GEORGE ZARNECKI

# George Zarnecki
# 1915–2008

The death of George (Jerzy) Zarnecki on 8 September 2008, four days short of his ninety-third birthday, brings to an end a distinctive episode in the history of art history in the British Isles. Zarnecki was among the last of that generation of art historians forced to flee Nazi tyranny from 1933 and who found refuge in this country. He was also one of the most influential and distinguished of these so-called 'Hitler Emigrés'—those remarkable intellectuals and artists who stayed here after the war, and who brought with them their own distinctive Central European intellectual culture. It was as a scholar of Romanesque art and sculpture that George made his international reputation; and as deputy director of the University of London's Courtauld Institute he presided over what some have called the golden age of the institute's history, when its position as the premier centre for the study of art history in England went largely unchallenged.

George Zarnecki was born on 12 September 1915 in Stara Osota in the Ukraine, in the voivodeship (province) of Kiev. His father, Zygmunt (1885–1955), was an hydraulic engineer from Cracow. He and two of his brothers at some point changed their names from Goldfinger to Zarnecki and adopted Catholicism. His mother, Julia Wolszczan (1888–1974), was the daughter of Ludwik, an engineer in the food industry. There were four daughters: Krystyna, Hanna, Jadwiga (universally known as Ala), and Aleksandra (known as Olga). In 1919, after Polish independence, the family moved to Rataje Słupskie, in the Kielce region. There Zygmunt took charge of the Vistula's flood defences, and George set out on his

*Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the British Academy*, XII, 435–450. 

bicycle to visit the medieval towns, abbeys and parish churches on the left bank of the river as it swung dramatically northwards and westwards. It was here, in and around Sandomierz, in what might be called northern Lesser Poland, that the boy discovered his love for medieval art, especially sculpture, and it was here that he acquired the most vivid memories of his childhood and youth. It was not surprising, therefore, that when he left his secondary school in Kalisz in 1933 he should choose to enrol in the art history department of the ancient Jagiellonian University in Cracow. The circumstances of his enrolment are worth mentioning. George's relationship with his father was a rather distant one, and he pressurised his son to follow him in his career as an engineer. Without telling his father, George enrolled in the art history department and only came clean at the end of his second year: 'It is not too late' said his father, 'you can switch courses.' To avoid domestic trouble, George agreed, but, luckily for us, continued to read art history. The department he enrolled in had been founded as early as the 1880s and was still dominated by the Vienna School of art history and its radical formalism. The fact that George chose to identify himself with the Viennese art historical avant-garde is obvious in his Master of Arts dissertation, on the Byzantine–Ruthenian murals in the Holy Cross Chapel in Cracow Cathedral. The thesis was supervised by Wojsław Molè, the Polish Byzantinist and cultural historian, who had taught in Vienna, and was later to provide a link in London between George and Fritz Saxl, the latter also a product of the Vienna School and a pupil of the great Max Dvořák. Another Cracow mentor, without the Viennese connections, was the assistant professor Adam Bochnak, whose studies of the so-called minor arts of the Middle Ages introduced George to the splendours of Romanesque metalwork and small-scale statuary. The interest bore fruit in George's discovery and publication of a number of small fourteenth-century wooden figures, two in Nowe Korczyn and one of King Kazimir the Great from Wiślica (now in the Jagiellonian University museum in Cracow)—all three figures from that crucial territory of the Upper Vistula, so beloved of George's youth. The Kazimir publication, which appeared in 1939, shows the young George doing what he did best: analysing the wooden technique of the figure; acutely observing its carving; drawing it into comparisons with different genres of sculpture (in this case the king's tomb in Cracow Cathedral); identifying stylistic parallels with Central European sculpture, especially that of Prague; and airing the

broader question of what art historians mean by the 'portrait'—indeed, questioning the purpose of medieval imagery.[1]

These articles brought George a junior assistantship in the university and an up-and-coming reputation as a skilful researcher. There are photographs of him on student excursions—tall, clad elegantly in a camel-haired coat draped from the shoulders, alerting a photographer to the angle he wanted and commanding the admiring attention of the students around him. Such images of *in situ* learning and natural charm recur again and again in his long career.

