tresseno or the reliefs of the Porta Romana in Milan. As for Modena, Wiligelmus is described as a Lombard or Germanic sculptor; however, his reliefs are labelled as «barbaric» and compared to the carvings of the Porta Romana in Milan[72]. In addition, Perkins shows interest in the names of the artists. Thus, Nicholaus of Verona is linked to the sculptor in Ferrara, and similarly, Guglielmo of Verona is connected to Wiligelmus. Perkins's analysis makes use of descriptions, and there is an effort to codify the representations and to understand their messages.

Perkins offered insights in the work of Benedetto Antelami, explaining that in terms of technical skill, «he was not in advance of many of his contemporaries, but though he expressed himself in very broken language, he had vastly more intelligence and feeling than any of them, and is on this account to be classed as their superior»[73]. It is worth noting that this is the second positive assessment of Antelami, following that of Lindsay. Perkins evaluates Antelami's work not only in terms of technical skills and language, but also for its intelligence and emotional depth. Nevertheless, his judgment of the sculpture from this period is trenchant and unequivocal, shaped by an evolutionary framework and a narrative of artistic progress. The sculptors of this

68 Gibbon 1836: 789.
69 Gibbon 1836: 789.
70 I am grateful to Jeremy Melius for calling my attention to Gibbon. The resonances between these two authors are discussed by Adams 1993.
71 Perkins 1883: ix-xiv.
72 Perkins 1883: xvii.
73 Perkins 1883: xviii.

era, Perkins explains, are reasonably successful when confined to decorative work, but they fall short in more ambitious endeavours. For example, the figures at San Zeno are described as «short and clumsy», the statue of *Virgil* in Mantua is a «poor work by an unknown sculptor», and the figures on the façade of Piacenza Cathedral (dated 1122) are «clumsily executed»[74]. By the end of the nineteenth century, an increasing number of publications revisited the key themes and ideas developed over the course of the century, particularly in their discussion of the various schools of sculpture. Significantly, Lombard monuments were no longer dated to the time of the Longobards (in the seventh or eighth centuries) but were instead placed in the decades around the year 1100[75].

3. Arthur Kingsley Porter: The Peak of «Lombard Sculpture»

Arthur Kingsley Porter's work is frequently described as foundational in the formation of the field of medieval art history[76]. His writings are analysed here to understand the transformation in the analysis, attitude, and understanding of Lombardy within its broader geographical context. In his first major work, *Medieval Architecture* (1909), Porter explains that, in the eleventh century, Lombardy experienced a revival marked by an extraordinary self-awareness of its powers and potential, evident in the growth of cities and the emergence of self-government[77]. According to Porter, these cities gave rise to the various architectural schools. Lombard architecture is seen as extremely innovative – the first in Europe, he argues, to break away from classical and Carolingian traditions. Moreover, Porter asserts that it was in Milan and Pavia «that were made all those important structural advances that were destined to play so great a part in the development of Gothic»[78]. Among these innovations, he lists the appearance of rib vaults at Sant'Ambrogio in Milan. Even more, Porter explains that «to a greater or less degree, all Western architecture underwent influence from Lombardy»[79]. While Lombardy is placed at the forefront of architectural innovation, during the twelfth century the architecture of the region shifted from innovation to regression.

Porter also emphasises sculpture, «the most important feature of Lombard decoration», and laments the lack of scholarly studies on the subject. Its main features include rinceaux and figures «composed with an eye more for humor than for beauty», along with obscene subjects that he characterizes as barbaric and grotesque. Ultimately, Porter argues, these unusual subjects would have attracted and engaged viewers, providing a comparison with his own era: «In the days before comic newspapers they seem to have fulfilled the function these journals fill with us»[80]. Porter further highlights the entanglements of sculpture and architecture, noting that carvings are especially common on portals and capitals. Regarding the façade of San Michele, Pavia, he explains, «it seems clear that this facade was designed with a view to displaying the sculpture, rather than the sculpture executed to decorate the façade», thus emphasising the pre-eminence of sculpture and its display[81].

