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# A Light on Europe. The International and Intermedial Trajectory of a Medieval Chandelier at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century

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## Abstract

This article investigates the shaping of European visual culture by tracing the international and intermedial trajectory of the visual motive of a chandelier from a 15th-century Burgundian manuscript in the decades around 1800. Passing from Brussels, Paris, Lyon, Mannheim, and Vienna to Coburg, and moving from illumination to drawing, archaeological illustration, painting, engraving to the applied arts, its trajectory exemplifies the historical conditions and cultural phenomena that animated the formation of a European visual culture, at a time when historical and national consciousness were developing on the continent.

## Résumé

Cet article étudie la formation de la culture visuelle européenne en retraçant la trajectoire internationale et intermédiaire d'un motif visuel de lustre, issu d'un manuscrit bourguignon du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle, dans les décennies autour de 1800. Circulant de Bruxelles, Paris, Lyon, Mannheim et Vienne à Cobourg, et passant de l'enluminure au dessin, à l'illustration archéologique, à la peinture, à la gravure et aux arts appliqués, cette trajectoire illustre les phénomènes et conditions historiques qui ont animé la culture visuelle européenne, à l'époque où la prise de conscience historique et nationale se développent sur le continent.

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It is a well-known fact that the things we nowadays associate with ‘national culture’ or ‘national past’ are the products of processes of nation-building that emerged between the late eighteenth and the early twentieth century. The ground-breaking work of Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, and Eric Hobsbawm has, since the 1980s, laid bare the constructed nature of modern nation-states.<sup>1</sup> As national communities were being imagined, following Anderson’s dictum, so were their cultural and artistic identities and the heroic myths of their long but inevitable coming into being.<sup>2</sup> National identities, thus, are not quite as old, authentic, and self-evident as was long assumed, and what is more: they are not properly *national*. As Anne-Marie Thiesse has convincingly shown for the case of Europe, they are the result of a long process of intense cross-border circulation, exchange, and (re-) appropriation. There is, indeed, “nothing more international than the shaping of national identities.”<sup>3</sup> Although this is common knowledge nowadays, we still have much to learn about the actual functioning of this process and about the many ways in which it shaped the world around us.<sup>4</sup> Much information is hiding in details, in places where we do not necessarily think to look, scattered across Europe, and evident in objects of all sorts.

In the following pages, I propose to shed light on some aspects of this phenomenon by following the wanderings of a little hexagonal chandelier painted by the miniaturist Loyset Liédet (ca. 1420–after 1484). It appears in a miniature representing the Carthaginian general Hannibal dining in the city of Capua (Fig. 1), one of fifty-five decorating the two-volume manuscript of Jean Mansel’s *Histoires romaines*, now kept in the Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal in Paris.<sup>5</sup> At the time of the execution of the manuscript

and its illuminations, both Mansel and Liédet were residing in Hesdin, a town in the north of France, then part of the Duchy of Burgundy.<sup>6</sup> The commissioner of the work was none other than Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, by whom Liédet was paid for the miniatures in 1460.<sup>7</sup> The manuscript then entered the ducal library in Brussels, where it was kept for centuries.

In all those years, the chandelier seems to have remained in its place, quietly on its parchment page. Around 1800, however, the discreet, seemingly insignificant visual motif of the hexagonal chandelier got on the move. It started to migrate and mutate between media and between cultural spheres, integrating new local and ‘national’ contexts along the way. What contributed to this sudden ‘awakening’? How did the motif circulate, and where did it go? Tracing its trail, we catch a glimpse of the very mechanics of European visual culture at a time when historical consciousness and cultural nationalism were getting a foothold on the continent.

## Antiquarianism and the Discovery of the French National Past

In Brussels, the two volumes of Mansel’s *Histoires romaines* were surely destined to become one of the highlights of the recently opened KBR museum, celebrating the library of the Dukes of Burgundy as a Belgian “national treasure.”<sup>8</sup> In the middle of the eighteenth century, however, as French troops sieged the city of Brussels, the manuscript was taken to France. The French minister of War, Marc-Pierre de Voyer de Paulmy, Count of Argenson (1696–1764), took the manuscript with him to Paris, along with other treasures from the ducal library. Upon his death, the manuscript was acquired by his nephew, the

<sup>1</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalisms* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983); Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> See: Anne-Marie Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales. Europe XVIII<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1999); Joep Leerssen, *National Thought in Europe: A Cultural History* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales*, 11.

