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Imagining Charlemagne in America

Early in December of 1942, the publisher W. W. Norton sponsored a half-page advertisement in *The New York Times Book Review*.[1] Tempting readers and consumers with the tagline "Books to give are 'Books that Live,'" the layout presented several options for holiday gift giving (Fig. 13.1). Curiously, *Mediaeval Art* by the Princeton University art historian Charles Rufus Morey (1877–1955) received top billing, above several other texts devoted to topics of cultural improvement.[2] The paragraph describing Morey's work explained that it was "a volume of great beauty and permanent worth" (Fig. 13.2).

The publishers promoted Morey's contextual approach to the history of art stating, "MEDIAEVAL ART traces the changes in politics, society, and thought that parallel these developments." A simplified illustration of the book's dust jacket depicted the title in Gothic-inspired script. Just below, an image of the Virgin and Child from Amiens Cathedral was superimposed on a stylized drawing of that Gothic cathedral. A star-covered ribbon extended from both sides of the book, reinforcing its future as a gift, but its publication date of 1942, during the height of World War II, also suggested an American, if not a deliberately patriotic, significance for the publication.

At first glance, the assortment of books chosen for the advertisement seem to cover a mishmash of topics. A closer examination shows that they all aligned with themes of self-improvement, specifically with American aspirations for status of the middlebrow variety. The blurbs accompanying each title promised modern readers a better understanding of their own era, one mediated through leisured reading about topics of cultural importance. Guided by expert authors, consumers could improve their understanding of Western civilization in the fields of art, music, literature, and even mathematics. This commodified approach enticed Americans to increase their cultural capital through the study of the arts and culture. The advertisement repeated this theme for each book. For example, *The Great Age of Greek Literature* would bring comfort for a "troubled present—a rich contribution to the library of every modern home." A passage from Morey's introduction was also paraphrased for the promotion;

1 *The New York Times Book Review*, 6 December 1942, 24.

2 Charles Rufus Morey, *Mediaeval Art* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1942).

Note: This essay is based on presentations for the International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, Michigan, 2019, and the Distinguished Alumni Lecture for the Medieval Studies Institute at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana, 2020. Evan Gatti, Diane Reilly, and audiences at those proceedings offered many helpful comments about the project. Brigitte Buettner, William Diebold, and the anonymous reviewers of this volume generously provided valuable guidance for completing this essay. All errors are my own.

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Fig. 13.1: "Books to give are 'Books that Live,'" *New York Times Book Review*, 6 December 1942. Photo: Author.

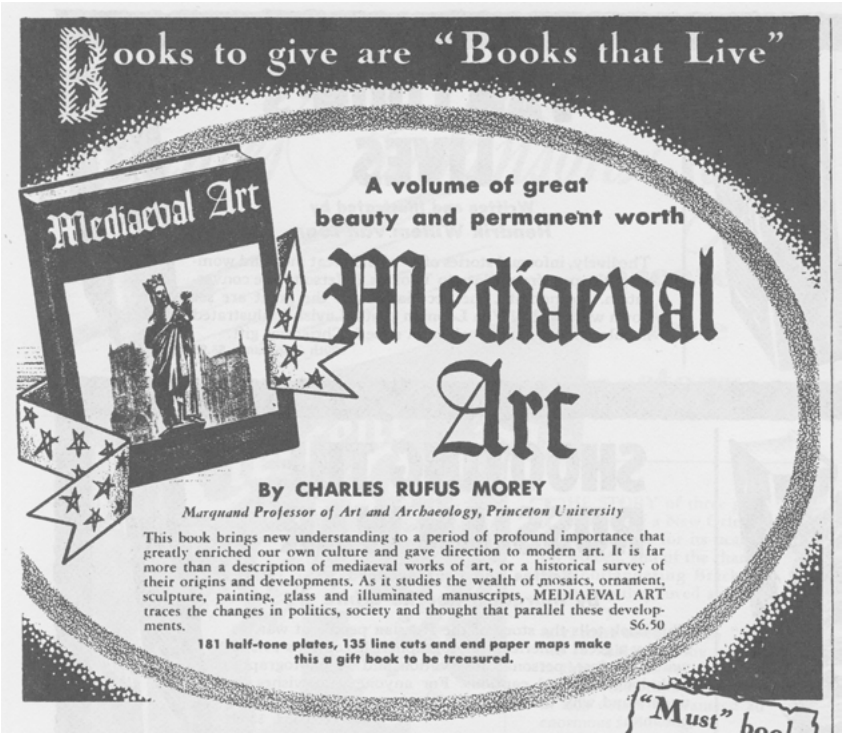

Fig. 13.2: "Books to give are 'Books that Live,'" *New York Times Book Review*, 6 December 1942 (detail). Photo: Author.

he claimed the art of the medieval era was a worthy pursuit because it made "a contribution of profound importance, since through it our culture was greatly enriched and direction given to our modern art."[3] In each case, the marketing reiterated that a reader's formative acquisition of information about European cultures of the past was essential for understanding the present and, indeed, expected of an accomplished, modern American.

As with the other advertised works, Morey's book was encyclopedic in scope. It covered the arts and architecture of the fourth to the late fifteenth centuries, including lengthy chapters devoted to the Byzantine Empire and western Europe, as well as medieval England and Ireland. Reviewers of the book echoed the advertisement's promise of value by praising *Mediaeval Art*'s accessible content and its significance as a lasting testament to the author's expertise in the field.[4] In the first half of the twenti-

3 Morey, *Mediaeval Art*, 17.

4 Kenneth J. Conant, review of *Mediaeval Art*, by Charles Rufus Morey, *Speculum* 19 (1944): 365–66; David M. Robb, review of *Mediaeval Art*, by Charles Rufus Morey, *American Journal of Archaeology* 49 (1945): 116–17.

eth century, Morey was deeply influential for the development and promotion of art-historical studies in the United States. While serving as chair of the Department of Art and Archaeology at Princeton University between 1924 and 1945, he was a prolific scholar committed to the study of style and iconography who founded Princeton's Index of Christian Art (now the Index of Medieval Art).[5] He took on leadership roles in the College Art Association (CAA) and encouraged the professionalization and expansion of art history at American universities. Morey's accomplishments in the years after the war were primarily international, with his work in Rome as cultural attaché to the United States embassy and as acting director of the American Academy. Recognition of his contributions was reinforced in 1953, when CAA created the prestigious Charles Rufus Morey Book Award. Conferred annually to authors of significant publications in art history, it attests to his continued importance as a defining figure in the field. Morey's reach also extended across multiple generations of educators, transforming the landscape of art history in the United States, as many of his students went on to draft textbooks, teach in art history programs throughout the country, and secure a place for medieval art in university curricula.[6]

Morey's publications were well known within academic circles, but what was the appeal of *Mediaeval Art* to the broader public? That audience would likely have been encouraged by the publisher's promises of cultural insight, a feature also commended by a reviewer who praised Morey's book as an engaging overview for general readers rather than a text that focused on elements of academic "controversy."[7] The formal aspects of architecture from the later Middle Ages also could have resonated with American readers, who would have encountered examples of revival Romanesque and Gothic styles in local ecclesiastical, commercial, and collegiate buildings.[8] But what of the arts produced during the early Middle Ages, between 600 and 1050? *Mediaeval Art* was one of the few American publications to include a comprehensive examination of arts associated with the emperor Charlemagne (ca. 747–814) and his descendants.[9] I will demonstrate that Charlemagne was a compelling figure for early twentieth-century Americans, not only in academia, but also within society at large. During this era, there was striking

5 Elizabeth Sears, "Iconography and Iconology at Princeton," in *Iconography Beyond the Crossroads: Image, Meaning and Method in Medieval Art*, ed. Pamela A. Patton and Catherine A. Fernandez (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2022): 9–33, at 14.

