



Ornament in Europe: From Antiquity to the Twentieth Century

Caroline van Eck

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Introduction

In this article ornament is defined as a decorative feature of objects and buildings, whereas decoration is used in the sense of the deployment of such forms, features, or shapes. Since ornament as it developed in Europe rests on a very particular set of definitions about its nature, and on the relation between the ornament and what is decorated by it, which are certainly not universal, this entry does not consider varieties of ornament developed in other parts of the world. Nevertheless, it does include scholarship on European ornament that originated in studies of ornament from other parts of the world, in particular from Islamic art history. The entry does not aim to give a historical overview of the development of ornament *designs*; rather, it treats theories of ornament and its historical development. Hence, the comparatively large space devoted to the 19th century, as this is the period in which the study of ornament took off on an unprecedented scale, partly as a result of the arrival of artifacts from all over the world in Europe, the development of global systems of classification in linguistics and anthropology, and the use of ornament in design disciplines as a marker of style and identity.

Origins

The English *ornament*, like the French *ornement*, are derived from the Latin *ornamentum*, which has its etymological roots in the verb *ordinare*, to put in (logical) order or to organize. In that respect the meaning of the Latin word *ornamentum* is close to the Greek *kosmos*, which can mean beauty resulting from an orderly arrangement. The main sources for thought about ornament in the West until the 19th century are rhetoric and architectural theory. In the rhetorical treatises by Aristotle, Cicero, and, in particular, Quintilian, a distinction was introduced that remained fundamental for most Western theories of ornament, namely, between *what* is said, done, or made and *how* it is said, done, or made. In rhetorical handbooks, this is the distinction between *res*, the subject matter and substance of a speech, and *verba*, the words used to present that substance in the most persuasive manner. This distinction works only when there is a choice in how to formulate subject matter. In classical rhetoric, such choices depended on the occasion, subject matter, and audience, and the speaker had to observe decorum while aiming for the greatest power of persuasion. Under the heading of *elocutio*, literally “pronouncing,” handbooks of rhetoric developed a classification of various figures of speech (alliteration, opposition, rhetorical questions) and thought (metaphor) that would add to the persuasive power of a speech, make it entertaining or moving, and engage the attention of the public. It is precisely this notion of choice that also informed most Western thought about ornament, since it was almost always associated with outward appearance and surface adornment and not with the substance or essence of a speech or any other cultural artifact. Although developed originally as a theory of persuasive speech, rhetorical theory included all human communication, whether in speech, gesture, or image. Therefore, the major classical treatises, those by Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian, and Longinus, all discuss the use of art to persuade an audience. Written as a handbook for young orators, Quintilian's *On the Education of the Orator* (*Institutio Oratoria*, Quintilian 1979–1986) gives a synthesis of Greek and Roman theory and practice of rhetoric that has never gone out of use. He used some highly influential visual examples to illustrate the use of figures of speech to make a speech more gripping and thereby more persuasive. For instance, his use of the *Discobolus* by Miron to illustrate the effects of *antithesis* would have a long progeny in Renaissance discussions of *contrapposto* (Summers 1981, pp. 76–77). At the same time, Quintilian introduced another very influential connection: that between ornament and style. It was Quintilian who made a first attempt at classifying sculpture on the basis of stylistic features, derived from rhetorical definitions of speaking styles based on local schools (Attic was sober, whereas Rhodian was more florid and elaborate); that is, in terms of the use of figures of speech and thought and other features contributing to a speech's ornateness, or *ornatus*. The second major source for Western thought about ornament is Greco-Roman architectural theory, as it survived in Vitruvius's *Ten Books of Architecture*, dedicated to the Emperor Augustus, and written c. 30 BCE. Much informed by rhetorical notions of decorum and *ornatus*, he considered the orders of architecture, including the entablature, the horizontal structure they support, as the chief ornament of architecture. They are also the source for most ornamental features used on the outside of

buildings. When he discusses the orders, the word he uses is *ornamentum*; but, he employs it in the sense of a representation in stone of the primitive wooden construction, not in the sense of an added ornament. Their use is codified by custom, tradition, and decorum (Gros 2010). Vitruvius condemned Pompeian mural painting of the Second Style, with its elaborate confections of candelabra, theatrical masques, and porticos, combined without any heed for structural logic, because he felt art should depict only what can exist, and it should obey the laws of nature. The words he used in this rejection would have a long afterlife, employed in the Renaissance, for instance, by Vasari to dismiss the Gothic or by 18th-century neoclassicists to condemn the irregular shapes of the rococo and their lack of a clear iconography (Gombrich 1968).

Dietrich, Nikolaus, and Michael Squire, eds. *Ornament and Figure in Graeco-Roman Art: Rethinking Visual Ontologies in Classical Antiquity*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2018.

Reconstructs perspectives on ornament and figuration from across the ancient Mediterranean. The authors attempt to remove post-antique perspectives on ornament, which, although rooted in ancient ideas, has obscured many aspects of ancient ornament. The book also brings together different national academic traditions.

Gombrich, Ernst H. "Style." In *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. Vol. 15. Edited by David L. Sills, 352–361. New York: Macmillan, 1968.

Classic article that shows how most European theories of ornament originate in Greco-Roman ideas on ornament as developed in rhetoric and architectural theory and illustrates connections between theories of style and theories of ornament

Gros, Pierre. "The Notion of Ornament from Vitruvius to Alberti." *Perspective* 1 (2010): 130–136.

Survey of the origins and meaning of *ornamentum* and *ornatus* in Vitruvius's treatment of the orders in his *Ten Books of Architecture*, and of the subsequent changes in Alberti's *On Building*.

Hölscher, Tonio. *The Language of Images in Roman Art*. Translated by Anthony Snodgrass and Annemarie Künzl-Snodgrass. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Reexamination of the rhetorical aspects of stylistic choice in Roman visual art. The introduction gives a useful overview of recent art historical discussions of style.

