

Das Haus ist vor wenigen Jahren knapp dem Abriß entgangen. Nun droht der immerhin erhaltenen Fassade erneut Gefahr. Seit das Haus nicht mehr bewohnt wird, ist seine Fassade zum Rastplatz der Stadtauben geworden, die mittlerweile die herausragenden Teile der Dekoration, insbesondere die Fensterbekrönungen des obersten Stockwerkes, die Kapitelle der seitlichen Pilaster und die Marienkrönungsgruppe mit einer Kotschicht überzogen haben. Dies bedeutet eine existenzielle Bedrohung der feinen Bildhauerarbeiten: Einer der Köpfe der Skulpturengruppe z. B. ist bereits verschwunden (*Abb. 7a und b*).

Wir appellieren an die Öffentlichkeit, für eine angemessene Konservierung der Fassade zu sorgen.

Robert Suckale, Markus Hörsch,  
Peter Ruderich und  
zahlreiche weitere Unterzeichner

DERESTORING VIOLLET-LE-DUC:  
THE BATTLE OF SAINT-SERNIN IN TOULOUSE  
(with one illustration)

A decade ago, a symposium was convened in Toulouse to discuss the question of what to do with aging 19th-century restorations executed under Viollet-le-Duc. The distinguished architect's centenary provided a pretext for what was in fact a response to a decision already taken the previous year to "de-restore" the important Romanesque basilica of Saint-Sernin. Today, what was little more than an academic exercise occasioned by a *fait accompli* has escalated from a dilemma to what the press has termed a war — "*la guerre des mirandes*" — being waged against that decision by local citizens aroused by art historians who question the wisdom of replacing Viollet-le-Duc's work with an approximation of what he undertook to replace in 1860: a tall brick *chemin de rond* pierced by roundheaded openings. The relatively modest cost of reconstituting those "*mirandes*" compared to that of replacing hand-carved 19th-century stonework helped the *Commission des Monuments historiques* resolve the dilemma in favor of the project proposed by Yves Boiret, the architect in charge, who was not alone, moreover, in questioning the merits of the 19th-century restoration (work has proceeded on the chevet and transept facades that includes the reroofing of the apsidal chapels over the last decade; *Abb. 8*).

The recent conflict was fomented by the discovery last year in the archives at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts of Toulouse of drawings signed by Viollet-le-Duc. They were interpreted by their discoverer, Odile Foucaud, as vindicating the architect's claim, published in his *Dictionnaire raisonné*, that he had all of the evidence needed to remodel the roof system according to the intentions of the original builders, that is, so that the distinction between the vaults of the main vessel and the tribunes would be visible externally. An exhibition that opened September 15 at the Musée Saint-Raymond in Toulouse (entitled *Saint-Sernin de Toulouse: Trésors et métamorphoses*) offered her and other local historians an opportunity to ventilate these issues. However, the French



government seized upon the occasion as a pretext for inaugurating the critical phase of obliterating Viollet-le-Duc's roofing system. A crane set up alongside the north arm of the transept lit the fuse. M. Boiret's project was held up again to question in public and defended again in turn by him. A local committee already formed last May recruited allies from among the art historical establishment in England, Spain, Switzerland and the United States. After accusing Jack Lang, the Minister of Culture, of a "shocking intellectual imposture," a local committee including Louis Peyrusse, Michèle Pradelier-Schlumberger and Abbé Jean Rocacher went to Paris to plead its case before the Commission which, in response, simply reaffirmed its support for the Boiret project. The affair was further complicated by Marcel Durliat's perception, subsequently seconded by many local organizations (including the Catharists!), that the use of the reconstituted *chemin de rond* as a possible lapidary museum "desacralized" the edifice. The ambulatory has, in fact, been treated as a municipal museum ever since the completion of interior restoration in 1981. The decade ended with a flurry of attention from the press but with the issue left unresolved and awaiting the final decision of Jack Lang.