6 Rensselaer W. Lee, "Charles Rufus Morey, 1877–1955," *The Art Bulletin* 37, no. 4 (1955): iii–vii, at iii–iv.

7 Robb, review of *Mediaeval Art*, 116

8 Michael D. Clark, "Ralph Adams Cram and the Americanization of the Middle Ages," *Journal of American Studies*, 23 no. 2 (1989): 195–213, at 202; Kevin D. Murphy and Lisa Reilly, *Skyscraper Gothic: Medieval Style and Modernist Buildings* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2017).

9 During the interwar years, English language publications that focused on early medieval art were rare. Two exceptions were Roger Hinks, *Carolingian Art* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1935) and Harold W. Picton, *Early German Art and Its Origins: From the Beginnings to about 1050* (London: B. T. Batsford, Ltd., 1939).

continuity between the ways that art historians employed concepts of race and ethnic identity to shape the role of Charlemagne in European history for their students and the depictions of him found in commercial publications and visual culture intended for consumers. He was portrayed as a powerful monarch whose influence in shaping early medieval European culture and the visual arts often was deployed to suit ideological ends. Academic and popular characterizations of Charlemagne shared a vision of the past that blended racialized and nationalist perspectives to serve narratives of American progress and cultural improvement.

A Charlemagne for American Art History

Mediaeval Art and art history survey texts published during the years leading up to World War II were fascinated with the early medieval monarch Charlemagne, who ruled as king of the Franks beginning in 768 and then as Holy Roman emperor from 800 until his death in 814. During the early twentieth century, he was characterized as a galvanizing figure who successfully mediated between a vigorous Germanic culture and a waning Roman one. This portrayal was employed across the small corpus of art-historical surveys published for American audiences in the first half of the twentieth century. The best known, Helen Gardner's *Art through the Ages*, was initially published in 1926 and issued in a second edition a decade later.[10] Gardner's book was exceedingly popular and set a methodological expectation for survey texts to situate the arts in their formal and cultural contexts.[11] Between 1935 and 1940 three additional works, now largely forgotten, established a foundation for teaching art history in the United States. In 1935, former students of Morey at Princeton, David M. Robb and Jesse J. Garrison, published *Art in the Western World*.[12] Two years later, the theater and art critic Sheldon Cheney issued *A World History of Art*, a comprehensive volume integrating the study of visual arts with theater and music history.[13] Then, in 1940, Raymond Stites, education director at the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. and professor at Antioch College, published *The Arts and Man*.[14] Morey's *Mediaeval Art* from 1942 represented a capstone of sorts to these volumes. Focused specifically on the arts of the Middle Ages, he provided a more comprehensive examination of Carolingian art, one specifically marketed to the general American reader.

10 Helen Gardner, *Art through the Ages* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1926); 2nd ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1936). Unless noted, subsequent citations refer to the second edition.

11 Barbara Jaffee, "'Gardner' Variety Formalism: Helen Gardner and *Art through the Ages*," in *Partisan Canons*, ed. Anna Brzyski (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 203–222, at 204–5.

12 David M. Robb and J. J. Garrison, *Art in the Western World* (New York: Harper & Brothers Pub., 1935).

13 Sheldon Cheney, *A World History of Art* (New York: The Viking Press, 1937).

14 Raymond S. Stites, *The Arts and Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1940).

In each of these publications, Charlemagne was the anchoring historical figure positioned at the start of chapters devoted to Romanesque art. He was constructed as a forward-thinking personality who provided impetus for cultural change. The first and second editions of Gardner's textbook lionized the monarch in just this fashion.[15] She vividly characterized western Europe as in flux. Rome had originally "established its customs and culture," but "in swept the barbarians, illiterate but of the fresh vigorous blood of the North."[16] Gardner then explained that Charlemagne's authority worked alongside the steadying influence of the church: "The one brilliant spot was the reign of Charlemagne, when for a short time order was restored, education and learning revived, and the arts stimulated."[17] In closing her chapter on Romanesque art, Gardner once again invoked a model of cultural fusion and located the origins of cultural change with the monarch by explaining: "The barbarians, Christianized, were going to school to the old traditions of the Mediterranean civilizations, but were transforming them with the fresh vitality of the north. North, South, and East were mingling."[18] *And there it is*: the first of many descriptions found in early survey texts where the vocabulary of formal qualities was paired with historically charged terms such as blood and vigor, effectively blurring the distinctions between concepts of ethnic identity, race, and culture.

Gardner's peers also employed this approach in their publications. Robb and Garrison summarized the Carolingian era as one of cultural blending, as they claimed that barbarians, harnessed by the forces of Christian expansion, led to a revival of Roman learning.[19] They also credited Charlemagne with fostering "a short-lived Renaissance." The authors neatly cribbed Gardner, slightly modifying her "one bright spot" metaphor for the ruler. They heralded his advent, explaining that "a single ray of light appears in the pervasive gloom of the Dark Ages."[20] Even Cheney, who only briefly discussed Carolingian art (his volume stressed the arts of later periods and especially those of the modern era), emphasized the emperor's skillful leadership and employed a nationalist sentiment by stating: "Under Charlemagne various forces were finally brought into some sort of focus. It is from 'the Carolingian renaissance' that historians date the entry of the French spirit into European art."[21] Like Gardner, each of these authors articulated Charlemagne's contribution as a keen ability to bring forth cohesion out of disarray.

These textbook analyses of Carolingian art and culture regularly integrated discussion of ethnic, racial, cultural, and national characteristics to contextualize the works.

15 Gardner, *Art through the Ages*, 280.
16 Gardner, *Art through the Ages*, 278.
17 Gardner, *Art through the Ages*, 280.
18 Gardner, *Art through the Ages*, 302.
19 Robb and Garrison, *Art in the Western World*, 461.
20 Robb and Garrison, *Art in the Western World*, 84.
21 Cheney, *A World History of Art*, 400.