Lipps, Johannes, and Dominik Maschek, eds. *Antike Bauornamentik: Grenzen und Möglichkeiten ihrer Erforschung*. Wiesbaden, Germany: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 2014.

Latest survey of archaeological and art historical research into Greek and Roman architectural ornament and the methodological issues this raises in the light of recent archaeological evidence.

Quintilian. *Institutio Oratoria*. 4 vols. Translated by H. E. Butler. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979–1986.

These volumes originally published 1920–1922. Published c. 95 CE. Book 8, Section 3 of Vol. 3 (pp. 211–245) gives an analysis of the use of ornament to make a speech more persuasive and a detailed catalogue of figures of speech and thought that contribute to this effect. Book 2, Section 13 of Vol. 1 (p. 293) draws a parallel between the enlivening use of figures of speech, such as opposition, and the similar effect of the suggestion of movement in sculpture. In Book 12, Section 10 (pp. 452–454), Quintilian applies a classification of speech in terms of ornament to develop the first stylistic analysis of sculpture and painting.

Rykwert, Joseph. *The Dancing Column: On Order in Architecture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997.

Survey from the earliest origins of the orders of architecture in Egypt to its survival in the 20th century, bringing together an unprecedented amount of archaeological and art historical evidence.

Squire, Michael. "Aesthetics and Latin Literary Reception." In *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Sculpture*. Edited by Elise A. Friedland, Melanie G. Sobocinski, and Elaine A. Gazda, 589–606. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Brief, but very complete discussion of the role of rhetoric in Roman thinking about the arts.

Summers, David. *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981.

Traces the origins in rhetoric and in medieval and humanist art theory of key features of Michelangelo's work, including aspects of ornament such as variety, movement, and style.

Wilson-Jones, Mark. *The Principles of Roman Architecture*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003.

Using recent archaeological discoveries, Wilson-Jones sets out the actual principles of Roman architectural design with particular attention to the orders and the ornament derived from them. On this basis the author offers a critical reinterpretation of Vitruvius's treatise.

Anthologies of Primary Sources

Primary source collections on the history and theory of ornament can be visual or textual. Many catalogues of major ornament (print) collections function as such, and they reflect the conditions that led to the constitution of particular collections. Thus Jessen 1896 encompasses the pioneering collecting by Hippolyte Destailleur of visual sources documenting 17th-century and 18th-century buildings in France that were soon to disappear, whereas Bellaigue 2006 documents the collecting of James A. de Rothschild, one of the most discerning—and richest—collectors of the 19th century. They provide visual histories of ornament design that developed alongside, and independently, of the histories of painting, architecture, and sculpture that were produced in the 19th century inspired by Vasari and nationalist motives, and which favored narratives revolving around great individual artists and their unique designs.

Bellaigue, Geoffrey de, ed. *The James A. de Rothschild Bequest at Waddesdon Manor: Drawings for Architecture, Design and Ornament*. London: Unicorn, 2006.

The English branch of the Rothschild family brought together a major collection of European designs, presented in a fully annotated edition.

Berliner, Rudolf. *Ornamentale Vorlageblätter des 15. bis 19. Jahrhunderts*. 3 vols. Leipzig: Hirmer Verlag, 1926.

Fundamental collection of ornament prints and pattern books, mainly from the German-speaking countries.

Decrossas, Michaël, Lucie Fléjou, and Jean-François Bédard, eds. *Ornements, XVe–XIXe siècles: Chefs-d'oeuvre de la Bibliothèque de l'INHA; Collections Jacques Doucet*. Paris: Éditions Mare & Martin, 2014.

This is a selection of the catalogues of major collections of visual sources such as prints and pattern books.

Frank, Isabelle, ed. *The Theory of Decorative Arts: An Anthology of European and American Writings, 1750–1940*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000.

A useful anthology of primary sources on the theory of the decorative arts, which often touches on issues of ornament.

Jessen, Peter. *Katalog der Ornamentstichsammlung des Kunstgewerbemuseums Berlin*. 2 vols. Berlin: E. A. Seemann, 1896.

Catalogue of the collection of one of the first, and most important, museums of industrial art, which includes the important collection by Hippolyte Destailleur of French ornament drawing.

Lambert, Stephen. *Pattern and Design: Designs for the Decorative Arts, 1480–1980.* London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 1983.

Catalogue of one of the major recent exhibitions of pattern books and design manuals for the decorative arts across Europe.

Miller, Elizabeth. *16th-Century Italian Ornament Prints in the Victoria & Albert Museum.* London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 1999.

Overview of one of the main collections of a formative group of ornament prints.

Reference Works

The French-language reference works listed here reflect the sustained study in France, in museums and universities, of efforts to develop a scientific basis for both the practice and the design of ornament, largely inspired by the state-sponsored exhibitions of French artisan craftsmanship that started in the 1790s and the challenges posed by the proliferation of industrial design. The English-language reference works are addressed to a larger audience of art lovers and students.

Arminjon, Catherine, and Nicole Blondel, eds. *Objets civils domestiques: Vocabulaire typologique.* Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 2002.

Originally published 1984. Revised edition of the standard pictorial dictionary of all domestic objects, including their ornament.

Campbell, Gordon, ed. *The Grove Encyclopedia of Decorative Arts.* 2 vols. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Covers much of the material listed in other works cited here, from prehistory to the present, and ranges across the entire world. Contains good bibliographies as well.

Fleming, John, and Hugh Honour. *Dictionary of the Decorative Arts.* New York: Harper & Row, 1977.

Succinct dictionary of furniture and interior decoration; concentrates on the West but includes a fair amount of objects and ornament from other parts of the world.

Lewis, Philippa, and Gillian Darley. *Dictionary of Ornament.* London: Cameron and Hollis, 1990.

Originally published 1985. Succinct pictorial dictionary of Western ornament.