74 Perkins 1883: xxi, xxvii.
75 For example: Radcliffe 1894: 268-276; Lethaby 1904: 91-119.
76 See, amongst others: Nicolai 1990; Tosco 1995; Brush 2007; Brush 2022.
77 Porter 1909: 199-204.
78 Porter 1909: 208.
79 Porter 1909: 209.
80 Porter 1909: 218.
81 Porter 1909: 218.

Considering the special emphasis Porter places on the artistic production of Lombardy in *Medieval Architecture*, it is not surprising that he dedicated other works to this area. Lombard sculpture is the focus of a 1915 article. This, together with his *Lombard Architecture* (1915-1917), marks a significant shift in the tone and pace of the scholarly debate we have traced so far. These studies also present a substantial departure from his earlier monograph, introducing at least five innovative approaches and frameworks. First, Porter expresses a clear interest in the figure of the artist, observing that, while elsewhere in Europe the «personality of the artists» has been lost, this is not the case in Italy, where artists possessed «strong individual personalities» and a «peculiar technical mannerism»[82]. He places figures such as Lanfranco, Guglielmo da Modena, and Benedetto Antelami on the same level – in terms of their innovative capacity – as Nicolò Pisano, Giotto, Masaccio, Donatello, and Michelangelo, «who frequently interrupted the normal development of art and diverted it to new and unexpected channels and sometimes even rolled it backward by the sheer force of their genius»[83].

Second, and in contrast to earlier views, there is a marked rise in the aesthetic appreciation for medieval sculpture. Although Porter explains that Guglielmo inserted the frieze somewhat arbitrarily into the façade at Modena, and describes his figures as «short and stocky (well-fed, thick-witted bourgeois)», the compositions are well constructed, and the space left around the figures evokes «the restfulness of Giotto»[84]. In another passage, commenting on the angel in the pulpit of Castell'Arquato, Porter states that this figure may be compared «with the masterpieces of archaic Greek sculpture [...] the composition is strikingly successful; the drawing of the wings is singularly rhythmical and majestic; the entire figure is full of meaning, and breathes an exquisite spirit of poetry»[85]. Furthermore, Porter situates Lombard sculpture within a much broader artistic horizon. For example, the prophets of Cremona, executed by Guglielmo, are deemed to be the first jamb sculptures, a motif that would later be adopted in France; Antelami's draperies, Porter argues, «derive» from those in the carvings at Chartres Cathedral, and the façade of Borgo San Donnino (Fidenza) «reproduces the façade» of St-Gilles-du-Gard[86].

A fourth innovative approach in these works is Porter's careful recognition and organisation of the various artists active in Lombardy, and their pupils. He views Guglielmo da Modena, active at Cremona and Modena, as a revolutionary figure in sculpture, far more advanced than the sculptors of Moissac. Guglielmo had several assistants who later worked in other centres, such as Borgo San Donnino, San Celso in Milan, Parma, Sasso, and Nonantola. The most important successor to Guglielmo, who nonetheless continued in the same tradition, was Niccolò, who left his signature at the Sagra S. Michele, Ferrara, and Verona (Cathedral and San Zeno), while the sculptures of the Cathedral of Piacenza are also attributed to him. Finally, «the Guglielmo tradition was brought to its highest point» by two anonymous sculptors, the authors of the prophet of the Sagra di Carpi and of the pulpit in Castell'Arquato[87].

82 Porter 1915: 142.
83 Porter 1915: 137.
84 Porter 1915: 141-142
85 Porter 1915: 146.
86 Porter 1915: 141, 149, 151.
87 Porter 1915: 143-146.