These references also ascribed an intrinsic energy that was thought to shape medieval artistic styles. For example, Robb and Garrison claimed that the Carolingian artist's "basic intent was to give expression to the ideal of the vital force which was the Teutonic contribution to the background out of which grew the culture of the later Middle Ages."[22] In his text, Stites posited a similar line of cultural development, albeit more succinctly, when he explained that the "art of the Dark Ages led to the portals of Chartres, Amiens, Reims, and Bourges."[23] Morey also situated Charlemagne as the essential progenitor for the Romanesque.[24] Initially, he introduced the ruler as a driven reformer, noting "The Carolingian 'renaissance' had no popular basis, but was the product of the individual effort of Charlemagne and his successors, the churchmen of the imperial entourage."[25] Then he concluded his discussion by asserting that Charlemagne's focused mediation between the northern and Roman impulses ultimately gave rise to Romanesque architecture. With a didactic (if inconsistent) logic, Morey claimed this style represented a barbarian triumph over the legacy of the late antique as "wherein a traditional tribal instinct had finally overborne the imperial machinery which Charlemagne labored so long to construct."[26] In each of these examples, the authors' use of racial, ethnic, and nationalistic terminology reinforced the shaping of the emperor as a catalyst who initiated a trajectory of cultural development.

Despite the pivotal role awarded Charlemagne as a European culture builder, these early publications included remarkably few works of art that dated to his reign. For example, the Palatine Chapel at Aachen (dedicated 805), presumably a useful monument to demonstrate the ruler's patronage and command of Roman and barbarian models, was rarely discussed in the textbooks. Instead, this first generation of American survey publications employed manuscripts, most of them made after Charlemagne's death, as the defining medium for the arts of the Carolingian era. This focus was significantly influenced by two image collections that were circulating in the 1920s, just prior to the publication of the first corpus of art history textbooks. These sets of photographic plates were essentially textbooks without a written narrative and represent early attempts to codify a canon for teaching Carolingian art in the United States. The first, a commercial endeavor, *Student Series K, Mediaeval Art*, was compiled by Morey in 1922 and made available for students to purchase through The University Prints company.[27]

22 Robb and Garrison, *Art in the Western World*, 461.

23 Stites, *The Arts and Man*, 368.

24 Following a trend common to his era, Morey placed the Carolingian narrative at the start of a long chapter devoted to Romanesque art.

25 Morey, *Mediaeval Art*, 267.

26 Morey, *Mediaeval Art*, 250.

27 Charles Rufus Morey, *The University Prints: Student Series K, Medieval Art* (Boston: The University Prints, n.d.). Its publication date was listed in the "Report of the President for the Year Ending December 31, 1922," *The Official Register of Princeton University* 14, no. 2 (1923): 73.

In his set, Morey focused on the sculpture, book illumination, and mosaics created in Europe as well as the broader Mediterranean; he included examples of folios from several Carolingian manuscripts.[28] The second collection, *The Carnegie Art Reference Set*, was more comprehensive as it covered the arts of ancient Egypt to the modern era and included references to a library of art history books.[29] The Carnegie Sets, as they came to be known, were a philanthropic initiative and given to smaller colleges and universities, typically institutions with teacher-education programs.[30] Arranged chronologically and following art according to modern national boundaries, the Carnegie Set limited its examples of Carolingian art to manuscripts.[31] The duplication of one key manuscript across Morey's *Series K* and the Carnegie Set suggests that, for Carolingian art, a canon, albeit one with only a few examples, was in the making.

Both collections included plates of individual folios from the Utrecht Psalter (ca. 830). Significantly, the Coronation Gospels, a work associated directly with the court of Charlemagne, was not selected to shape art-historical narratives about the emperor and his cultural contributions.[32] Instead, the Utrecht Psalter was assigned that role (Fig. 13.3). This manuscript, with its engaging ink drawings depicting verses from the psalms, would become (and continues to be) the ubiquitous exemplar for the Carolingian era in most survey textbooks. Produced at least a generation after Charlemagne's death, this manuscript and its images would prove to be a malleable tool in the hands of art historians as they constructed a vigorous Germanic or Teutonic vision of Charlemagne and the Carolingian era for American university students and interested readers.

28 It is unclear to what extent Morey's selection of images was shaped by the desire to generate a specific canon of Carolingian works or if his choices may have been influenced by the photographs available for reproduction in the publisher's catalog. Morey's original set included images of the Utrecht Psalter (ca. 830), the Vivian Bible (ca. 845), and the Sacramentary of Metz (ca. 870). A later version added the Gospel Lectionary of Godescalc (781–83), the Coronation Gospels (ca. 800; identified as Byzantine), and the Lorsch Gospels (778–820).

29 Originally, there were plans for a textbook to accompany the Carnegie Set, but it was never completed. Raymond S. Stites, "Introduction," in *The Carnegie Art Reference Set for Colleges*, ed. Carnegie Corporation of New York (New York: Rudolf Lesch Fine Arts, Inc., 1939), n.p.

30 Carnegie Corporation, *Carnegie Art Reference Set*, n.p.

31 The Carnegie Set did not incorporate images from the Gospel Lectionary of Godescalc or the Sacramentary of Metz, opting instead for one from the Gospels of Saint-Médard de Soissons (early ninth century) and a second from the Utrecht Psalter.

32 Given the more focused scope of *Mediaeval Art*, it is not surprising that Morey does discuss a few manuscripts associated with Charlemagne's court.

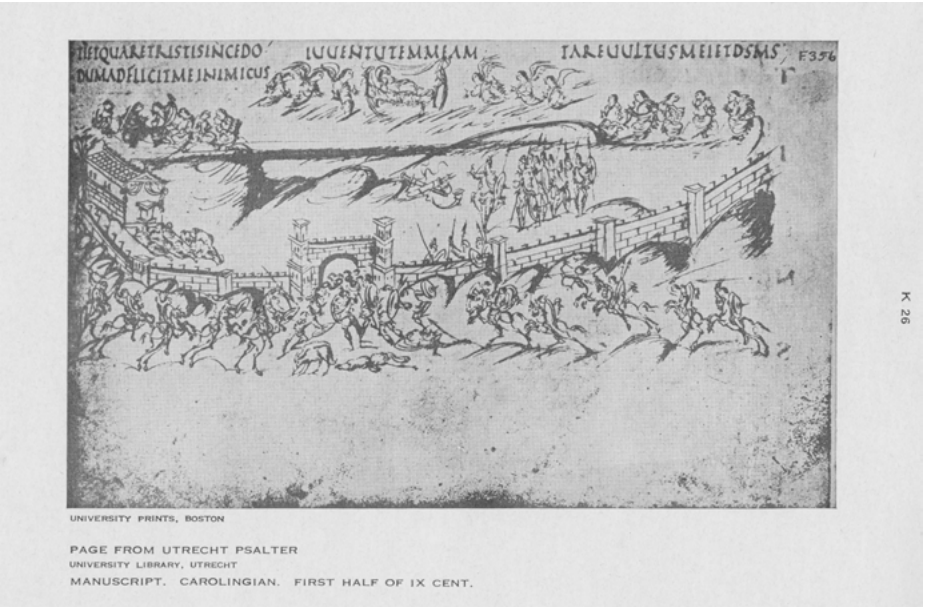

Fig. 13.3: Psalm 43 from the Utrecht Psalter illustrated in Morey, *The University Prints: Student Series K*, 1922. Photo: Author.