Liévaux, Pascal, and Laurence de Finance, eds. *Vocabulaire de l'ornement.* Paris: Éditions du Patrimoine, 2014.

So far the only exhaustive vocabulary of terms related to ornament based on systematic lexicographical research.

Historical Overview

Attempts at writing a history of Western ornament are rare. Where they do exist, they tend to concentrate on the formal developments in one particular artistic discipline, medium, or object type; when the aim is to produce a more general history, they generally depart from the rhetorical and architectural framework outlined here in Origins. The history of ornament is also distinguished by a lack of identified creators, sources, and theoretical statements. No extensive histories exist of such old and universal decorative objects as the candelabrum or the tripod; nor are works available on ornamental motifs such as the acanthus leaf or the grotesque. Another complicating factor is that ornament is very often not connected exclusively to one medium, discipline, material, or genre: the acanthus

leaf migrates from pottery to architecture and sculpture, from wood to ceramics to marble, and from temples dedicated to Apollo to rococo boudoirs. But this mobility and capacity for metamorphosis means that ornament disappears as a general historical or theoretical issue the moment that medium, period, or material specificity becomes a prime concern in art theory and aesthetics, for instance in the debates about the unique character of the visual arts sparked by Lessing's *Laocoon*. The first attempt to write a history of ornament in Europe is by the Dresden architect Friedrich August Krubsacius (b. 1718–d. 1789; Krubsacius 1759), but this work is still largely based on the accounts of the origins of ornament drawn from myths in Vitruvius and rehearsed by Alberti. It is only with the arrival in Europe of artifacts from all over the world in the later 18th century that histories of ornament begin to be written that move beyond the parameters of Vitruvian theory. *Grammar of Ornament* (Jones 1856) is one of the first attempts to write a global history, followed by Gottfried Semper's anthropological theory, based on anthropological data collected, including at the Great Exhibition, to trace ornament from all over the world to the four primitive crafts that he associated with the origins of human material culture (see Semper 1860–1863, cited under the Impact of the Industrial Revolution and Great Exhibition). Riegl developed a formal method to date artifacts on the basis of ornamental patterning (Riegl's *Stilfragen: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik* and *Historische Grammatik der bildenden Künste*), but this was much criticized because of his use of the concept of *Kunstwollen* as the origin of ornament. With the Modernist rejection of ornament, and the positivist distrust of empathy, historical inquiry faltered during a large part of the 20th century. In the 1970s, a reappraisal of ornament began, which led to new histories of ornament based on psychological theories of perception. The scope of inquiry was also significantly broadened by the work of Islamicists such as Oleg Grabar, who has recently argued that the historiography of ornament has been shaped largely by the traditional conception of ornament going back to Alberti, who associates it with architecture and the applied arts and who considers ornament often as additions that can be endlessly reproduced and are devoid of independent meaning. This has led to an endless series of (pictorial) dictionaries; or, inspired by Riegl, to attempts to trace a development from figural ornament to abstract motifs (Grabar 1992, Grabar 2010a and Grabar 2010b). At present, no single-volume historiographic study of ornament in the West exists; however, in the past decade important conference papers and special journal issues have been published, such as Necipoglu and Payne 2016, Grabar 2010a and Grabar 2010b, as well as new surveys, such as Kirkham and Weber 2013 (cited under Historical Surveys).

Grabar, Oleg. *The Mediation of Ornament*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992.

Alternative view of ornament, based on Islamic art and Platonizing ideas. Argues that the Western approach to ornament, going back to Alberti and Vitruvius, as additions that can be endlessly reproduced and that are devoid of independent meaning, is too restrictive and does not do justice to the richness of meaning and use of other ornamental traditions. Rather, ornament should be conceived as a mediator, bringing the object into the domain of human interaction and communication.

Grabar, Oleg. "On Ornament and Its Definitions." In *Special Issue: Ornement / Ornamental. Perspective: Actualité en Histoire de l'Art 1* (2010a): 5–7.

Summary of the work of Grabar with an important critical review of recent scholarship.

Grabar, Oleg, ed. *Special Issue: Ornement / Ornamental. Perspective: Actualité en Histoire de l'Art 1* (2010b).

This special issue, published in French and English, brings together major specialists on ornament from Antiquity to the present. It includes a substantial bibliography on many aspects of ornament, from pattern books to vocabularies, and from individual designers to particular kinds and varieties.

Jones, Owen. *A Grammar of Ornament*. London: Day and Sons, 1856.

This attempt to deduce the general principles governing the design of ornament in the decorative arts and architecture was inspired by Jones's firsthand study of the Alhambra and of ornamental design from all parts of the world displayed at the Great Exhibition. It presents ornamental patterns from Islamic Spain, Turkey, and the Middle East as well as from nature.

Krubsacius, Friedrich August. *Gedanken von dem Ursprunge, Wachsthum und Verfall der Verzierungen in den schönen Künsten*. Leipzig: Breitkopf, 1759.

The first attempt to write a history of ornament in Europe, but still a work based mainly on the mythological accounts of the origins of ornament in Vitruvius, and as rehearsed by Alberti.

Necipoglu, Gülru, and Alina Payne, eds. *Histories of Ornament: From Global to Local*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016.

Global survey of the history of ornament from the Middle Ages to the present, bringing new insights into materiality, globalization, portability, and connectivity to bear on the study of ornament. This volume also stands out for the sustained attention to political aspects of the development and dissemination of ornament across the globe.

Riegl, Alois. *Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament*. Translated by Evelyn Kain. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992.

Outlines a formal method to date artifacts on the basis of ornamental patterning based on the author's work as a curator of Islamic carpets in Vienna. Originally published as *Stilfragen: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik* (Berlin: G. Siemens, 1893).

Riegl, Alois. *Historical Grammar of the Visual Arts*. Translated by Jacqueline E. Jung. New York: Zone, 2004.