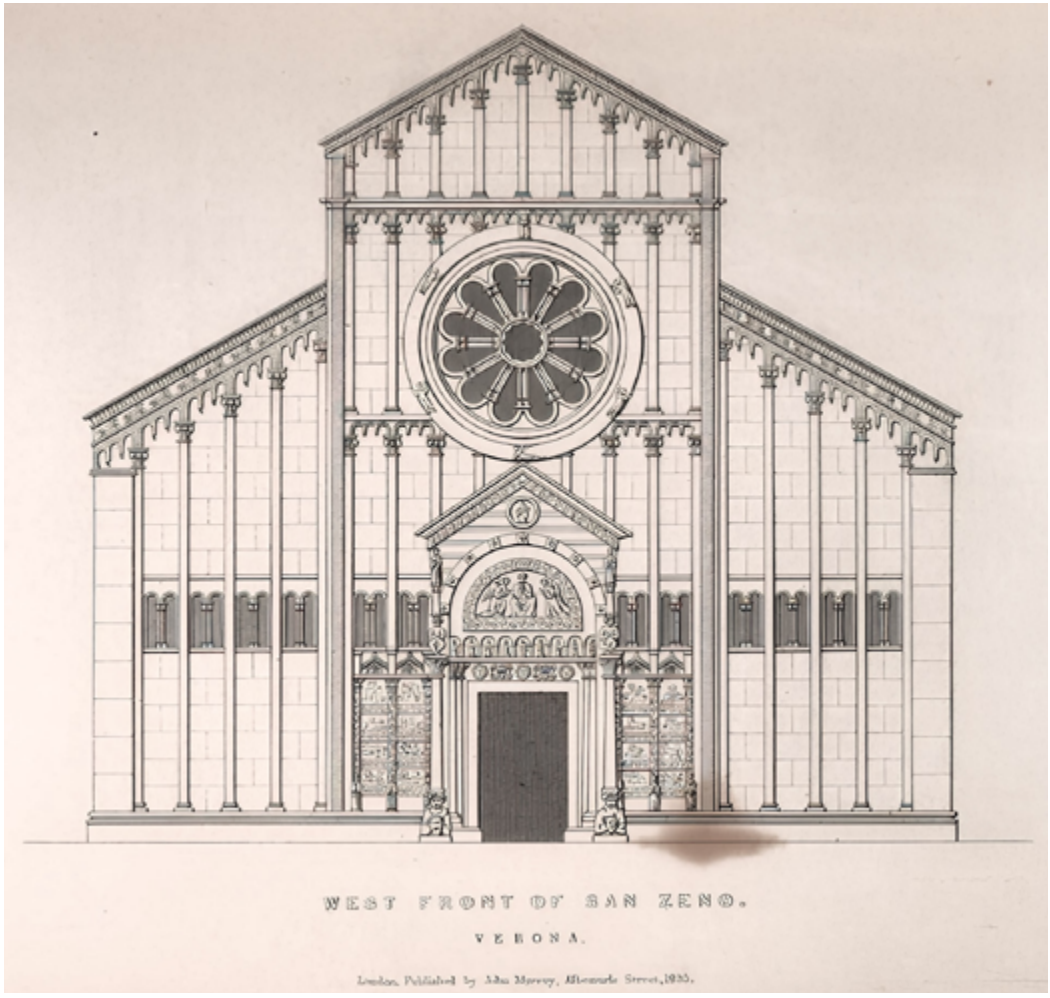
Porter sees a new era inaugurated by Benedetto Antelami. Setting aside Guglielmo's «coarse drapery», Benedetto introduced delicate, «ethereal folds»; he chose subjects rich in symbolic meaning and treated them «with profound religious feeling»[88]. According to Porter, his main works are the *Deposition* and the *Baptistery* of Parma, along with some carvings at Borgo San Donnino. However, his successors failed to establish a lasting tradition: «Like Michelangelo, Benedetto disrupted a tradition and left behind chaos»[89]. One of these followers is the author of the pulpit in Modena; another, active in Berceto, produced work that Porter describes as «an imitation – or perhaps [...] a parody»[90]. At last, «a new genius [...] no less individual, no less revolutionary than Benedetto himself» emerges in the final years of the twelfth century, producing the stuccoes at Civate and the ciborium of Sant'Ambrogio – introducing a new medium, stucco, through which he achieved a striking and novel technique. His art draws primarily on his Lombard predecessors and shows affinities with the prophets now in the Piacenza Museum, though some features suggest a «foreign influence», probably Spanish[91].