A Racialized History of Early Medieval Art

Today, the charged vocabulary that Gardner, Morey, and their peers applied in these early publications is jarring, especially if one is familiar with the neutral tone adopted in contemporary art history survey textbooks. In recent decades historians and art historians have nuanced their language, frequently preferring the concept of ethnicity, rather than race, when discussing issues associated with early medieval identity.[33] For Morey and his peers working in art history during the early decades of the twentieth century, employing concepts of race would have been the normative approach.[34] These early authors' descriptions of a beleaguered late antique culture reinvigorated through encounters with barbarian people from the north are indebted to several strands of ac-

33 For example, see Helmut Reimitz, *History, Frankish Identity and the Framing of Western Ethnicity, 550–850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

34 For a recent discussion of the European history and context for concepts of race in art-historical writing, see Éric Michaud, *The Barbarian Invasions: A Genealogy of the History of Art* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2019).

ademic inquiry.[35] In particular, this racialized approach relied on theories about the early Middle Ages developed by American historians and European art historians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Historians frequently adopted specific romanticized idioms to describe aspects of the early Middle Ages; these included "development" (lifted from Darwinism) and "spirit" or "consciousness" (taken from Protestant spiritualism and Hegelianism).[36] The Teutonic origins thesis was actively promoted by many, including the historian Henry Baxter Adams (1850–1901) who taught at Johns Hopkins during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. This theory argued that ancient Germanic society was not only "superior to all others," but that it had a foundational place in American identity. Adherents claimed that Germanic peoples embodied a democratic essence that had been transmitted from its origins in northern Europe to Anglo-Saxon England, and, ultimately, the United States, where it continued to flourish.[37] In the words of contemporary historians Patrick Geary and Otto Gerhard Oexle, America for many nineteenth-century academics was "the culmination of Germanic racial evolution."[38] As Gardner, Robb and Garrison, and Stites drafted the first generation of art history textbooks, the approaches followed by historians such as Adams were already decades out of favor.[39] But even as American historians were becoming leery of methods that engaged with racialized concepts, many of their colleagues in art history continued to employ these ideas and integrate them into frameworks for teaching early medieval and, especially, Carolingian art.[40] In publications intended for the non-specialist reader, discussions of the Utrecht Psalter employed racialized and nationalistic approaches while also cultivating an image of Charlemagne and Carolingian culture as essential precursors to American modernity.[41]

Gardner, Morey, and their colleagues did not identify with or subscribe to a single theoretical approach in their survey publications; they sampled a range of art-historical methods. If there was a dominant influence, it would be variations on the ideas pro-

35 Éric Michaud, "Barbarian Invasions and the Racialization of Art History," *October* 139 (2012): 59–76, at 60.

36 Robin Fleming, "Picturesque History and the Medieval in Nineteenth-Century America," *American Historical Review* 100, no. 4 (1995): 1061–95, at 1078. For elaboration on these concepts in relation to the era around 1900, see T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880–1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981) and Michael D. Clark, *The American Discovery of Tradition 1865–1942* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005).

37 Fleming, "Picturesque," 1078.

38 Patrick Geary and Otto Gerhard Oexle, *Medieval Germany in America* (Washington, D.C.: German Historical Institute, 1996), 22.

39 Gabrielle Spiegel, *The Past as Text and the Practice of Medieval Historiography* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 66.

40 Thomas Crow, "The Practice of Art History in America," *Daedalus* 135, no. 2 (2006): 70–90, at 75.

41 The Utrecht Psalter became central to the canon of medieval art during this era. An examination of how it came to play such a key role would be a welcome addition to the scholarship on Carolingian manuscripts

posed by the art historians associated with the Vienna School, especially Josef Strzygowski (1862–1941).[42] Today, his early publications are being revisited with a recognition of his importance to the emergence of comparative art history and to the examination of the arts with a global perspective.[43] In the 1920s, he spent considerable time in the United States working as an academic, but also cultivating a sizeable public following.[44] For Morey and the authors of the survey texts, the attraction to Strzygowski's ideas lay in his focus on the visual aspects of northern art and how best to align its formal elements with often-racialized characterizations such as barbarian, Teutonic, and Germanic.[45] This mode of inquiry aligned with Morey's generalized approach, in which style could be mapped to reveal successive interrelationships between all manner of social identifiers including culture, race, and nationality.[46] This method was, in turn, employed by Morey's colleagues in their survey textbooks and proved especially useful for aligning the drawings in the Utrecht Psalter with the authors' construction of Charlemagne and the Carolingian era.

Given the centrality of this manuscript as an exemplar, the range of folios that were selected to represent the Utrecht Psalter is telling; each author employed a different image.[47] It was as though any composition from the manuscript could fulfill the task of conveying key facets of expression, dynamism between forces, and artistic development. Although the authors identified formal and iconographic elements, often tracing them to Mediterranean and late antique antecedents, they also consistently stressed how the images manifested qualities specific to cultural spirit. In their introduction to Carolingian manuscript painting, Robb and Garrison explained that the Utrecht Psalter was an "outstanding example" of how the early medieval artist's "basic intent" was "to give expression to the ideal of vital force which was the Teutonic contribution to the background out of which grew the culture of the Middle

42 Sears, "Iconography," 14.

43 Guido Tigler, "Circolazione di modelli artistici: l'incontro tra l'arte classica del bacino del Mediterraneo con le arti delle civiltà dell'Oriente e quelle dei 'barbari' del Nord germanico nelle teorie della Scuola di Vienna," in *Le vie della comunicazione nel medioevo: Livelli, soggetti e spazi d'intervento nei cambiamenti sociali e politici*, ed. Marialuisa Bottazzi, Paolo Buffo, and Caterina Ciccopiedi, (Trieste: Centro Europeo Ricerche Medievale, 2019): 101–59, at 158.

44 Christopher S. Wood, "Strzygowski and Riegl in America," *Journal of Art Historiography* 17 (2017): 1–19, at 4; William J. Diebold, "Baby or Bathwater? Josef Strzygowski's 'Ruins of Tombs of the Latin Kings on the Haram in Jerusalem' (1936) and its Reception," in *Orient oder Rom? History and Reception of a Historiographical Myth (1901–1970)*, ed. Ivan Foletti and Francisco Lovino (Rome: Viella, 2018), 65–82, at 66–70.

45 Margaret Olin, "Art History and Ideology: Alois Riegl and Joseph Strzygowski," in *Cultural Visions: Essays in Honor of the History of Culture*, ed. Penny Schine Gold and Benjamin Sax (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000): 151–70, at 164.

46 Sears, "Iconography," 15.

47 Morey reproduced the plate depicting Psalm 43 from his *Series K* and added a new drawing copied from a photograph of Psalm 11 (see Fig. 13.4); Robb and Garrison used the image for Psalm 74; Stites opted for a photograph of Psalm 150.