The German invasion of Poland in September 1939 forced George into heroic but harrowing escapades across war-torn Europe worthy of a Bulldog Drummond novel. By then a Lance Corporal in the Polish army, he once more took to his bicycle, heading due east from Cracow to join his regiment in Włodzimierz Wołyński, only to find it transferred to Pomerania. Still on his bicycle, he and his mother and two sisters reached Mizocz, to join up with other members of his family, but only to find their escape cut off by the Russian army's invasion of eastern Poland. George left his family in the Polish east and cycled into Rumania, from whence he made his way, via Bucharest and Yugoslavia, to France, there to join the Polish armies of the West. He fought bravely on the French front and in Alsace in 1940, for which he was awarded the Polish Cross of Valour and the French Croix de Guerre. After the fall of France in 1940 he was captured by the Germans and incarcerated in a number of Prisoner of War camps up to 1942. One of them, in Strasbourg, signalled his art historical interests. Every day the prisoners were made to file past the cathedral's north transept, much to George's frustration, who petitioned the commandant to divert the prisoners' route to the south transept on the grounds that it displayed a much higher class of sculpture—indeed Chartres-influenced sculpture of *c*.1230s! But George never prevailed on the Germans to allow the prisoners this innocent pleasure. The last laugh, however, was George's. In prison he developed a skill in forging documents. This, together with

[1] 'Nieznany posąg Kazimierza Wielkiego' ['An unknown statue of Casimir the Great'] *Prace Komisji Historii Sztuki*, 8 (1939), 93–103; 'O nieznanej rzezbie gotyckiej w Nowym Korczynie' ['An unknown Gothic Sculpture in NowyKorczyn'] *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki I Kultury*, 6 (1938), 365–6; 'Ze studiów nad snycerstwem gotyckim w. XIV–XVI pólnocnej Małopolski' [From studies on Gothic woodcarving in northern Lesser Poland from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries'] *Prace Komisji Historii Sztuki*, 8 (1946), 269–85. (The text of a paper presented at the session of the Committee for History of Art of the Polish Academy of Learning in Cracow 16 Feb. 1938.)

his fluent German, offered opportunities for escape. After two failed attempts, he succeeded in passing himself off as a married French citizen, living in Lyon. In 1942, exhausted by the depredations of the camps, he reached Marseilles, where he was cared for by Polish medical staff, and from thence he struggled to Montpellier, and then to the Pyrenees, generously giving to the local Spaniards who had helped him his last valuable possession—a fountain pen. He reached Portugal in 1943, but not without further imprisonment by the Spanish authorities. English and Polish agents smuggled him to Great Britain where, for the second time, he joined the Polish armed forces in the West. He was demobilised in 1945, still holding the rank of Lance Corporal, but not before he had joined, in 1944, the Polish art historian Karol Estreicher (1906–84) in his Bureau for the 'Revindication of Cultural Losses', an organisation based in London and charged with the recovery of Polish cultural property plundered and lost by Germans and Russians.[2]

George's decision to remain in England after the war was prompted by factors both personal and academic. In 1944 he met Anne Leslie Frith (1923–2009) in Regent's Park underground station during an air raid, and they were married a year later. The marriage produced a son, Jan (John) Charles, in 1949, and a daughter, Julia Mary, in 1952. The academic reasons for staying were equally attractive and equally pressing. Poland was a country now under Soviet control, and George was shrewdly aware of the fate of bourgeois intellectuals in the hands of communist regimes in Central Europe. Besides, a number of Central European art historians were already living in productive safety in London attached, principally, to two institutions: the Courtauld Institute and the Warburg Institute, both cosmopolitan institutions affiliated to London University. George's entreé to the Warburg was through its director Fritz Saxl, FBA (d.1948), who had known Wojsław Molè in Vienna, and who not only encouraged the young Pole but also presented him with a Ph.D. topic—the history and regional variety of English Romanesque sculpture, a thesis which was never published in its entirety, but which gained him his doctorate at the Courtauld in 1952, and formed the basis for two small published volumes on English Romanesque sculpture, the first of which appeared in 1951, dealing with sculpture from 1066 to 1140, and the second in 1953, covering

[2] K. Estreicher, *Cultural Losses of Poland. Index of Polish Cultural Losses during the German Occupation, 1939–1944* (London 1944), XVI–XVII and *Dziennik Wypadk*ów, II: 1946–60 [*Journal of Incidents*, II:1946–1960].