This 1915 article offers insights into the methodology of Arthur Kingsley Porter. On one hand, late medieval and Renaissance artists – from Giotto to Michelangelo – are evoked as points of reference for the sculptors of twelfth-century Lombardy. It is possible that Porter emphasises the importance of medieval Lombardy in order to situate it within the burgeoning canon of the discipline of Art History. Furthermore, this focus on individual artists may reflect a similar emphasis found in studies of the Italian Renaissance (for example, Bernard Berenson's *The Italian Painters of the Renaissance* was published in 1894 and Wilhelm Bode's *Florentiner Bildhauer der Renaissance* in 1902). On the other hand, the analysis of carvings is conducted through clear stylistic and formal frameworks, taking into account all elements – from style and composition to the use of draperies. This approach similarly draws on the methods of Bode and Berenson – *Lombard Architecture* was likely modelled on Berenson's corpus of Florentine drawings – and the intellectual tools of connoisseurship[92].

It is also worth noting – as a final and fifth innovative aspect – that, in the publications under discussion, Porter makes use of his own photographs, as well as those taken by Lucy Wallace Porter[93]. This allows for a far more incisive study than one based solely on graphic reproductions. Indeed, this represents a significant innovation that distinguishes these studies even from his earlier *Medieval Architecture*. While many scholars have focused on the meticulous drawings of Fernand de Dartein—reproduced in his *Étude sur l'architecture lombarde et sur les origines de l'architecture romano-byzantine*, published between 1865 and 1882 – for their remarkable fidelity to the originals, the same cannot be said of the studies discussed in the present article[94]. For example, the posthumous publication of Hope's study is accompanied by drawings that, according to the frontispiece, were made by the author. Yet, these often present discrepancies from the works themselves. In the drawing of the west front of San Zeno in Verona, for instance,

88 Porter 1915: 149-150.
89 Porter 1915: 151.
90 Porter 1915: 151.
91 Porter 1915: 154.
92 On Connoisseurship and Berenson: Wood 2019: 275-280, 341-346. As unearthed by Kathryn Brush, Berenson and Porter have been in close contact from 1917 until Porter's death: Brush 2014.
93 Brush 2017.
94 See, amongst many: Camus 2003; Guarisco (ed.) 2012; Bella 2013; Guarisco, Bella (eds) 2015.

Hope depicts the Virgin with Jesus flanked by two figures in the tympanum – a composition that more closely resembles the tympanum of the Duomo of the same
2 city, rather than that of San Zeno, which features the patron saint[95].

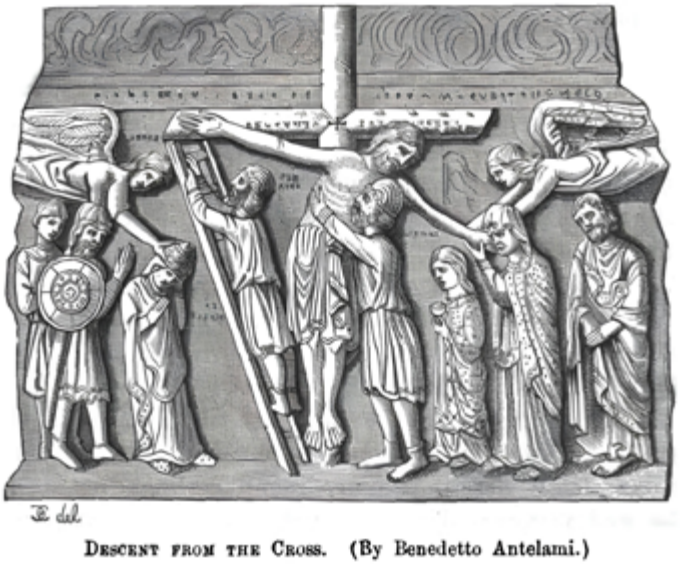


2 Illustration of the façade of San Zeno, Verona (Hope 1835, II: tav. 6)

In Perkin's *Historical Handbook of Italian Sculpture* we encounter similar issues: for example, the illustration of the Deposition by Benedetto Antelami pays attention to some details, such as the angel accompanying Jesus' hand to the Virgin's
3 face, or Joseph of Arimathea on his ladder getting to the cross. Overall, however, this illustration presents only the central figures, ignoring the three women, the personifications of the sun and the moon, and the other figures behind the centurion, including the group casting lots for Christ's tunic[96]. Most significantly, the image is a mirror reversal of the original, with the left and right sides inverted. These remarks should not be understood as an ahistorical criticism towards these authors, but rather as a sign of the technical and material difficulties faced by scholars of medieval art, issues that would have been resolved – partially, at least – by a more widespread use of photography, pioneered by Porter.