Attempt, based on a method of formal analysis of ornaments and patterns, to write a history of Western art from ancient Egypt to the end of the Middle Ages. Originally published as *Historische Grammatik der bildenden Künste* (Graz, Austria: Herman Böhlau, 1966).

Historical Surveys

Because of the focus of much historical research on motifs and their reproductions or transformations through time, many surveys take the form of albums or illustrated handbooks. The works cited here are by no means exhaustive, but they give a sense of the development and range of the materials produced. Ornament surveys are often conceived as systematic compendia of motifs addressed mainly to designers, whereas historical overviews of ornament are integrated into larger histories of interior design or the decorative arts.

Bossert, Helmuth. *Ornament: Two Thousand Decorative Motifs in Colour; Forming a Survey of the Applied Art of All Ages and All Countries*. London: Benn, 1924.

Picture dictionary of world ornament.

Durant, Stephen. *Ornament: A Survey of Decoration since 1830*. London: Phaidon, 1986.

Pictorial survey of ornament from the Industrial Revolution to the 1980s, with extensive bibliography and biographies of designers.

Gruber, Alain. *The History of the Decorative Arts*. 2 vols. New York: Abbeville, 1994–1996.

History of the applied arts from the Renaissance to the end of the 18th century, organized around types of ornament, such as cartouches, and their use across object types, materials, and periods.

Hamlyn, Arthur D. F. *A History of Ornament*. 2 vols. New York: Century, 1916.

First English/American attempt to write a systematic historical survey of ornament instead of a compendium of ornamental motifs.

Kirkham, Pat, and Susan Weber, eds., *History of Design: Decorative Arts and Material Culture, 1400–2000*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013.

The most inclusive global survey for the period 1400–2000 to date.

Snodin, Michael, and Howard, Maurice. *A Social History of Ornament since 1450*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996.

One of the first social histories of ornament from the Renaissance to the 20th century, tracing its migration, through books and prints, from Renaissance architecture to home interiors and personal decoration, with a concluding chapter on the integration of African and Asian motifs into Western design.

Speltz, Alexander. *Styles of Ornament*. Translated by David O'Connor. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1906.

Pictorial overview of ornament styles in the tradition of Jones and Wornum, but much more inclusive in chronological scope. Originally published as *Der Ornamentstil* (Berlin: Bruno Hessling, 1906).

Wilson, Eva. *Ornament, 8,000 Years: An Illustrated Handbook of Motifs*. London: British Museum Press, 1994.

Survey of the history and symbolism of ornament grouped into nine main categories (including animals, spirals, and geometrical shapes).

Wornum, Ralph N. *The Characteristics of Styles: An Introduction to the Study of the History of Ornamental Art*. London: n.p., 1855.

Based on Owen Jones's *Grammar of Ornament* this is one of the first 19th-century attempts at a visual classification of ornament styles and their historical development.

Middle Ages

During the early Middle Ages revivals of classical, early Christian, and Byzantine ornament were imposed on Germanic animal ornament. Scandinavian animal art was adopted in western Europe. In Britain, a distinctive Hiberno-Saxon art was developed, combining Germanic animal art, Celtic and Pictish spiral scrolls, and the interlace of the British and Byzantine traditions. In France, the classical revivals begun by Charlemagne reintroduced Roman and Byzantine motifs, which continued to flourish until the arrival across Europe of Romanesque art. This style, the first to spread across the whole of western Europe, incorporated classical motifs, such as the acanthus, Christian features like the vine, and also animal shapes derived from Scandinavian art and the ancient Near East. The Gothic style, which began to replace the Romanesque from the early 13th century onward, is characterized by its tracery design and realistic rendering of foliage. Secular ornament included hunting scenes and idealized floral motifs. Heraldry became another major repertoire, reintroducing the lions, eagles, and *Mischwesen* (composite creatures) of the ancient Near East. Theologians such as Abbot Suger (b. 1081–d. 1151), who was closely involved with the building of the abbey of Saint-Denis near Paris—one of the first Gothic churches—developed an aesthetics of sacred architecture and ritual objects in which light, and the luster of shining precious surfaces, becomes the main ornament.

Binski, Paul. *Gothic Wonder: Art, Artifice, and the Decorated Style, 1290–1350*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014.

Binski argues that Gothic architecture aimed to persuade, favoring surface effects, ornament, color, and variety as chief means to dazzle the public.

Eco, Umberto. *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002.

Highly readable survey of mediaeval aesthetics; discusses most medieval theories of ornament.

Panofsky, Erwin. *Abbot Suger on the Abbey Church of St.-Denis and Its Art Treasures*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1946.

Influential statement of the aesthetic of light and luster as the chief ornament of religious art, much influenced by Neo-Platonism.

Webster, Leslie. *Anglo-Saxon Art: A New History*. London: British Museum Press, 2012.

Beautifully illustrated survey of Anglo-Saxon art and ornament in its European context.

Renaissance

In the 15th century the humanist and architect Leon Battista Alberti (b. 1404–d. 1472) introduced the distinction between structure and ornament in the first printed treatise on building, *On Building (De re aedificatoria)* (written in 1443–1452, first published in 1485). Unlike Vitruvius, who considered the orders as the main ornament of architecture, Alberti discussed them twice, once as structural features and next as ornament. In a second major innovation, Alberti distinguished between the beauty resulting from qualities inherent in a building, such as proportion, and the additional beauty conveyed through the use of ornament (see Alberti 1997, Book 9). Alberti's treatise marked the start of a series of architectural treatises by Serlio, Palladio, Vignola, and Scamozzi that discussed ornament as derived from the orders. He adapted the humanist philological technique of reconstituting Greek and Latin manuscripts by going back to the first versions to architecture, arguing that architects should study, draw, and measure Roman ruins themselves. This led to increasingly faithful visual restitutions of Roman buildings, as well as an increasingly rich codification of architectural ornament. The rediscovery of the palace of the Emperor Nero, the Domus Aurea, on the Palatine Hill in Rome led to the revival of a second category of ornament: the grotesque, so named after the grotto-like spaces in which they were seen by Raphael and other Renaissance artists. Raphael subsequently used these decorations in the loggias of the Vatican. Reproductions in print and drawing quickly spread across Europe, and they became the core of a very widespread repertoire of ornamental forms, used in architecture, interior decoration, tableware, furniture etc.