sculpture from 1140 to 1210.[3] As the most internationally famous institute of art history in England, George knew about the Courtauld. Peter Kidson tells the story of one day late in 1943 when Margaret Whinney, who was holding the Courtauld fort during the war, answered a knock on the door of the institute's premises, 20 Portman Square, and found a young man on the doorstep who in halting English said something like 'Please.... Polish art historian.' So began an association which was to last for sixty-four years. George certainly had an unerring homing instinct, for he arrived at the Courtauld at a moment fraught with possibilities. He joined the institute in 1945 as an assistant librarian in the large photographic archive, the Conway Library, named after its benefactor Baron Conway of Allington. Such a post enabled him to pursue his own research while working in the library and such was his charm and industry that in 1949 he was promoted to the post of principal librarian. The promotion offered him the kind of opportunity which he was to pounce on with his customary energy. The post-war Courtauld, under the directorship of the aloof and mandarin Anthony Blunt, was making something of a fresh start, and George was given virtually carte blanche to shape the Conway as he wished. Where the Witt Library was conceived for the benefit of the art trade, the Conway was a research tool, one suited also to George's own mission as a leader in the field of Romanesque scholarship. In cooperation with the institute's photographic department, George set out to make the Conway the largest photographic archive of its kind in the world, on a par with the National Monuments Record of Great Britain, but also with a Continental coverage. In this he nearly succeeded. His photographic expeditions were organised like military operations. Only by seeing and recording all the great monuments of early medieval Romanesque art in England and on the Continent (argued George) could the art historian unpick the secrets of the Romanesque. In their heyday, in the 1960s and 1970s, these expeditions included not only Romanesque art but all the monumental arts of the Middle Ages, and covered Continental as well as British objects, in Spain, Italy, southern and northern France, Germany, Austria and Central Europe. But their origins were modest. In the early 1950s George, accompanied by his friends Peter Lasko (1924–2003), later the Director of the Courtauld, and Reg Dodwell (1922–94), then a Fellow of the Warburg Institute, travelled through Germany and the Low Countries

[3] George Zarnecki, *English Romanesque Sculpture 1066–1140* (London, 1951) and *Later English Romanesque Sculpture 1140–1210* (London, 1953).

in their small Austin 7, photographing all things Ottonian, Carolingian and twelfth-century.

It may be significant that in these early expeditions George's medievalist colleague at the Courtauld, Christopher Hohler (1917–97), does not appear, even though, as a lecturer, Hohler held a more senior teaching position than George's. In 1947 Anthony Blunt, the Director of the Courtauld from 1947 to 1974, had appointed Hohler to the post of teacher of medieval art, to replace Professor Tom Boase (1898–1974). It was an eccentric choice, since Hohler, like Boase, was not an art historian by training, and went out of his way to dissociate himself from art history. Both were products of the Oxford History School and they tended to show an Anglo-Saxon disdain for the methods and language of the kind of Continental art history that had shaped the work of George, Peter Lasko (from Berlin) and Reg Dodwell (from the Warburg). The pragmatism of English medievalists, their emphasis on antiquarian sources and archaeological evidence, sat uneasily with the methods of *Kunstgeschichte*. Continental art history treated its artefacts as expressions of a 'spirit of an age'; it underlined the importance of a pan-European vision; it adopted a systematic, 'scientific' approach to the organisation and categorisation of knowledge. But its special strength—a strength which was also particularly George's—lay in the training of the eye, and the high premium placed on a sensitivity to 'style'—to inflections of form as connections between artworks, or indicators of authorship, or bearers of meaning. 'In the beginning was the eye, not the word'—was the motto of Otto Pächt, one of the founding fathers of the Second or 'new' Vienna School.[4] It could have been George's watchword too, for George had a superb eye—the eye of the connoisseur—one conditioned by his Viennese-trained masters. He is famous for discovering a lost Poussin in a small antique shop in Somerset. The painting was a wreck, but behind its age and damage George recognised the brush strokes of the French master. He bought it on spec, and when he unrolled the dirty canvas in front of Anthony Blunt, the latter, who at that time was putting the finishing touches to his magnum opus on Poussin, let out a cry of delight; for what George had brought him was *Women Bathing*, Poussin's missing work, previously known only from an eighteenth-century engraving.[5]

[4] For Pächt see Otto Pächt, *The Practice of Art History: Reflections on Method* (translated by David Britt, with an introduction by Christopher S. Wood: London, 1999).

[5] Anthony Blunt, *The Paintings of Nicolas Poussin. A Critical Catalogue* (London 1966), pp. 166–7, no. L.117.

The notion of the eye as uncovering objective, historical evidence was seen by the pragmatists of the Oxford History School as nonsensical. Peter Kidson recalls George declaring, perhaps mischievously, that if he had to choose between a date in a document and a date for what his eye for style told him, he would always trust his eye. Hohler would have found this statement virtually incomprehensible, and he was quite capable of conveying his contempt for anyone who believed it. But we should not forget that George never regarded his attachment to Continental art history, or his allegiance to 'style', without a certain humorous reserve. 'Style', he recognised, could be a dangerous criterion. I remember James Austin, the Courtauld photographer, standing with lights and camera in front of a Romanesque sculptural ensemble in France and shouting to a laughing George: '… would you like me to make this 1100 or 1140?'