Ages."[48] Later in their discussion of the image they had chosen from the manuscript, the authors connected the personifications of summer and winter and the depiction of facial features to earlier Hellenistic and late antique models, but rapidly transitioned back to a discussion of spirit, stating "the purpose of the artist was not the suggestion of form in space but the expression of dynamic force by the intrinsic vivacity of linear movement."[49] With this approach, the authors effectively bracketed the visual analysis between two discussions of dynamic force, reinforcing that a Germanic heritage was perceptible in the composition and connecting the visual elements to a moment of cultural change.

The lack of uniformity in image selection sometimes led to conflicting opinions. For his part, Stites made the opposite claim to that of Robb and Garrison, stating that the Mediterranean tradition was visually dominant in the Utrecht Psalter and suggesting that the folio revealed "the first step in taming the northern spirit by the classical southern ideals of form."[50] While these brief examples demonstrate the malleability of the Utrecht Psalter to support varied interpretations, it is important that, even when the authors disagreed as to which cultural force was in the ascendant, they employed identical methods of evaluation to make their point. Each author relied on the analysis of formal elements to reveal some aspect of the racial or ethnic spirit.

Morey's discussion of the Utrecht Psalter was the most comprehensive, and stressed two facets of artistic modernity: realism and expressionism. In his evaluation, these two concepts were interconnected. His application of realism referred to the representation of everyday elements that conveyed a sense of reality, noting that "the style is also the beginning of European realism: for the first time a Christian theme is couched in really concrete terms, and the illustrator is at one with the infinitudes that it implies."[51] Expressionism for him characterized the manner in which the images were executed, including line quality, and also their compositional structure, which he described as "utterly without symmetry or rhythm . . . spreading beyond the bounds that limited archetypal illustration, and held together solely by an intense animation."[52] In his summary of the manuscript's visual elements, Morey claimed that "such powerful expression of the barbarian genius could not fail to supplant the earlier Carolingian passive assimilation of the antique."[53] His assertions connecting the Utrecht Psalter to the modern were reinforced by the unusual approach to illustrations used in *Mediaeval Art*. The volume included many photographic im-

48 Robb and Garrison, *Art of the Western World*, 461.
49 Robb and Garrison, *Art of the Western World*, 462.
50 Stites, *The Arts and Man*, 376.
51 Morey, *Mediaeval Art*, 206.
52 Morey, *Mediaeval Art*, 206
53 Morey, *Mediaeval Art*, 206.

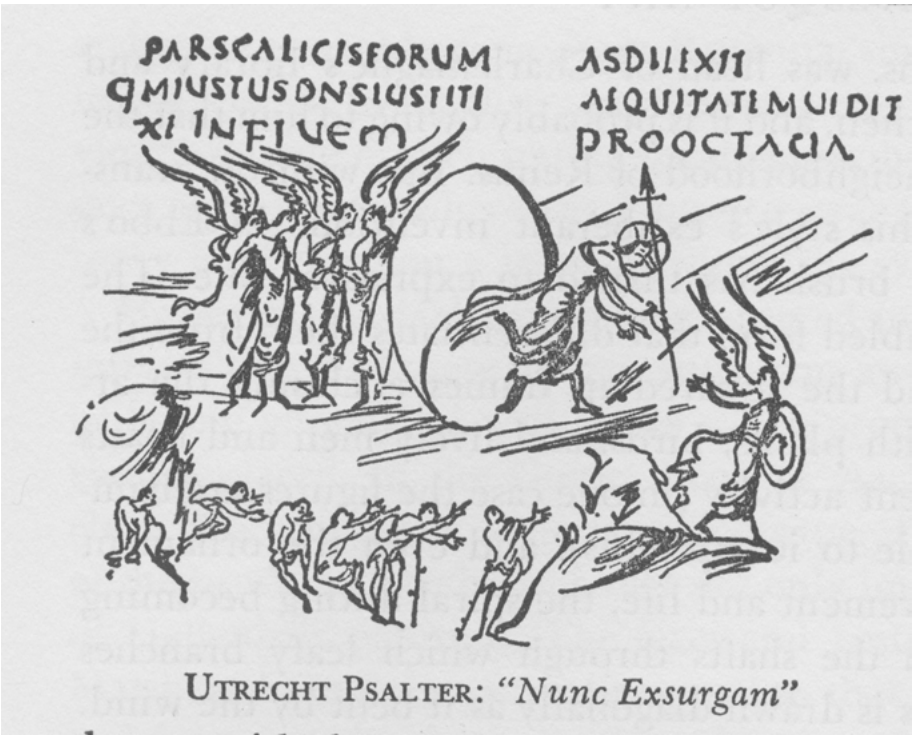

Fig. 13.4: Drawing after a detail of the original image for Psalm 11 from the Utrecht Psalter as illustrated in Morey, *Mediaeval Art*, 1942. Photo: Author.

ages, but also incorporated over 160 line drawings made from photographs of the original medieval works that Morey discussed in the publication.[54]

One of these copied images accompanied his analysis of the Utrecht Psalter: a vignette depicting a portion of the illustration for Psalm 11 (Fig. 13.4). In this drawing, copied after the manuscript's original half-page image, Christ, the angels, and standing figures have been greatly simplified and rendered using heavy contour lines. The result is a visual aesthetic that more closely resembles a modern *New Yorker* cartoon instead of capturing the delicate, feathery quality of the drawings that is characteristic of the images in the original manuscript (Fig. 13.5). The Carolingian original employed contour lines, but they vary from lightweight to heavy, observable in the depictions of the figures and small plants that dot the hilltop. The modern associations reinforced by the drawings commissioned by Morey and the publishers for *Mediaeval Art* also found their way into his descriptive analysis of the Utrecht Psalter's images. In his overview of the manuscript, Morey explained that "The formulae employed by the

54 Conant, "Review," 366.

Fig. 13.5: Psalm 11 from the Utrecht Psalter, Utrecht, Utrecht University Library, Ms. 32, fol. 6v. Photo: Utrecht University Library.

Psalter's draftsmen may be basically Greek; their use was new and Frankish. All of the antique reserve disappears in a wave of expressionism; for the first time in European art the artist *feels* as well as *sees* his subject."[55] Morey, along with his colleagues Robb and Garrison, effectively located the modern concept of the sympathetic artist in the Carolingian past (Fig. 13.5).

A Middlebrow Early Middle Ages

Historiographic examinations of art history, including this one, often center on the networks and publications of scholars working at elite institutions. The first generation of survey texts helped expand art-historical studies in higher education and prioritized narratives about Charlemagne that presented him and his immediate successors as champions of progress. Outside of formal educational settings, the American cultural ambient also stressed the informal study of the visual arts as an improving activity

55 Morey, *Mediaeval Art*, 204–5; emphasis Morey.

with cultural, social, and even patriotic ramifications.[56] During the Progressive Era, middle-class readers were encouraged to learn from studying the arts. Late nineteenth-century publications such as those by Clara Waters cultivated the study of art history as a leisure activity, advocated for travel as well as visits to art museums, and, in turn, built a culture to support those institutions.[57] The role of the arts as personal enrichment was not limited to those with the means to travel. Notably, social reformers strategically distributed black-and-white reproductions of famous works in European museum collections to people living in tenement neighborhoods in hopes of fostering an appreciation for fine art instead of more accessible (and brightly colored) commercial images.[58] The impetus was to improve the taste, and presumably the lives, of working-class Americans. These efforts at cultural awareness were often stymied by individuals who preferred to maintain their own standards, rather than adopt the preferences imposed by the reformers.[59] Within these domestic practices of individual and cultural improvement, Charlemagne had a remarkable role to play.