Alberti, Leon Battista. *On the Art of Building in Ten Books (De re aedificatoria)*. Translation and introduction by Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach, and Robert Tavernor. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997.

Foundational text for Western thought about architectural ornament, which integrates rhetorical theory of ornament with the distinction between structure and function, and beauty in buildings.

Connelly, Frances S., ed. *Modern Art and the Grotesque*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Connelly gives an overview of grotesque ornament from the 16th to the 20th centuries, providing anthropological and psychological contexts for its survival.

Dacos, Nicole. *La découverte de la Domus Aurea et la formation des grotesques à la Renaissance*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1969.

Dacos gives an overview of the rediscovery of the Domus Aurea and the revival of grotesque ornament as well as the attempts by Renaissance artists and humanists to integrate them into the tradition of thought about ornament that originates with Vitruvius.

Guest, Claire L. *The Understanding of Ornament in the Italian Renaissance*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2016.

Integration of Platonic, Aristotelian, rhetorical, and Stoic traditions of thought on ornament and their reception in the Renaissance. Examines the role of ornament in architecture, the arts, and literature of the period. She also shows how it became identified with style; thus, the way was prepared for the central role of ornament as the bearer of style and the locus of historicism when art history evolved into an academic discipline in the 19th century.

Necipoglu, Gülru. *The Topkapi Scroll: Geometry and Ornament in Islamic Architecture*. Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1995.

Groundbreaking, exemplary edition of one of the main Islamic treatises on architectural and ornament design, which illuminates relations with Italian Renaissance design.

Payne, Alina A. *The Architectural Treatise in the Renaissance: Architectural Invention, Ornament and Literary Culture*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Reconstructs the reception of Vitruvius's treatise in Italy from 1400 to 1600, with particular attention to the evolution of ideas on ornament, beauty, and decorum.

Squire, Michael. "‘Fantasies, so Varied and Bizarre’: The Domus Aurea, the Renaissance, and the ‘Grotesque.’" In *A Companion to the Neronian Age*. Edited by Martin Dinter and Emma Buckley, 444–464. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.

Squire places the grotesques in the context of Roman art and archaeology.

Warncke, Carsten-Peter. *Die Ornamentale Groteske in Deutschland, 1500–1650*. 2 vols. Quellen und Schriften zur Kunstgeschichte 6. Berlin: Volker Spiess, 1979.

Warncke documents the spread of grotesque ornament in one country that was particularly receptive to it.

Wright, Alison. *Framework: Honour and Ornament in Italian Renaissance Art*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019.

Discussion of ornament and its persuasive functions from the perspective of one of the most conspicuous, but least-studied, varieties of ornament, namely the frame.

The 17th and 18th Centuries

A direct lineage can be traced from the spread of grotesque ornament across Europe to the development of rococo ornament in France starting in the Regency. Both varieties did not originate in the vocabulary of forms derived from the orders of architecture. Whereas grotesque ornament still includes elements with a clear, codified iconographical meaning, such as masks or animal shapes, rococo ornament is entirely free, derived loosely from vegetal shapes or the outlines of shells, and it does not obey the rules of symmetrical composition advocated in classical and Renaissance design. Among 18th-century attempts to define it, two stand out: the ornament designer Gilles-Marie Oppenord (b. 1672–d. 1742) situated ornament in the realm of play and games (Bédard 2011), whereas the architect Germain Boffrand (b. 1667–d. 1754), who designed the first rococo interior in the Hôtel de Soubise in Paris (1735–1740), systematically applied Horace's *Art of Poetry* to architectural and, in particular, interior design (Boffrand 2002). In the second half of the 18th century, rococo ornament was increasingly criticized by neoclassicists such as the French collector Pierre-Jean Mariette (b. 1694–d. 1774) because it failed to adhere, in his view, to the standards of decorum and good taste of classicism. Mariette's rejection of rococo ornament was one of the catalysts for Giovanni Battista Piranesi's radically different theory on the origins and nature of ornament, published in his polemical texts *Letter to M. Mariette* and the preface to his book on chimney design, the *Diverse Maniere di Adornare le Cammini* (Piranesi 1769 and Piranesi 2002). Here he argued for the inclusion of all kinds of material culture developed in Antiquity around the Mediterranean, rejected the traditional view of Greek architecture as the origin of Roman building, instead proposing Etruscan origins; however, he also argued, possibly inspired by the shell-like appearance of rococo ornament, for the origin of ornament in natural history.

Bédard, Jean-François. *Decorative Games: Ornament, Rhetoric, and Noble Culture in the Work of Gilles-Marie Oppenord, 1672–1742*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011.

First modern study of a highly original theory of ornament by one of its major early-18th-century designers, associating it with the parlor games and novels that were popular among the Regency aristocracy.

Boffrand, Germain. *Book of Architecture*. Edited and introduced by Caroline van Eck and translated by David Britt. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002.

Originally published 1745. Publication of the architect's main designs, preceded by his rigorous application of rhetoric and Horace's *Art of Poetry* to interior design.

Coquery, Emmanuel, ed. *Rinceaux et figures: L'ornement en France au xviii^e siècle*. Paris: Musée du Louvre, 2005.

Beautifully illustrated overview of two of the main motives in French 18th-century ornament.

Hyde Minor, Heather. *Piranesi's Lost Words*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015.