More consequential to the fate of the basilica than the opinions expressed by the world community — including a letter from the *Société archéologique du Midi de la France* and a telegram on behalf of 1100 members of the International Center of Medieval Art based at The Cloisters in New York — may be the role of the municipality of Toulouse (required by law to contribute a quarter of the cost of any restoration) and its mayor. Dominique Baudis, responding to the unanimous vote of his *Conseil municipal* in October to delay the project, has sought a position acceptable to all parties and seems recently to have found it in what has come to be known as "la troisième voie," a compromise that might cost even less than the "projet Boiret" and that had been tendered by that architect over a decade ago under the facetious title, "Boiret-le-Duc." Based in part on the original project proposed by Viollet-le-Duc in 1846 and soon approved by then *Inspecteur général* Prosper Mérimée, "la troisième voie" had been mentioned again by Boiret himself in a November lecture in Toulouse. I had also championed the early project in the *Bulletin monumental* of 1981 and reiterated that view in a December interview in Toulouse. Public support for some such compromise furnished the mayor with a proposal he presented formally to Jack Lang on January 2. A response is expected from the Ministry perhaps at the conclusion of the Saint-Sernin exhibition now on view at the Hôtel de Sully in Paris. In the meanwhile, partisans everywhere are being encouraged to express opposition to the Minister of Culture and the tide is said to be running in that direction, thus affording M. Baudis the luxury of being on the side of experts as well as the people.

However, any compromise spells trouble from a technical as well as an ethical point of view. The restoration of the present state is in fact the only one of the alternatives that respects the terms of the Charter of Venice drafted by ICOMOS in 1965. The restoration begun in 1860 so radically elevated the roof level by means of bracing arches above the main vault (in the interest of a theory of "architectural transparency") that returning to an earlier state on that basis will inevitably misrepresent a historical reality. Furthermore, compensating for the most unattractive features of the pre-restoration state



has prompted Boiret to modify repeatedly in the course of the past decade some aspects of the exterior elevation, especially in the most cherished part of the edifice, the chevet. Raising the roof enough to simulate the appearance of the building in old photos and drawings requires erecting diaphragm walls in industrial brick (see *Abb. 8*) over the tribune vault ribs which, in addition to the weight of the handsome Roman tiles manufactured expressly for Viollet-le-Duc, will add considerably to the load and raise the elevation much higher not only than the present elevation but also than what was there in fact before 1860. Whether the de-restoration is more southern Gothic than Romanesque (the pre-restoration state may very well have represented a final building stage of the early 14th century) will in the end be a less important issue than how the local public may respond to a radically changed silhouette after more than a century-long attachment to a familiar profile. Considerable disappointment and even resentment is also bound to be aroused by the blocking of light through the transept *oculi* by the new roof. These are considerations the Minister of Culture will have to weigh from a political rather than an esthetic standpoint, however much the decisions of the *Commission* are supposed to be above politics. Such considerations are the more difficult in that the Socialist government for whom Jack Lang speaks in matters related to the arts, has attempted over the last decade to pay more attention to regional options in an attempt to decentralize culture. The fate of Saint-Sernin has provided an unlikely forum for thrashing out the question of where national authority ends and local desires are engaged — and for an ambitious mayor to demonstrate his skill at walking a tight line between intractable alternatives.

Thomas W. Lyman

## Tagungen

### IN SEARCH OF THE NETHERLANDISH TRADITION: PATTERNS OF CONTINUITY AND EXCHANGE.

International Research Conference of The Historians of Netherlandish Art. The Cleveland Museum of Art, 26.—28. Oktober 1989.

Die „Historians of Netherlandish Art“ trafen sich im Cleveland Museum of Art zu ihrer dritten Forschungskonferenz. Die vor acht Jahren von amerikanischen Kunsthistorikern gegründete Vereinigung hat inzwischen etwa 300 Mitglieder, darunter zunehmend auch Kollegen aus Europa. Dies spiegelte sich in Cleveland nicht nur in der Zusammensetzung der etwa 200 Teilnehmer, sondern auch in der Rednerliste.

Die Konzentration der behandelten Themen zeitlich vor allem auf das 15. und das 17. Jahrhundert, gattungsspezifisch primär auf Malerei und Graphik entspricht der generellen Forschungssituation vor allem in den Vereinigten Staaten, aber nicht nur dort. So verstehen sich die Historians of Netherlandish Art zwar als Forum für jedwede Forschung zur niederländischen Kunstgeschichte vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart, der tatsächlich abgedeckte Bereich ist allerdings — noch — sehr viel schmaler.