<sup>4</sup> An ambitious initiative that aims to map this process is the *Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe* (ERNIE), edited by Joep Leerssen and curated by the Study Platform on Interlocking Nationalisms at the Universiteit van Amsterdam. *Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe*, ed. Joep Leerssen, [ernie.uva.nl](http://ernie.uva.nl).

<sup>5</sup> Ms-5087 and 5088. Five miniatures at the end of the second volume (Ms-5088) are nowadays attributed to the Rambures Master, the rest to Liédet. François Avril and Nicole Reynaud, *Les manuscrits à peintures en France 1440-1520* (Paris: Flammarion/

Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1998), 93-94, no. 44; Thomas Kren and Scot McKendrick, “Loyset Liédet”, in *Illuminating the Renaissance: The Triumph of Flemish Manuscript Painting in Europe*, ed. Thomas Kren and Scot McKendrick (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2003), 230-231.

<sup>6</sup> The town referred to here was located at the place of present-day Vieil-Hesdin. It was subject of continuous fights between the French crown and the dukes of Burgundy, until it was completely destroyed by Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, in 1553.

<sup>7</sup> Avril and Reynaud, *Les manuscrits à peintures*, 93.

<sup>8</sup> “Het KBR museum: ontdek een schat die 600 jaar verborgen bleef”, Koninklijke Bibliotheek/Bibliothèque Royale, Brussels, published September 15, 2020, <https://kbr.prezly.com/het-kbr-museum-ontdek-een-schat-die-600-jaar-verborgen-bleef>.



**Figure 1.** Loyset Liédet (ca. 1420-after 1484), *Hannibal dining with Pacuvius and Perolia in Capua*, ca. 1454-60 (detail). Miniature on parchment, in Jean Mansel, *Histoires Romaines*, vol. 1. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Ms-5087, fol. 221v. Source: Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gallica.



great bibliophile Antoine-René de Voyer d'Argenson, Marquess of Paulmy (1722-1787).<sup>9</sup> In the following decades, Enlightenment and Neo-classicism set the tone in Europe. Only a limited circle of scholars and *amateurs*, like the Marquess of Paulmy, took an interest in the art and culture of the Middle Ages, of which the Burgundian manuscripts were such eloquent testimonies. By the end of the century, however, this all started to change.

Fed by a growing interest in processes of historical progress as well as by a burgeoning national

consciousness, Europe started to rediscover its medieval past. In France, where the Revolution had symbolically cut off society from its medieval—royal and Christian—roots, this phenomenon was particularly present. One of the initiatives that reflected this was the creation, in 1795, of the *Musée des monuments français*. Located in the abandoned convent of the Petits-Augustins in Paris, this museum housed sculptures, tombs, architectural fragments, stained glass windows, and other objects saved from Revolutionary vandalism.<sup>10</sup> Over the

<sup>9</sup> Avril and Reynaud, *Les manuscrits à peintures*, 94. Henri Martin, *Histoire de la bibliothèque de l'Arsenal* (Paris: E. Plon, Nourrit et C<sup>e</sup>, 1900), 116, 123, 126.

<sup>10</sup> Geneviève Bresc-Bautier and Béatrice de Chancel-Bardelot eds., *Un musée révolutionnaire. Le musée des Monuments français d'Alexandre Lenoir* (Paris: Hazan/Musée du Louvre, 2016).



years, the museum's curator, Alexandre Lenoir, elaborated an innovative chronological arrangement, which allowed visitors to follow the development of French art and culture from the Middle Ages to the seventeenth century. It was the first-ever museum dedicated to the history of the arts and culture of one European nation and, as such, a curiosity and a source of inspiration for others. In those same years, the ancient royal library, now called Bibliothèque nationale, was enriched with numerous manuscripts and precious books confiscated from the clergy and aristocrat *émigrés*, and soon also from prestigious foreign collections looted during the revolutionary military campaigns. Finally, the illustrious library of the Marquess of Paulmy, baptized Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, was declared 'national' and 'public' in 1797 and opened its doors to the general public one year later.<sup>11</sup>

With such splendid collections of historical objects and manuscripts easily accessible to a large public, Paris soon became a hotspot for the study of long-neglected historical source material. For a long time, the study of history had been focussed on texts, important 'names and dates,' the lives and actions of those in power, and events of great political importance. But now, the materiality of historical objects and questions from the sociocultural realm have moved to the foreground: how did people from different social classes live? What did they wear or eat? What did their houses look like? While scholars scrutinized texts and objects looking for answers, a growing number of illustrated publications assured the dissemination of this type of knowledge to the larger public. Such a publication is *Monuments français inédits* by Nicolas-Xavier Willemin (1763-1833).<sup>12</sup> The work consists of plates filled with images, which appeared at irregular intervals in issues of six plates each from 1806 onward. In 1839, after Willemin's death, his friend André Pottier edited a complete two-volume set of three hundred plates to which he added textual descriptions.