Study of Piranesi's late, polemical works that pays particular attention to the context of his theories of ornament in natural history.

Piranesi, Giovanni Battista. *Diverse maniere di adornare i cammini . . . con ragionamento apologetico in difesa dell'architettura egizia, e toscana*. Rome: Generoso Salomoni, 1769.

In presenting these designs for a furniture type unknown in Antiquity and advocating for the use of Etruscan, Egyptian, Greek, and Roman ornament, Piranesi revolutionized the design and theory of ornament.

Piranesi, Giovanni Battista. *Observations on the Letter of Monsieur Mariette with Opinions on Architecture*. Introduction by John Wilton-Ely and translated by Caroline Beamish and David Britt. Los Angeles: Getty Center, 2002.

Piranesi's refutation of the French neoclassical view that Roman architecture derived from Greek architecture, as well as an argument for variety, richness, and stylistic pluralism in design.

The Rise of Aesthetics

The development of aesthetics as the subdiscipline of philosophy concerned with beauty and judgments of taste in the work of Baumgarten and Kant added a new dimension to artistic concepts of ornament. Immanuel Kant (b. 1724–d. 1804) argues in *Kant 2000* (originally published 1790) that aesthetic enjoyment arises from the free, disinterested enjoyment of the interplay of imagination and understanding. Such disinterested enjoyment can arise only from the contemplation of objects that have no functional purpose that lies outside themselves. Since Kant associated ornament with the decorative arts, that is with useful objects, ornament was relegated to an inferior aesthetic status. At the same time Kant cites architectural patterns, such as “dessins à la grecque,” foliage for borders and wallpaper, as forms without any intrinsic meaning or practical purpose and therefore as instances of free, formal beauty (Kant 2000, Book 1, §§ 1–5 and 13–16; Ginsborg 2013).

Bédard, Jean-François. “Ornament in Architecture.” In *The Blackwell Companion to the History of Architecture*. Vol. 2, *The Eighteenth Century*. Edited by Caroline van Eck and Sigrid de Jong, 96–116. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017.

The author analyzes the shift in 18th-century discourse on architectural ornament from the classical tradition informed by rhetoric, by means of rococo, to Kant's position on ornament as one of the features of an object or building that lends itself best to disinterested aesthetic enjoyment. At the same time, Bédard shows how in this shift from the rhetorical to the aesthetic, classical ornamental motifs retain an exemplary status.

Ginsborg, Hannah. “Kant's Aesthetic and Teleology.” In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edited by Edward N. Zalta. Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 2013.

Accessible but rigorous analysis of Kant's views on beauty and ornament, with extensive bibliography.

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Edited by Paul Guyer. Translated by Edward Matthews. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Best English translation, with introduction that places the *Critique of Judgment* in the context of Kant's philosophy and gives historical background to his theories on aesthetics. Originally published as *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Berlin: Lagarde & Friederich, 1790).

The 19th Century

In the first decades of the 19th century the classical tradition in creating ornament and theorizing it continued, with the Empire style as the final flowering of this tradition as a global style. At the same time the interest in medieval art led to the Gothic Revival, in many respects the opposite of neoclassicism: its theorists advocated a return to local traditions of the Gothic, often as part of a nationalist movement. From the 1850s onward these two traditions became less important, as the debate about ornament was transformed by the display of artifacts and designs from all over the world in the Great Exhibition of 1851 and its successors and the impact of the Industrial Revolution on design, manufacture, and merchandizing. In the final decades of the century the influence of psychological theories on empathy added a major new element to discussions. Use of recent research into the psychology of perception has not only naturalized responses to ornament, but also encouraged designers to reconsider the revivalism that had characterized most ornament design during this century.

The Empire Style

The Empire style constitutes the transition between the end of the classical tradition in ornament design and the emergence of historicizing revivalist styles in the 19th century. It was developed as the house style of Napoleon's empire to a significant degree by Charles Percier and Pierre-Antoine Fontaine, who had trained as architects in Paris and Rome and who established themselves as interior designers as well. Inspired by Piranesi's late work, the excavations at Pompei and Herculaneum, and the French expedition to Egypt, the style integrates elements from very different periods and regions. Thus, it heralds the emergence of 19th-century eclecticism and globalization (Nouvel-Kammerer 2007, van Eck and Versluys 2017).

Nouvel-Kammerer, Odile, ed. *Symbols of Power: Napoleon and the Art of the Empire Style, 1800-1815*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2007.

Catalogue of a major exhibition in which the essays move beyond traditional iconographical readings of Empire ornament to account for the radical changes in the use of antique ornament, the integration of Egyptian motifs, and the new ways in which objects were made, viewed, and handled.

Percier, Charles, and François-Louis Fontaine. *Recueil de décorations intérieures comprenant tout ce qui a rapport à l'ameublement, comme vases, trépiéds, candélabres, cassolettes, lustres, girandoles, lampes, chandeliers, cheminées, feux, poêles, pendules, tables. . . etc., composé par C. Percier et P. F. L. Fontaine, exécuté sur leurs dessins par Charles Percier*. Paris: Les auteurs, 1812.

One of the first artist's publications to present interior design as an independent discipline and the first to identify fashion as a main factor in artistic innovation, competing with the standards of taste as defended by the Academy.

van Eck, Caroline, and Miguel John Versluys. "The Hôtel de Beauharnais in Paris: Egypt, Greece, Rome, and the Dynamics of Stylistic Transformation." In *Housing the New Romans: Architectural Reception and Classical Style in the Modern World*. Edited by Katherine T. von Stackelberg and Elizabeth Macaulay-Lewis, 54–91. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Starting from the thesis that the Hôtel de Beauharnais is an immersive space, and using recent human-thing entanglement theory, the authors reconstruct the biographies of the main objects and how they contribute to an imaginative re-creation of ancient Egypt.