Art historians' characterizations of the emperor as an early medieval precursor of modernity were not limited to the university environment. In the first decades of the twentieth century, his image and biography were deployed in publications and media with a frequency that clearly expected people living in the United States to have at the minimum a basic familiarity with the monarch. American popular culture from the interwar years shared with academic culture an enthusiasm for Charlemagne as an exemplar of American values. For example, in 1924, Thomas Bullfinch's *Legends of Charlemagne*, based on the twelfth-century *Song of Roland*, was issued in a version for young readers. Featuring several full-color illustrations by the painter N. C. Wyeth, this commission was typical for the artist who had previously illustrated adventure novels such as James Fenimore Cooper's *The Deerslayer* and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Wyeth was also known for his depictions of medieval topics including Robin Hood and King Arthur.

In the *Legends of Charlemagne*, most of the images portrayed scenes with young knights, but for the title page Wyeth depicted Charlemagne as an intense, blonde, blue-eyed, aging warrior (Fig. 13.6). Wearing (what was wrongly believed to be) his imperial crown, and holding his sword, the monarch presents the pommel and grip in a cross-like fashion.[60] The "portrait" is surrounded by an elaborate gold frame deco-

56 Jaffee, "'Gardner' Variety Formalism," 210.

57 Amy M. Von Lintel, "Clara Waters and the Popular Audiences for Art History in Nineteenth-Century America," *The Princeton University Library Chronicle* 75, no. 1 (2013): 38–64, at 48–49.

58 Katharine Martinez, "At Home with Mona Lisa: Consumer and Commercial Visual Culture, 1880–1920," in *Seeing High & Low: Representing Social Conflict in American Culture*, ed. Patricia Johnston (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006): 160–76, at 166.

59 Martinez, "At Home with Mona Lisa," 173.

60 For more on this crown in the first half of the twentieth century, see the Introduction to this volume.

Fig. 13.6: N. C. Wyeth, *Charlemagne*, from Bullfinch, *Legends of Charlemagne*, 1924.
Photo: Author.

Fig. 13.7: Albrecht Dürer, *Charlemagne*, engraving from Russell, *Charlemagne: First of the Moderns*, 1930. Photo: iStock.com ZU_09.

Fig. 13.8: Trading card with Charlemagne, Ogden's Tobacco Company, 1924. New York Public Library, George Arents Collection. Photo: New York Public Library.

rated with cabochon gemstones; clearly inspired by early medieval reliquaries, it reinforces the imposing characterization. The origins of Wyeth's depiction ultimately go back to Albrecht Dürer's historicizing portrait of 1512 for the Nuremberg Treasury.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, engravings of this painting were regularly reprinted in American trade publications such as historical biographies and in books for young readers (Fig. 13.7).[61] Alternately, the American artist may have based his illustration on mechanically reproduced commercial images such as a trading card from the *Leaders of Men* series printed for Ogden's Tobacco Company in 1924 (Fig. 13.8).[62] Charlemagne's significance as a cultural model and moral guide was reiterated in the preface to Bullfinch's book. Cultivating a familiarity with

61 Examples include Charles Edward Russell, *Charlemagne: First of the Moderns* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1930), n.p. and John H. Haaren and A. B. Poland, *Famous Men of the Middle Ages* (New York: American Book Company, 1904), 110.

62 For an analysis of French and German depictions of Charlemagne in scholastic and commercial publications, see Bernhard Jussen, "Between Ideology and Technology: Charlemagne in Modern

tales about him and the early Middle Ages was promoted as a meaningful endeavor, for "a young person will more frequently need an acquaintance with the creations of fancy than with the discoveries of science or the speculations of philosophy."[63] Taking the message a step further, the author then assured the reader of the culturally improving nature of the text by explaining that "some knowledge of these things is expected of every well-educated young person."[64]

The potential for this book to shape American youth extended beyond leisure reading into the library and schoolroom. The 1922 edition of *The Legends of Charlemagne* was included on lists of books approved by librarians and professors, who confidently affirmed that this literature could be placed in the hands of young readers to ensure that "taste is cultivated, . . . manners corrected, . . . knowledge broadened."[65] In 1933, the state curriculum for Minnesota recommended Wyeth's edition as a reference for a history unit titled "Hero Stories of the Nations." The report explained "that pupils should be *naturally* interested in the heroes of the countries from which their parents or ancestors came."[66] Students could create pageants from lists of illustrious figures from European and American history such as Charlemagne, George Washington, and Abraham Lincoln. Possible themes included a "Dramatization of a gathering of heroes in an international Valhalla" or a "Presentation of claims to place in a hall of fame a favorite hero."[67] Clearly, Charlemagne's benefit to American youth extended beyond the acquisition of facts about his life and reign. Such exercises presented these heroes, including the Carolingian emperor, as having a natural affiliation with American students, who presumably could connect with a specific ethnic heritage or be ready to immerse themselves into the narrative arc of European history. Charlemagne thus became an exemplar to be performed in the company of American historical figures in order to promote the imagined continuity between a heroic early medieval Germanic past and its manifestation in modern America.

In addition to providing a model for American youth, Charlemagne was employed in marketing campaigns aimed at American men in the early decades of the twentieth century. As in the schoolroom lessons, the ruler was characterized as worthy of admiration and emulation. This tactic followed trends in advertising of the time as companies, seeking Depression-era consumers, shifted their messaging toward themes that

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Times" in *The Making of Medieval History*, ed. Graham A. Loud and Martial Staub (Rochester: Boydell Press, 2017): 126–62.

63 Thomas Bullfinch, *Legends of Charlemagne* (New York: Cosmopolitan Book Publishers Corp., 1924), v.

64 Bullfinch, *Legends*, vi.

65 "One Hundred Story Books for Children Between the Ages of Eight and Fourteen," *The Bookman: A Review of Books and Life*, 56, no. 3 (November 1922): 366–67, at 366.

66 *Curriculum for Seventh and Eighth Grades in the Ungraded Elementary Schools* (St. Paul: Minnesota Department of Education, 1933), 168; emphasis mine.

67 *Curriculum*, 168.