George's publications present a paradox: he never wrote a major book, but he was one of those rare art historians who both interpreted and *made* his field of enquiry. English Romanesque sculpture was a *terra incognita* in post-war England, and George eagerly accepted Fritz Saxl's suggestion that he write his thesis on the subject. For both men the Romanesque was a hot topic, not least since its 'proto-modernist' abstractions conformed to English modernist taste in the decades before and after the Second World War. It was no coincidence that a photograph of Henry Moore appeared in the *Arts Council of Great Britain Information and Research Section* of 25 May 1984, seated next to one of the great 'discoveries' of George's Romanesque exhibition (of which more later): the twelfth-century Castle Frome Font.[6] Many of the Romanesque objects which he described and analysed were the fruits of his own excursions and discoveries in the late 1940s, some on his bicycle, to Suffolk, Berkshire and Herefordshire, and often accompanied by Anne: the head from Bury St Edmunds, stolen from there and recovered by him in Swaffham; the Bridlington torso, which he rescued from a building site; the Coronation of the Virgin from Reading Abbey, discovered at Borough Marsh, cleaned in the bath of his Bayswater flat (much to the annoyance of his wife) and returned to Reading; the fragments of Romanesque carving from Sonning, buried under a gate post pushed down by a cow, and brought to George's attention by his teacher friend from Eton, René Ledesert. Here was a whole new territory of English art.[7]

[6] *1066. English Romanesque Art*, Exhibition, Hayward Gallery, London, 5 April–8 July 1984 (London, Arts Council of Great Britain), no. 139.

[7] For the character of George's Romanesque exhibition, compared to its successors, see Paul Crossley, 'Between spectacle and history: art history and the medieval exhibitions', in Richard Marks (ed.), *Late Gothic England. Art and Display* (Donington, 2007), pp. 138–53, esp. 142–4.

George's thesis was never published, but its outlines and conclusions were incorporated into his two small books on English Romanesque, mentioned above.[8] They were the first-ever attempts to discuss the main pieces of English Romanesque sculpture collectively, as a separate branch of art, advancing new chronologies, distinguishing various regional schools, unearthing Continental parallels and influences, and making stylistic links with other art disciplines and media (manuscript and wall painting, *ars sacra*). The novelty of this approach, and the clarity and unpretentiousness of George's writing, made these small books classics in their own right, and formed the foundation for all future scholarship on English Romanesque, including George's own later refinements. George's conclusions offered a new explanation for what happened in English art shortly before and right after the Norman conquest. 'Anglo-Saxon art', he asserted, 'did not die an heroic death at Hastings', but continued to enrich Anglo-Norman Romanesque well into the twelfth century. He questioned the generally accepted view that the Norman conquest introduced foreign Romanesque influences to Anglo-Saxon sculpture, and instead contended that already around AD 1050 English painters and sculptors were moving towards what we would call Romanesque, having little or no relation to Normandy. He also showed that older and more familiar artistic traditions in Anglo-Saxon art—those of the Winchester school and the Scandinavian animal styles—survived the Norman conquest and contributed to the rich, stylistically plural styles of Romanesque sculpture that developed in England in the twelfth century. He returned to the topic of Anglo-Saxon art and Norman influence in an authoritative article in 1966.[9] He also alerted his readers to the Continental parallels for English sculpture, and warned them of the English tendency to underplay their own medieval art. He rightly countered another author's claim that 'the Briton could only copy and coarsen …'. With subtlety and balance, George gave proper weight to the Scandinavian elements in English Romanesque, and in so doing was able to isolate some of the salient features of the so-called West Country school of carvers. And in a classic article (with Françoise Henry) he unpicked the diverse Continental parallels with the animal and human heads decorating English Romanesque arches.[10] In the same vein, he contributed to Peter Kidson's Festschrift

[8] See above, n. 3.

[9] George Zarnecki, '1066 and architectural sculpture', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 52 (1966), 87–104.