The Impact of the Industrial Revolution and Great Exhibition

In the 19th century the geographical and chronological range of ornament studies widened considerably, and this development contributed to the rise of a new, anthropological way of thinking about ornament. Conceiving the tendency to decorate the human body and artifacts as a basic, and universal, feature had already been present in classical and Renaissance writing on ornament. The arrival of artifacts from the Pacific in Europe in the 1760s inspired the first attempts at developing a global, ethnographical perspective. Thus the archaeologist Carl August Böttiger proposed tattooage as one of the first varieties of human ornament, a suggestion that Gottfried Semper would take up (van Eck 2017). In the 1850s Owen Jones published *A Grammar of Ornament*, the first sustained attempt to develop a global morphology of ornamental motifs. The linguistic model was also an important inspiration for Gottfried Semper, who adopted the notion of material transformation, or *Stoffwechsel*, over time and place of basic elements from contemporary debates about the Indo-Germanic roots of European languages and combined this with an artifactual and anthropological theory of ornament (Hvattum

2004). He posited its origin in the primary human crafts: weaving, carpentry, masonry, and metalwork, and he argued that the representation of these crafts over time in different materials, for instance representing weaving knots in pottery decoration or depicting tapestry borders in framing devices, constitutes the core of human ornament from prehistory to the present. The Great Exhibition of 1851 served as the catalyst for a systematic reflection on the industrial arts and the implications of mass production on artistry and design. Gottfried Semper's *Science, Industry and Art* of 1852 was one of the first attempts to chart the new relations between architecture and the industrial arts and their implication for design education. In his major work, *Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts, or Practical Aesthetics* (Semper 1860–1863, Semper 2004), Semper set out the development of the four basic crafts from their earliest beginnings in the Caribbean and the Pacific through their transformations in Egyptian, Assyrian, and Roman textile, ceramics, and brickwork, ending in the Early Modern period. Because he considered masking and dressing, that is the decoration of surfaces, as the essence of art, he radically transformed the status of ornament. Instead of Kant's marginalizing appraisal of ornament as the manifestation of purely formal, disinterested beauty, he put ornament back into the heart of the artistic development of mankind. Semper's analysis of the transformation of motifs over long periods and in different materials and techniques constituted an important inspiration for the formalist methods of stylistic classification on the basis of ornaments developed in Vienna by Alois Riegl to understand the anonymous artistic production of societies without much textual evidence, such as the Eastern tapestries or late Roman industrial art assembled in the Habsburg collections. The Industrial Revolution and the Great Exhibition were also the catalysts for a radical rethinking of ornament, most especially the British reform movements that included not only the Arts and Crafts and Aesthetic movement, but also the Gothic Revivalists, headed by Charles Welby Northcote Pugin and John Ruskin. They shared a dislike of classical ornament and mass-produced decoration and advocated a return to the organic societies of the Middle Ages and to individual craftsmanship, producing ornament that was inspired by plant forms.

Atterbury, Paul, and Clive Wainwright. *Pugin: A Gothic Passion*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994.

A well-illustrated catalogue of an exhibition that showed the full range of Pugin's production across architecture and the applied arts, including its background and social ambitions.

Blakesley, Rosalind Polly. *The Arts and Crafts Movement*. London: Phaidon, 2009.

Blakesley provides a very balanced overview of the Arts and Crafts movement from eastern Europe to the United States.

Hewison, Robert. *John Ruskin: The Argument of the Eye*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1976.

Overview of Ruskin's theories about the visual arts and architecture.

Hvattum, Mari. *Gottfried Semper and the Problem of Historicism*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Situates Semper's thought on ornament, as the place where historicism manifests itself, in 19th-century anthropology and historical linguistics.

Labrusse, Rémi. *Face au chaos: Pensées de l'ornement à l'âge de l'industrie*. Paris: Les Presses du Réel, 2018.

Overview of ways in which the main designers, historians, and theorists of ornament in the 19th century, including Owen Jones, Christopher Dresser, Charles Blanc, and Karl Böttiger, tried to face the challenge posed by the arrival of mass industrial production and, in particular, how to save the living experience of individuals in the face of mass fabrication that threatens its destruction

Moritz, Karl Philipp. *Vorbegriffe zu einer Theorie der Ornamente*. Nordlingen, Germany: Alfons Uhl, 1986.

Originally published 1793. One of the rare attempts before the 20th century in western Europe to formulate a theory of ornament as an inherent feature of objects and not as some additional luster.

Penick, Monica, and Christopher Long, eds. *The Rise of Everyday Design: The Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain and America*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019.

The contributors concentrate on the Anglo-Saxon world, and has more attention for the role of the movement in the development of design as a discipline also concerned with objects of everyday use.

Riegl, Alois. *Die spätromische Kunst-Industrie nach den Funden in Österreich-Ungarn im Zusammenhange mit der Gesamtentwicklung der bildenden Künste bei den Mittelmeervölkern*. Vienna: Österreichische Staatsdruckerei, 1901.

Attempt, from a formalist misreading of Semper, to reconstruct the formal development of the industrial arts in the later Roman Empire on the basis of its material survival in the Habsburg Empire.

Semper, Gottfried. *Der Stil in den technischen und tektonischen Künsten, oder praktische Aesthetik: Ein Handbuch für Techniker, Künstler und Kunstfreunde*. Frankfurt: Verlag für Kunst und Wissenschaft, 1860–1863.

Sets out the development of the four basic crafts from their earliest beginnings in the Caribbean and the Pacific through their transformations in Egyptian, Assyrian, and Roman textile, ceramics, and brickwork, ending in the Early Modern period.

Semper, Gottfried. *Style: Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts; or, Practical Aesthetics*. Introduced by Harry Francis Mallgrave. Translated by Harry F. Mallgrave and Michael Robinson. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2004.