95 Hope 1835, II: tav. 6. It should be noted that the use of photographs in art historical publications was already introduced at least in the first decade of the twentieth century, see for example Riegl 1902. On the challenges of illustrations: Wood 2019: 207, 296; Vermeulen 2010.

96 Perkins 1883: xviiii.



Descent from the Cross. (By Benedetto Antelami.)

3 Illustration of Antelami's Deposition (Perkins 1883: xviiii)

In the following decade, Porter – as is well known – expanded his scope of inquiry in *Romanesque Sculpture of the Pilgrimage Roads*[97]. While the narrative surrounding Lombard sculpture changed little, increasing emphasis was placed on the numerous connections between Lombardy and other, even distant, regions – consider, for instance, the well-known comparison between Modena and Bari. As Porter himself explains: «We need not concern ourselves here with the complex question of the direction of the influence; it is probable that, as so often in Romanesque art, it flowed in two directions at the same time. What is significant for our purpose is that the art in Apulia and Lombardy was essentially the same»[98].

Porter was able to draw on a wide range of scholarly contributions – from Zimmermann's *Oberitalienische Plastik* and Venturi's *Storia dell'Arte Italiana* to the works of Émile Mâle and Richard Hamann, particularly his *Südfranzösische Protorenaissance*. Porter's work had an immediate impact on the scholarship on medieval Italian art. For example, Charles Rufus Morey, professor at Princeton and founder of the *Index of Christian Art* (now *The Index of Medieval Art*), in his *Mediaeval Art* (published in 1942), focuses on the Lombard style and the sculptures of Wiligelmus at Modena. In their heavy forms and sword-shaped beards, the author sees echoes of Ottonian painting – such as the Gospels of Otto III – but also, more generally, of bronze artworks. Nicola (identified as Niccolò) is presented as a pupil of Wiligelmus, distinguished by his use of strong central elements in portal tympana. Morey classifies both sculptors within what he calls the First Lombard School. In contrast, the Second Lombard School, represented by Benedetto Antelami, demonstrates clear connections with France – especially in the refined drapery lines and verticality of the figures, which, according to Morey, recall the Proto-Gothic style of the Île-de-France[99].

97 Porter 1923a. Brush 2018 for Porter's interest on the Iberian Peninsula.
98 Porter 1923b: 63.
99 Morey 1942: 218-222.

It is also significant that in these very decades – following the First World War – the 'Lombard myth' was no longer confined to scholarly circles, but permeated various aspects of American society. Lombard design had an impact on contemporary architecture. For example, two buildings of the University of California, Los Angeles, both completed in 1929, referenced churches in northern Italy. Royce Hall, with its brick façade, two tiers of arcades, and flanking towers, was directly inspired by
4 Sant'Ambrogio in Milan. On the same campus, the octagonal dome of the Powell Library was modelled after Santo Sepolcro in Bologna, while its main entrance recalls the portals by Nicholaus in Verona[100].

On the East Coast, the Salmon Tower in New York, completed in 1928, features a monumental carved portal that, as discussed by Dorothy F. Glass, drew on Lombard-Emilian sculpture, specifically the portal of Nonantola and the workshop of
5 Wiligelmus[101].

4 UCLA Los Angeles, Royce Hall (NativeForeigner, CC BY-SA 3.0)

100 Dundjerski 2011: 274-277. I am extremely grateful to Alison Locke Perchuk for sharing her unpublished work on the UCLA Campus.

101 Glass 2011. The so-called Romanesque revival in New York did not look exclusively at Lombard sources of inspiration: Schuyler 1891-1892. Leuchak 1988.