[10] George Zarnecki, 'Romanesque arches decorated with Human and Animal Heads', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, Third Series, 20–1 (1957–8), 1–34.

with a convincing article on the influence of Insular manuscripts on the design of monumental sculpture in Lombardy during the Carolingian period.[11]

George's approach was always Continental in its reach. His book, written with Denis Grivot (1921–2008), on Gislebertus, the chief sculptor of the Romanesque church of St Lazare in Autun, remained, for decades, the classic analysis of this Cluniac-inspired artist.[12] George wrote most of the text, concentrating on the stylistic characteristics of the sculpture but also on its iconography, and on the sheer aesthetic power and invention of what is commonly held to be one of the leading masterpieces of Romanesque sculpture in Europe. In George's writing the aesthetic qualities of Romanesque—its 'primitive' and 'abstract' dynamism—come alive as an art of high emotional power. George's studies of Romanesque sculpture at Lincoln (one of his favourite cathedrals) amount to the first modern analysis of the cathedral's enigmatic and extraordinary west façade. He was the first to note the presence of St-Denis-influenced column figures in the west portals of the cathedral, and to date their inclusion to the reign of Bishop Alexander; while he located the west front of Modena Cathedral and that of St Mark's in Venice as the likely sources of the Last Judgement and Old Testament frieze on the same front in Lincoln. Not surprisingly, some of his conclusions have been superseded by more recent research,[13] but there can be no doubt that his analysis has formed the solid and single basis for the future understanding of the Lincoln sculpture.[14] To late Romanesque capitals and portals he brought a sensitivity to metalwork and small-scale liturgical instruments, at the same time tracing the sources of portal carving to manuscript ateliers, notably at Canterbury, Ely, Durham and Bury St Edmunds.

George's interest in sculpture and its relations to craftsmanship in precious materials, such as marble and lead, lay behind his pioneering publications on the relations between sculpture and *ars sacra*. This is not the

[11] George Zarnecki, 'Como and the Book of Durrow', in Eric Fernie and Paul Crossley (eds.), *Medieval Architecture and its Intellectual Context. Studies in Honour of Peter Kidson* (London and Roncerverte, 1990), pp. 35–45.

[12] Denis Grivot and George Zarnecki, *Gislebertus. Sculptor of Autun* (French edition, Paris, 1960; enlarged English and American editions, London and New York, 1961; German edition, Wiesbaden, 1962).

[13] D. Kahn (ed.) *The Romanesque Frieze and its Spectator: the Lincoln Symposium Papers* (London 1992).

[14] George Zarnecki, *Romanesque Sculpture at Lincoln Cathedral* (Lincoln Minster Pamphlets: Lincoln, 1963: 2nd, rev. edn. 1970). *Romanesque Lincoln. The Sculpture of the Cathedral* (Lincoln, 1988).

place to discuss George's published works in any detail, but a list of his publications in the Festschrift published in 1987 for his seventieth birthday in 1985, and compiled by its editor, Neil Stratford, suggests the breadth of George's interests, and his authority in the field.[15] There are articles or reviews on carving techniques, the Chichester Panels, Winchester acanthus in manuscripts and sculpture, door knockers, the tomb of Henry of Blois, marble fonts, the column figures of Minster-in-Sheppey, Kent, a Late Romanesque fountain from Campania, Romanesque painting in Spain, the west portal of the Temple church in London, church treasuries in north-west Europe, the Vikings in the British Museum, the sculpture of the Moot Hall, Colchester, and the abbey of St Benôit-sur-Loire. Lest we dismiss George as a Viennese formalist, it should be pointed out that this list contains many questions touching on iconography as well as style, the most famous of which was his discovery of the Coronation of the Virgin capital from Reading Abbey—a piece of crucial evidence which showed (contra Emile Mâle and others) that this iconographic type had not been invented in northern France in the mid twelfth century.[16] Nevertheless, George's common sense made him highly suspicious of iconographic over-interpretation. I remember asking him, as we stood in front of the portals of Chartres, what he thought of the monumental exegesis of Chartres' sculpture published by Adolf Katzenellenbogen in 1959: 'Too much interpretation' said George, putting on an expression meant to convey the weariness of this type of semiosis.[17]

This list of George's interests is not exhaustive, and many of these publications are concise book and exhibition reviews; but they show his erudition and his international status, as well as his continuing concern for the health of his discipline. The variety of his interests, coupled with a strongly synthetic approach to all kinds of Romanesque, is also obvious in his outline of Romanesque art, published by Belser Verlag in 1970,[18] and in his collected essays—forty-two of the most important of them—gathered together in two volumes, published in 1979 and 1992.[19]

[15] Neil Stratford (ed.), *Romanesque and Gothic. Essays for George Zarnecki*, 2 vols. (Bury St Edmunds, 1987).

[16] 'The Coronation of the Virgin on a capital from Reading Abbey', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 13 (1950), 1–12.