First complete English translation of *Der Stil*, with accessible introduction and useful annotation, but without many of Semper's footnotes that enable the reader to reconstruct the origins of, and evidence for, his ideas.

van Eck, Caroline. *Organicism in Nineteenth-Century Architecture: An Inquiry into Its Theoretical and Philosophical Background*. Amsterdam: Architectura & Natura Pers, 1994.

Overview of 19th-century theory about organic ornament and design and its roots in idealist philosophy and classical and Renaissance rhetoric.

van Eck, Caroline. "Cannibalisme, tatouage et revêtement: De l'histoire de l'architecture à l'anthropologie de l'art." *Gradhiva: Revue de l'Anthropologie et des Arts du Musée du Quai Branly* 25 (2017): 24–49.

Exploration of Semper's attempt to retrace the origins of ornament to the earliest forms of human material culture.

Psychological Approaches to Ornament

In addition to these major ways of thinking about ornament, psychological approaches were developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, inspired by empathy theory, functional and *Gestalt* psychology, and psychoanalysis as well as, most recently, cognitive psychology. All these Western ways of thinking about ornament share the idea that ornament is essentially an additional feature, determined by other considerations than the functional, and often serves as a main source for beauty. Attempts to think about inherent varieties of ornament, such as luster or texture, are much more rare, and so are theories of ornament that do not depart from its origins in Greco-Roman architecture. Moritz 1986 (originally published 1793) is a rare Western attempt to do so.

Mallgrave, Harry F., and Eleftherios Ikonou, eds. and trans. *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873–1893*. Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 2000.

English translation of the main German texts on empathy, with an introduction that situates these texts in contemporary debates in architecture and aesthetics.

Wölfflin, Heinrich. "Prolegomena to a Psychology of Architecture" In *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873–1893*. Edited by Harry F. Mallgrave and Eleftherios Ikonou, 149–187. Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 2000.

In his attempt to extend empathy theory to the nonfigurative art of architecture, Wölfflin argues that we project bodily sensations, such as the struggle to stay upright, unto the shapes of the orders. Thus, the expressive nature of ornament becomes a product of our physical and sensory capacities.

The 20th Century

The advent of modernism in architecture and the applied arts completely overturned the tradition outlined here. Ornament was no longer considered as the interface between objects or buildings and the world, as the features that make them speak to their owners or users and add that extra luster that completes their beauty. Instead, they were rejected as useless surface frills, equated with equally useless jewelry. This rejection was partly driven by the increasing association, during the 19th century, of ornament with historicizing revivalist styles. From the 1880s such revivals were rejected as the symptom of a lack of creativity and a reluctance to engage with modernity. The other argument driving this rejection was the Modernist equation of the essence of a building or object with its interior. Finally the functionalist credos of architects and designers such as Louis Sullivan ("form follows function," Sullivan 1924, p. 108) or Adolf Loos, associating ornament and crime, led to a depletion of the conceptual space in which ornament could productively be discussed. In postmodernism this functionalist rejection of ornament was reversed. This return to favor was heralded by *Learning from Las Vegas* (Venturi, et al. 1972), which reinstated ornament as the bearer of a building's meaning. This publication was closely followed by Ernst Gombrich's *The Sense of Order* (Gombrich 1979), which signaled the return of ornament as a topic of art historical inquiry. The book marks an attempt to found the study of ornament on a scientific, psychological basis, but it came too soon. Its true impact began to be felt only in the late 1990s when cognitive psychologists started to study the perception of ornament.

Arnheim, Rudolf. *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974.

Classic study of the psychology of perception of ornament, building on state-of-the-art cognitive psychology.

Gombrich, Ernst H. *The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art*. Oxford: Phaidon, 1979.

Marks the return of ornament on the art historical agenda. Uses recent insights from perceptual psychology to discover general principles of ornament design and appreciation.

Loos, Adolf. "1908: Adolf Loos; Ornament and Crime." In *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th-Century Architecture*. Edited by Ulrich Conrads, 19–24. Translated by Michael Bullock. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999.

Originally published 1911. Revolutionary, but often misread, manifesto for a modernist, functionalist theory of ornament.

Moussavi, Farshid, and Kubo, Michael. *The Function of Ornament*. Barcelona: Actar, 2008.

Manifesto on contemporary return to ornament in architecture by two main practitioners.

Payne, Alina. *From Ornament to Object: Genealogies of Architectural Modernism*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012.

A major revision of modernist theorizing of ornament, this book includes a thorough history of the shift in thought about design and the nature of ornament that took place from the 1880s to the 1930s.

Picon, Antoine. *Ornament: The Politics of Architecture and Subjectivity*. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2013.

Relates the return of ornament in contemporary architecture to the possibilities offered by new digital technologies and questions the politics underlying its use and, especially, the refusal of contemporary design to take on the symbolical potential of ornament.

Schafter, Debra. *The Order of Ornament, the Structure of Style: Theoretical Foundations of Modern Art and Architecture*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Analysis of how modern architecture understood itself through the work of four major 19th-century thinkers about ornament: Ruskin, Jones, Semper, and Riegl.

Souillou, J., M. Dachy, C. Domino, et al. *L'Envers du décor: Dimensions décoratives dans l'art du xxe siècle*. 2 vols. Lille, France: Musée d'Art Moderne de Lille Métropole, 1998.

Lavishly illustrated, wide-ranging overview of decorative art in the 20th century.

Sullivan, Louis. *Autobiography of an Idea*. New York: Press of the American Institute of Architects, 1924.

Functionalist manifesto of the designer of the first American skyscraper.

Trilling, James. *Ornament: A Modern Perspective*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003.

Revisits cognitive and perceptual approaches to ornament integrating experimental research from the past thirty years.

Venturi, Robert, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour. *Learning from Las Vegas*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1972.

Manifesto for a return to ornament as a bearer of meaning. Famously argues that "less is a bore," and advocates a return to principles of architectural design as developed in Renaissance Mannerism.

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