5 New York, Salmon Tower, portal (Wally Gobetz, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

4. The Decline of the Lombard Myth

In the decades following the Second World War, a few scholars placed Lombard architecture and sculpture within much broader narratives. For example, George Zarnecki presented the *Lombard School* as one of the most influential within Italian Romanesque art, emphasizing its impact beyond the Alps[102]. Similarly, in a monograph devoted to Romanesque Sculpture, Millard Fillmore Hearn devoted substantial attention to key monuments of northern Italy, situating them within a European context and proposing a distinction between the *Lombard* and *Emilian* schools[103]. However, beyond these works, the 'Lombard myth' was significantly downscaled in Anglophone art historiography. For instance, John Beckwith – keeper at the Victoria & Albert Museum and Slade Professor at Oxford – dedicated only half a page to Lombard churches in his *Early Medieval Art* (1964), noting that although these buildings were once regarded as seminal, they were now reevaluated as a synthesis of «imperial and French Romanesque tendencies»[104]. Similarly, Robert G. Calkins, in his *Monuments of Medieval Art*, omits discussion of Lombard architecture and sculpture altogether[105].

It is noteworthy that, during these same decades, only two PhD dissertations on Lombard medieval art were defended at American universities: the study of the Romanesque carvings in Pavia by Mary Louise Wood, supervised by Penelope C. Mayo and Herbert Kessler, and Jane Elliott McKinne's dissertation on Rivolta d'Adda, supervised by Jean Bony[106]. Both dissertations share similar methodological approaches, as sculpture is examined to establish chronologies, authorship, and connections with other sites. Meanwhile, other Italian centres – such as Rome, Venice, and the Adriatic – or other European countries attracted significantly greater interest from American doctoral candidates working on medieval art.

Thus, we should ask why, following the work of Porter and – chronologically – the Second World War, Lombardy came to feature less prominently in critical debates on Medieval art in Britain and America. One possibility is that, once the chronology of key monuments such as San Michele in Pavia and Sant'Ambrogio in Milan was corrected – from the time of the Longobards to the eleventh or twelfth centuries – these structures were no longer perceived as exceptional. However, it is worth noting that this chronology was already widely accepted when Porter tackled *Lombard Architecture*. More significantly, there were clear signs of a broader shift in scholarly and intellectual priorities, with the Romanesque world increasingly interpreted through a pan-European lens, especially following Porter's *Romanesque Sculpture on the Pilgrimage Roads*. Pilgrimage roads and associated churches were framed in expansive, transnational terms. It is therefore plausible to assume that this broader approach was likewise adopted in university classrooms.

Yet, another factor may have contributed to the decline in interest in Lombard Art. As William J. Diebold has highlighted, the late work of Joseph Strzygowski «aligned very well with the ideas of the National Socialists in Germany»[107]. In his *Aufgang des Nordens* (The Rise of the North), Strzygowski emphasises that the Goths and the Langobards were Germanic tribes who «brought with them in wooden

102 Zarnecki 1975: 263-274.
103 Hearn 1981: 85-101.
104 Beckwith 1964: 160.
105 Calkins 1979.
106 Wood 1978. McKinne 1985.
107 Diebold 2018: 66.

forms – three-strip interlace patterns – and consecrated them to the service of the Church», thereby underscoring the supposedly Germanic character of their artistic production[108].

Similar ideas were proposed by Emerich Schaffran in his studies on the history of the Longobards. His first publication appeared in 1938 under the aegis of the *Deutsches Ahnenerbe*, «a private institute of learning» established in 1935 with the Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler as one of its curators, and later incorporated into the SS[109]. A second monograph, published in 1941, focuses specifically on artistic production. In this volume, Schaffran characterises the Lombards as Germanic people who «came from a life without images to a pictorial one [...], from the realm of wood to that of stone». The dramatic transformation of art in Italy between 600 and 750, he argues, was not the result of «a stylistic change with an unchanged ethnic basis», but rather «the addition of a completely different ethnic group»[110]. This «incursion of Germanic artistic culture» is presented as the foundation not only of *langobardischen Kunst*, but also of *lombardischen Romanik* and of Romanesque art and architecture across Europe more broadly[111]. Schaffran clearly linked Lombard art with the ideology of National Socialists in Germany, claiming that the artistic production of the Italian peninsula had been «vitalised by the influx of Arian blood caused by the Langobard invasion», as observed by Guido Tigler[112].