[17] Adolf Katzenellenbogen, *The Sculptural Programs of Chartres Cathedral. Christ. Mary. Ecclesia* (New York, 1959).

[18] George Zarnecki, *Romanik* (Belser Stilgeschichte, VI: Stuttgart, 1970), English and American editions—George Zarnecki, *Romanesque Art* (London and New York, 1971); Polish edition—George Zarnecki, *Sztuka romańska* (trans. Agnieszka Roznowska-Sadraei: Cracow 2005).

[19] George Zarnecki, *Studies in Romanesque Sculpture* (London, 1979) and *Further Studies in Romanesque Sculpture* (London, 1992).

Both sets of publications give the reader some inkling of the quality and range of the grand synthetic study he was never to write. In the early 1950s the editor of the prestigious Pelican History of Art series, Nikolaus Pevsner, commissioned the three friends, Reg Dodwell, Peter Lasko and George himself, to write 'their' volumes. Dodwell's on *Painting in Europe 800–1200* appeared in 1971, Lasko's on what he called *Ars Sacra*—the so-called 'minor arts' 800–1200—appeared in 1972. George's was to be on Romanesque sculpture in Europe, but it never materialised. One reason may have been the fact that George already knew that he was going to have an opportunity to synthesise his lifetime thoughts on English Romanesque in the form of a major loan exhibition. At least from 1970 onwards George knew that his colleague at the Courtauld, Alan Bowness, director of the Arts Council, would support any application from him to hold a large and synthetic exhibition of Romanesque art, one that would sum up George's life's work with the same vividness, and perhaps with a greater scope, than the restrictions of a Pelican history of art book could have allowed. The exhibition project was long in gestation, but the year 1984 saw its opening at the Hayward Gallery in London, under the title *English Romanesque Art 1066–1200*, with George as its leading curator. To all who saw it, it had, indeed, been worth waiting for. The greatest assemblage of early medieval English art ever brought at that time into this country, it was in many respects the crowning achievement of George's career. It displayed his distinctive approach to medieval art, recognisable ever since his arrival at the Courtauld. The themes are familiar: the regional character of Romanesque sculpture; its kinship with metalwork, ivories and manuscript illumination; the importance of seals and liturgical furniture, particularly fonts; the rhetoric of materials, especially Purbeck marble fonts and tombs and bronze door knockers—and the power of architecture to frame and shape all these objects, of whatever genre. The exhibition, despite the 1066 in its title, questioned the generally accepted view that it was the Norman conquest that introduced 'foreign' Romanesque influences to Anglo-Saxon sculpture, thus putting an end to the old style. Indeed, George could persuade us that by around 1050 English painters were heading towards the Romanesque, with no relation to Normandy whatsoever. He was able here to reiterate what he had advanced in his two books, namely that the old artistic traditions, developed in the so-called Winchester School and strengthened by the Scandinavian animal style, survived the Norman conquest and inspired the flourishing of sculpture in the Anglo-Norman period. Anglo-Saxon art did not 'die at Hastings' but survived the conquest and joined in the

remarkable development of Romanesque sculpture right up to its mature phases in the twelfth century. It even influenced the art of Normandy and other areas of northern France. As Stratford put it: 'Zarnecki has quite literally rewritten a whole chapter of England's artistic history, taking the sculpture and "minor arts" of the Norman period and placing them firmly in the wider spectrum of European Romanesque.'[20]

The exhibition was also a cooperative effort involving team work (over twenty authors and more than 500 entries), not the grand pronouncements of an individual author. For a scholar who often referred to himself as an old rank and file soldier—'a mere Lance Corporal'—George's modest preference for cooperation may have found its metier in organising a multi-author exhibition.

These personal qualities may also help to explain the absence of the magnum opus. He was, quite simply, just too busy to shut himself away and write a major book. His qualities as an organiser, helper, encourager and administrator meant an increasingly heavy workload as his career blossomed. In 1959 he was promoted from his post as Conway Librarian to a Readership at the Courtauld, a post which involved a full-time teaching commitment. In 1960–1, as the prestigious Slade Professor of the History of Art at Oxford University, he delivered a series of lectures on English Romanesque art. In the same year Anthony Blunt appointed him as the institute's Deputy Director, in succession to Johannes Wilde, the latter the last (with George) of the Vienna-trained art historians at the institute. The Blunt–Zarnecki partnership was one of complementary opposites, though it laid increasingly heavy burdens on the conscientious George. Blunt continued to manage the 'foreign policy' of the Courtauld—fund-raising, purchasing new acquisitions for the Courtauld gallery, networking with the English aristocracy, particularly at the Palace, where he occupied the position of Surveyor of the Queen's Pictures, at the same time as he was preparing for publication his magnum opus on Poussin.[21] George, by contrast, managed the 'home affairs' of the institute. The 1960s were a time of great change in the British university system. Following the recommendations of the 1963 Robbins report, several new universities were founded, and old ones reshaped. George skilfully steered the Courtauld through this critical decade of expansion, and—as a personal friend of Lionel Robbins—even took advantage of the changes. Using all his charm and tact, George made it his business to ensure that