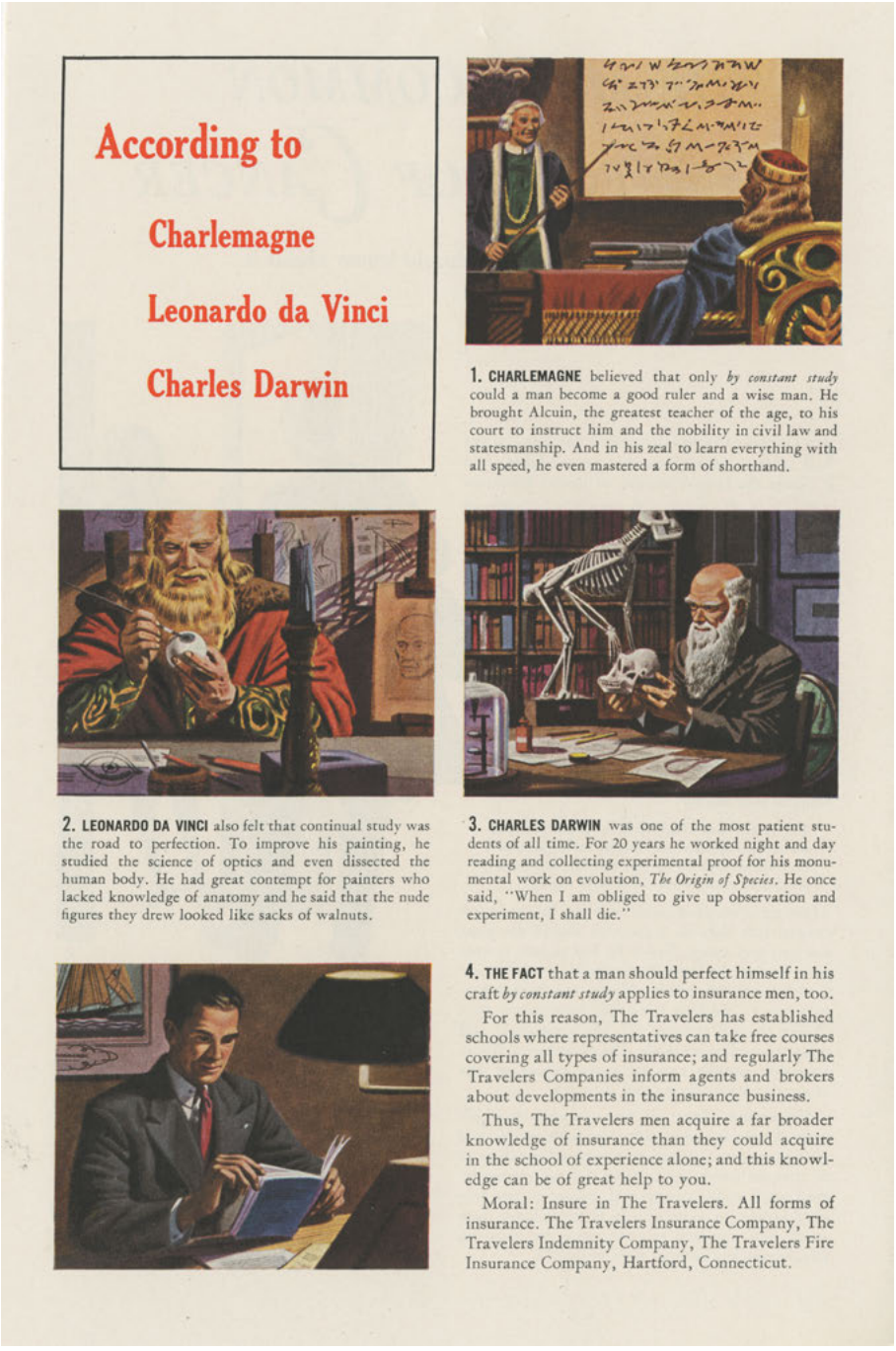

Fig. 13.9: Travelers Insurance advertisement, 1940. Photo: Author.

stressed the importance of purchasing goods focused on self-improvement.[68] In just such a campaign for Travelers Insurance, the Holy Roman Emperor was enlisted as a precursor to and a model for the modern insurance salesman (Fig. 13.9). Printed in 1940, the first image in this multipanel spread depicted a golden-haired king seated on his throne and attentively listening by candlelight to a lecture delivered by Alcuin. The tutor, dressed in quasi-Renaissance garments, holds a modern pointer in front of a teaching chart covered with script. The text box below informed the reader that "CHARLEMAGNE believed that only *by constant study* could a man become a good ruler and wise man," noting that the monarch had Alcuin instruct "him and the nobility in civil law and statesmanship." The section's closing sentence asserted that "in his zeal to learn everything with all speed, he even mastered a form of shorthand." Subsequent panels depicted the innovative thinkers Leonardo da Vinci and Charles Darwin directing their energies toward careful study. The concluding image showed an insurance agent dressed in suit and tie seated at a desk under a reading lamp. King of his own castle, self-reliant and diligently studying, the salesman updates his command of policy to improve his business acumen. The text informed the reader that this industriousness is expected, noting that "THE FACT that a man should perfect himself in his craft *by constant study* applies to insurance men. too." Later in the passage the reader is reminded, "Thus, The [sic] Travelers men acquire a far broader knowledge of insurance than they could acquire in the school of experience alone; and this knowledge can be of great help to you." The visual sequence is deliberate; the warring monarch, tempered with tutoring from an English cleric, is the early medieval counterpart to the modern American salesman whose balance of lived experience with rigorous study is a recipe for the American dream.

Charlemagne was also used in advertisements that capitalized on associations with his military leadership. In 1937, he was the focus of a national print campaign for Anheuser-Busch's Budweiser beer (Fig. 13.10).[69] This image had wide distribution in newspapers and magazines, including a full-page reproduction in *LIFE*, one of the most popular weekly news, photo, and culture publications in the United States at the time.[70] That same year, members of the American Legion and veterans of World War I would have seen the advertisement in the program for their national convention held in New York City.[71] Oliphant raised, Charlemagne rallies his armor-clad warriors and the band advances, following several hounds. This detailed, if confusing, scene simultaneously evokes all manner of masculine pursuits such as a hunting party, military skirmish, and chivalric tournament. The accompanying text also blends genres,

68 Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity 1920–1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 87.

69 *LIFE*, 25 October 1937, 12.

70 Erika Doss, "Introduction," in *Looking at LIFE Magazine*, ed. Doss (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001): 1–24, at 2.

71 *New York National Guardsman*, September 1937, n.p.

Fig. 13.10: Budweiser advertisement from *LIFE*, 25 October 1937. Photo: Author.

pairing an anecdote from the monarch's biography with modern consumerism. The headline declared, "He took his brewery with him!" and a banner below the image invited the customer to take a taste test. After drinking Budweiser, "a sweet beer" will be unpalatable. A short paragraph explained that Charlemagne's exacting taste for a

quality beer prompted him to bring the royal brew master along when expanding his empire. Combined, the visual and textual characterizations reinforce a heroic expansionist role for Charlemagne as enforcer of cultural cohesion, while positioning the emperor as a man of discerning taste.