After the Second World War, the attention of art historians based in American and British universities steers away from the Lombard world. This may reflect a field that was constantly expanding in its geographical scope and methodological frameworks – opening up to new theoretical enquiries[113]. However, it is also possible that the debate was marked by a hesitancy in re-engaging with topics or methodologies that had been tainted by their earlier ideological use[114]. In recent decades, however, a new surge of interest in the artistic production of medieval Lombardy (although not necessarily Romanesque) is demonstrated by no fewer than eight PhD dissertations defended in the United States, ranging from studies on Parma, its piazza, and its Baptistery, the *pontile* of Modena, investigations on urban spaces in Lombard cities, the work of Nicholaus, and the *Volto Santo*, with many subsequently developed into monographs[115]. It is crucial to note, however, that the terms of the scholarly debates within the field of medieval art have changed considerably since the early studies discussed in this article[116]. New questions are being posed, and sculpture is increasingly examined through different lenses – such as ecclesiological and political contexts, as in the work of Christine Verzar Bornstein and Dorothy Glass, or through optical and spatial analysis, as proposed by Christopher Lakey[117].

108 Strzygowski 1936: 259-260.

109 Schaffran 1938. As for other publications of the *Ahnenerbe*, the page before the title presents a motto by Himmler: «Geleitwort: Ein Volk lebt so lange glücklich in Gegenwart und Zukunft, als es sich seiner Vergangenheit und der Grosse seiner Ahnen bewusst ist» (Foreword: A people lives happily in the present and future only as long as it is aware of its past and the greatness of its ancestors). On the *Ahnenerbe*, see Webb 1976: 321-324.

110 Schaffran 1941: 20.

111 Schaffran 1941: 140-170, quote at 155.

112 Tigler 2024: 10.

113 An insightful analysis of the field is offered by Kessler 1988. See also Glass 2007.

114 On the entanglements between art, politics, and historiography, see the essays in Buettner, Diebold (eds) 2025.

115 Cunningham 2003. Marina 2004. Geymonat 2006. Lugli 2009. Lakey 2009. Weinryb 2010. Spiro 2014. Fee 2015. Marina 2012. Weinryb 2016. Lugli 2019.

116 For the transformation of the debate on Romanesque sculpture, see Maxwell, Ambrose 2010.

117 Bornstein 1988. Glass 2010. Lakey 2018. In the same decades, a renewed interest in Lombard architecture is presented in Armi 2004 and Armi 2017.

Conclusions

This article has examined how Lombard sculpture – or, more broadly, medieval art in northern Italy – has been approached within the Anglophone art-historical discourse. From the earliest writings, medieval art was understood in connection with continental Europe, and, drawing on medieval sources, several authors emphasised Italy's fundamental role. Around 1830, Lombardy took centre stage, in the first instance in the work of Hope, who associated Lombard architecture with what we now define as Romanesque architecture across Europe. This moment marked the beginning of sustained scholarly interest in Lombardy, as well as the emergence of what might be termed the 'Lombard myth'.

A key and somewhat idiosyncratic feature of this early phase was the prominent role assigned to the Freemasons – a conflation, perhaps characteristic of Anglophone discourse at the time, between the *Magistri Comacini*, medieval lodges, and modern Freemasonry. John Ruskin added a further conceptual layer, portraying the Lombards – and, ultimately, Lombard art – as primitive. This interpretation, with its connotations of primitivism, and the connection between artistic production the character of a population, would continue to resonate in later studies.

The second half of the nineteenth century saw the increasing adoption of more rigorous scholarly and academic methods. However, it was only with Arthur Kingsley Porter that Lombard sculpture emerges in all its power. Porter represents both the high point of the Lombard myth and, paradoxically, the beginning of its decline. Following the publication of *Romanesque Sculpture of the Pilgrimage Roads*, the prominence of Lombardy in the scholarly debate was notably diminished. After the Second World War, it was largely sidelined altogether. The Lombard myth, as it had taken shape between 1830 and 1930, appears to have faded from view.

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