[20] Stratford, 'Foreword', in *Romanesque and Gothic*, unpaginated.
[21] Miranda Carter, *Anthony Blunt. His Lives* (London, 2001).

the fledgling art history departments in these new establishments should be staffed by ex-Courtauld students or staff. Under George, art history in the British Isles became something of a Courtauld mafia. George's job as deputy director was largely administrative, which meant sitting on committees, dealing with university bureaucracy, supervising course teaching, and looking after the physical fabric of the institute, at that time occupying the elegant but rather shabby Home House in 20 Portman Square, an exquisite 1777 town house designed by Robert Adam and once belonging to Samuel Courtauld. It might be an exaggeration to assume, with one writer, that George's 'responsibilities extended to almost running the institute on Blunt's behalf', but there is no doubt that George wielded the day-to-day power over the Courtauld's activities. And when in 1979 Blunt was unmasked as a Russian spy, it was George, and not just Peter Lasko, Blunt's successor from 1974, who acted as the institute's mainstay, even though, in that same year, 1974, he had resigned from the deputy directorship. In that year he could look back with some satisfaction on his tenure in office. He left the institute a civilised and powerful institution, able to determine the direction of medievalist studies in Britain, and to feel confident of the support of friends in high places. All this helped to steady the crisis into which the Courtauld was plunged in 1979.

But his legacy extended well beyond the deputy directorship. His Conway photography expeditions formed the nucleus for a vast and on-going database of imagery. While on a photo tour of Herefordshire in 1960 with the French architectural historian and medievalist, Jean Bony, George launched the idea of the *Corpus of Romanesque Sculpture in Britain and Ireland*, an enterprise that flourished under the auspices of the British Academy. It was also enthusiastically supported by Peter Lasko (when he came to be Director of the Courtauld) as a publicly available digital project, one of the first of its kind (www.crsbi.ac.uk). It now involves a number of fieldworkers visiting, recording and measuring Romanesque sculpture in Britain and Ireland at more than 6,000 sites.

George's dedication to opening up art history to a wider constituency is also writ large in his setting up of the so-called Courtauld Summer Schools. The first of these annual summer sessions was held in 1956, with George as the academic advisor and his friend Barbara Robertson (1915–2002) as the generous source of finance. Barbara Robertson was the wife of the wealthy industrialist Charles Robertson (owner of Robertson's jams), both of whom sponsored various cultural projects including the annual Bath Music Festival. From the beginning the participants consisted of three constituencies: the Courtauld medievalist teaching staff,

led by George (including Peter Kidson, Peter Lasko, Robin Cormack and Christopher Hohler); the wealthy 'clients' from Europe and the United States, who were eager to join such a prestigious group of experts; and the students, who were funded by the Robertsons and, indirectly, the 'clients'. The earliest sessions were held in Great Britain, but from 1963 the school ventured abroad, and the destinations became more and more adventurous. By common consent Eastern Turkey was the most challenging, but other sites had their own memorable qualities. When Barbara eventually hung up her organising whistle in 1982 she could look back on schools to Poland, Austria, Provence, northern France, the Rhineland, southern Italy, northern Italy, Rome, western France, and Spain—all of them amounting to unforgettable experiences for the students and clients.

Practical, convivial, gregarious and courteous, joking with the Robertsons and the 'clients', George was in his element in the Summer Schools. They brought out the personal qualities of the man. Seemingly without effort he fitted into the society of the great and the good. When he retired from his professorship in 1982 (to which he was appointed in 1962) he could look back on a career showered with honours; and the best were still to come. His successes read like pages torn from *Who's Who*. He became a member of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton in 1966; a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, of which he had been a long-standing Vice-president; he was elected to a Fellowship of the British Academy in 1968; on his retirement in 1982 he was made Emeritus Professor of the University of London and elected a Fellow of the Courtauld Institute in 1986; the Royal Archaeological Institute made him an honorary member in the same year; the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences elected him a foreign member in 1994. He received honorary doctorates from the Universities of Warwick (1978), East Anglia (1981), and Dublin (1984). He was made Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1970, and in Poland awarded the Golden Cross of Merit (1978). In some senses his career offers a striking contrast to that of Nikolaus Pevsner, another Eastern European émigré who, like George, settled in England and devoted himself to the study of English art. But whereas Pevsner was for a long time treated by the English academic establishment, especially its architectural specialists, as a slightly off-shore figure, resented for his professionalism and industry,[22] George integrated himself into the English establishment very quickly; he was welcomed immedi-