These images do not share a visual aesthetic with the arts of the early Middle Ages, but they do share an ideological imperative with the characterizations of early medieval art employed by Morey and his peers. The portrayals of Charlemagne in these popular works integrate text and image to portray the monarch as one who harnessed the power of a Germanic spirit through education and moderation as a model for American success. Deeply embedded in the American imagination, this characterization also was used by academics as they situated the Carolingian era as pivotal to changes in medieval European culture and as instrumental to modernity. Morey expressed this sentiment directly in the introduction to *Mediaeval Art*, writing that the art of the Middle Ages "added to the antique inheritance, and passed on to modern times."[72]

This trajectory that situated medieval art as a direct precursor to the early twentieth century was shared with a popular culture that positioned Charlemagne as a figure of rational discernment and a predecessor for modern America. Whether through formal education, independent learning, or at leisure, twentieth-century Americans consumed the early Middle Ages as a potent form of cultural currency.[73] The model proved flexible; it could be applied to the aspiring student of art history, the youthful reader who benefitted from reading about and performing a heroic early Middle Ages, the insurance salesman hoping for professional success and his next gray flannel suit, or the modern drinker giving careful thought to the selection of a quality beer.

Return to the Present

In a world of digitized books, the publications by Morey and his peers never really disappear. Their messages of Germanic and Teutonic power find new readers in the digital realm accessed, fully or in part, through web repositories such as the Internet Archive. This multimedia digitized library states that its mission is to provide "Universal Access to all Knowledge."[74] In addition to current publications, digitized versions of Morey's *Mediaeval Art* are available there, as are numerous editions of Gardner

72 Morey, *Mediaeval Art*, 17.

73 Although it focuses on the role of Merovingian history in early American society, Gregory I. Halfond's recent book employs an integrative approach similar to mine. See especially his chapter "Schoolbooks and the Teaching of Merovingian History" in *Writing About the Merovingians in the Early United States* (York: Arc Humanities Press, 2023).

74 "About the Internet Archive," Internet Archive, https://archive.org/about/.

and the now unfamiliar survey textbooks by Robb and Garrison, Cheney, and Stites. In the virtual environment, racialized language, such as that about the Germanic spirit, lives on, decontextualized and present for readers who may not be aware of, or who choose to perpetuate, the charged legacy of these approaches.

Digitized mass-market publications are also available in the sphere of educational projects such as the Heritage History website. The welcome page identifies its audience as "History Lovers and Homeschoolers."[75] The organization presents its mission as a counterpoint for and in opposition to Social Studies or, in their terms, "analytical or critical" approaches used in the contemporary public-school classroom. It asserts that the purpose is not political but to alleviate boredom and revive the role of narrative history with a focus on the study of heroes.[76] On the website, one encounters language that lithely slips between promotion of hero narratives coded to spark young people's enthusiasm and curricular structures that divide pre- and early modern history into Christian Europe, the British Middle Ages, and Spanish Europe.[77] The site's library contains no fewer than eleven digitized books for young people published between 1910 and 1925 that reinforce tropes of Charlemagne as the wise, barbarian king. Bullfinch's text is not among them, but other volumes, such as George P. Upton's 1910 translation of Ferdinand Schmidt's *Charlemagne*, used a similar approach. The translator's preface for the American edition sounds all too familiar; not only did the emperor pursue his life with "activity and energy," he was an excellent administrator, noble and wise. "As one of the most conspicuous figures in history, the events of his life as narrated in this volume deserve careful study at the hands of youth."[78] The website and its content makes virtually present, *here and now*, the essentializing lens that informed the 1930s approaches used in *Mediaeval Art*, the survey texts, and product advertisements.

When considering the afterlives of these early publications, it is wise to remember that the authors, including Morey and his students, who established the canon for early medieval art, are distanced from our era by only one, or at most two, generations. Their approaches still echo in recent editions of *Gardner's Art through the Ages*, now edited by Fred Kleiner. In its sixteenth edition, the contemporary presentation of the Utrecht Psalter is representative of the enduring legacy of the treatments employed in earlier survey textbooks. The author's discussion includes welcome additions that address the role of materials and the challenges posed by the word-image relationship in the manuscript.[79] These are all important points of context, but a close reading of the

75 Heritage History, https://www.heritage-history.com/index.php.

76 "The Heritage History Mission," Heritage History, https://www.heritage-history.com/index.php?c=library&s=info-dir&f=history_mission.

77 "Heritage History Mission."

78 George P. Upton, *Charlemagne* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1910), vi.

79 Fred S. Kleiner, *Gardner's Art through the Ages: A Global History*, 16th edition (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2020), 331.

Gardner's text reveals descriptive language that should give the reader pause. A rich, clear, color image of the illustration for Psalm 43 has replaced the grimy plate of the same drawing that Morey used in his original *Series K* for University Prints and in *Mediaeval Art* (see Fig. 13.3). The accompanying text explains that the figures "move and gesticulate with nervous energy." In the elaboration on the image for Psalm 23, the author notes that the scene is "brought to life by the nervous energy of the figures and the landscape setting that seems also to be in constant movement."[80] These descriptions are a disconcerting point of continuity with the language employed in the early corpus of survey textbooks. Later, when comparing the Psalter's illustrations to those in the Ebbo Gospels (ca. 825), the author repeats the emotive characterizations of human figures and even the landscape stating: "The bodies of the Utrecht Psalter figures are tense, with shoulders hunched and heads thrust forward. As in the Ebbo Gospels, even the earth heaves up around the figures."[81] The repeated use of the words *nervous* and *energy* relies upon the early discussions by Gardner, Morey, Robb and Garrison, and Stites. The language of spirited energy persists, even as the racialized modifiers of Germanic and Teutonic have been stripped away. The methodological approaches used by the early twentieth-century authors continue to define how the drawings in the Utrecht Psalter are communicated to readers. Are these figures depicted as if they possess nervous energy? Why not curiosity, contemplation, or awe? The historic and contemporary descriptions of the images in Utrecht Psalter prompt reconsideration of art-historical language and its legacies. At first glance, the phrases appear standardized, even neutral, but closer examination of the context for their original use reveals the charged history of those conventions.

Returning to the 1942 advertisement and its summary, what can this decades-old volume tell us about approaching early medieval art in the current moment? Morey and his publisher claimed that "MEDIAEVAL ART traces the changes in politics, society, and thought that parallel these developments," a promise that holds true if one situates Morey's American vision of the early Middle Ages within its broader cultural context. That same vision also was broadly disseminated by Gardner, Robb and Garrison, Cheney, and Stites. *As scholars and educators, it is incumbent upon us to do more than* replace older approaches with new and presumably improved ones. Instead, we must grapple responsibly with art history's place in the complicated narratives of American culture building. Our predecessors' efforts in shaping medieval art history for students and general readers were not isolated to academic pursuits; these art-historical publications shared ideologies with popular culture visions of a particular modern American identity that, however surprisingly, was securely tethered to a Carolingian past.

80 Kleiner, *Gardner's*, 332.

81 Kleiner, *Gardner's*, 332.