[22] For Pevsner see Paul Crossley, 'Introduction', in Peter Draper (ed.), *Reassessing Nikolaus Pevsner* (Aldershot, 2004), pp. 1–25; Susie Harries, *Nikolaus Pevsner. The Life* (London, 2011).

ately. This owed much to his extraordinary achievements, but also to more personal qualities, notably his exceptional charm and cheerfulness. His modesty—he used to say that he was just an old rank and file soldier—went down well with English self-deprecation. As we have seen, his diplomacy and courtesy did much to steady the Courtauld ship in 1979, the year of Blunt's unmasking.

But perhaps the most endearing aspect of George the man was his proverbial kindness. His family meant everything to him. He was a loyal friend. His house in north London was open to Polish scholars and colleagues, on whom George would shower precious books and off-prints. Hugo Buchtal was a frequent visitor. Millard Meiss (1904–75) visited him on all his trips to Europe. I myself was the happy recipient of George's and Anne's hospitality. My witness of George's capacity for friendship centred on Lech Kalinowski (1920–2004), Professor of Art History at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, long-standing friend of George, and my informal mentor for my doctoral thesis on the architecture of Kazimir the Great. George's attitude to his old haunts in Poland was wary. After some soul-searching he had returned to Cracow for a family holiday in 1963. This was followed by a tour of Romanesque architecture in Lesser Poland, as well as a visit to his mother and sisters in Cracow, in 1976. He returned to accept an invitation to do some teaching in 1977. But the real challenge came in December 1980, the month and year of Lech Kalinowski's sixtieth birthday celebrations. Invitations had been sent out (to George and to me), and the grand Aula of the university was reserved for two days of conference speeches—all directed towards the virtual canonisation of Lech. But early December 1980 was a fraught moment in Central European history, for *Solidarity* was born in that year, a defiant strike was underway in the Gdańsk shipyard, and Russian tanks were massing along Poland's eastern borders. The Foreign Office was warning against travel to Poland by air or land. An invasion seemed imminent. But George and I could not disappoint Lech, so he took the plane and I took the train, and we arrived unscathed. In fact we were welcomed like heroes. It was then that I saw the full extent of the warmth and pride which Polish academic life bestowed on George, though I should have appreciated it earlier, since I had been the beneficiary of his characteristically Polish generosity twelve years before. I was about to visit Poland for the first time, in 1968, at a particularly sensitive moment in the cold war, in the hope of defining the subject of my doctoral thesis. I thought it prudent to seek George's advice. What I got was not quite what I expected—not a polite few words from a busy man, but in my presence a long conversation on the

telephone in Polish, obviously to a Polish friend, followed by a series of precise instructions from George that would bring me to Cracow on a particular day at a particular time. There, George assured me, I would be met, on Cracow station, by a 'lady wearing a green beret'. Sure enough, the lady was there to meet me, wearing a green beret, and I was then ushered into the welcoming presence of Lech Kalinowski, who had organised all this with George in that long telephone call in London. From then on, my doctoral research never looked back.

Such stories of George's kindness could, I am sure, be multiplied from scores of his students. It was one reason why they loved him. Of course he had the aura of a guru, and his eye for style made his classes little exercises in visual revelation. But it was as much his courtesy, his charm and his kindness which endeared him to them, and which offered a welcome alternative to the bullying, abrasive techniques of Christopher Hohler. The same respect and courtesy he showed to the secretarial staff, who were also devoted to him. Peter Kidson tells us that Rhoda Welsford called him 'our lovely Pole', and his secretaries Elizabeth Hasloch, Kathy Trudgett and Rebecca Hurst are all agreed that it was a pleasure to work for him.

Peter Kidson, who knew George at the Courtauld very well, and who also owed much to George's kindness, should have the last word: 'George Zarnecki never stopped trying to turn himself into an authentic Englishman, even going so far as to pretend that he liked English bitter beer; but those of us who knew him over the years were very glad that he always remained what he was when he arrived: "our lovely Pole", and a very Polish art historian.'

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