<sup>11</sup> Martin, *Histoire de la bibliothèque de l'Arsenal*, 396.

<sup>12</sup> See: Françoise Arquie-Bruley, "Les *Monuments français inédits* (1806-1839) de N.-X. Willemin et la découverte des 'Antiquités nationales,'" *RACAR: Revue d'art canadienne/Canadian Art Review* 10, no. 2 (1983), 139-156; Charlotte Denoël, "The beginnings of scholarship on early medieval book illumination (1700-1850): between classicism and ethnicity," *Journal of Art Historiography* 22 (June 2020), 1-26.

With his *Monuments français inédits*, Willemin repeated the model of his first antiquarian work, *Choix de costumes civils et militaires des peuples de l'antiquité* (Paris, 2 vols. in folio, 1798-1802). Just like the latter, the *Monuments* was conceived in the first place as a collection of visual source material for artists. But the focus now shifted from classical antiquity to the French national past. For its visual material, the publication drew largely on the treasures of the public institutions mentioned above. Willemin himself studied and copied objects and manuscripts in these collections and engraved some of the plates, but he also relied on a large team of collaborators for both the drawing and engraving of the images.<sup>13</sup>

One of the plates, entitled "Plafond et meubles du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle" and published somewhere between 1815 and 1836, reproduces furniture and architectural elements copied from Jean Mansel's *Histoires romaines* from the library of the Dukes of Burgundy.<sup>14</sup> In the middle of the plate, we find Liédet's hexagonal chandelier (Fig. 2), engraved by Willemin after a drawing by Étienne-François Imbard (1780-1830). Originally from Lyon, Imbard had gone to Paris in 1800 to study art before working as a draughtsman for Willemin, as well as for Alexandre Lenoir at the *Musée des monuments français*.<sup>15</sup>

What exactly motivated Willemin or Imbard to select this specific motif for publication is difficult to say. Pottier, in his 1839 description of the plate, describes the chandelier, together with a second one published on the same sheet, as "an interesting example of this kind of furniture, which could, either in the churches or in the rich private residences, take on shapes as elegant as they were varied," adding that "they were often called *crowns*, when, as in

<sup>13</sup> Arquie-Bruley, "Les *Monuments français inédits*," 153-154.

<sup>14</sup> Nicolas-Xavier Willemin (plates), André Pottier (text), *Monuments français inédits pour servir à l'histoire des arts depuis le VI<sup>e</sup> siècle jusqu'au commencement du XVII<sup>e</sup>*, vol. 2 (Paris: M<sup>le</sup> Willemin, 1839), plate 203. None of the plates are dated, and the present one is not mentioned in the reviews of the newly published issues in the *Magasin encyclopédique* up to 1815. After that date the press coverage of the work becomes less systematic and comprehensive. See: Arquie-Bruley, "Les *Monuments français inédits*," 155. As images from this plate are reproduced in Samuel Rush Meyrick's *Specimens of Ancient Furniture* (London: William Pickering, 1836), it must have appeared prior to this date.

<sup>15</sup> *Catalogue de tableaux, dessins, estampes, livres, curiosités chinoises et autres, instrumens de physique et the mathématiques etc.; Provenant du Cabinet du feut M. E.-F. Imbard* (Paris: M. David, 1831), vj-vij.



**Figure 2.** Nicolas-Xavier Willemin (1763-1833), after Étienne-François Imbard and Paul Turmeau, *Plafond et meubles du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle extraits de l'ancienne Bibliothèque des Ducs de Bourgogne, MSS. de Bruxelles*, s.d. In: Nicolas-Xavier Willemin and André Pottier, *Monuments français inédits*, vol. 2, Paris, 1839, plate 203. New York Public Library, the Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs. Source: New York Public Library, Digital Collections, <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e3-511a-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>.

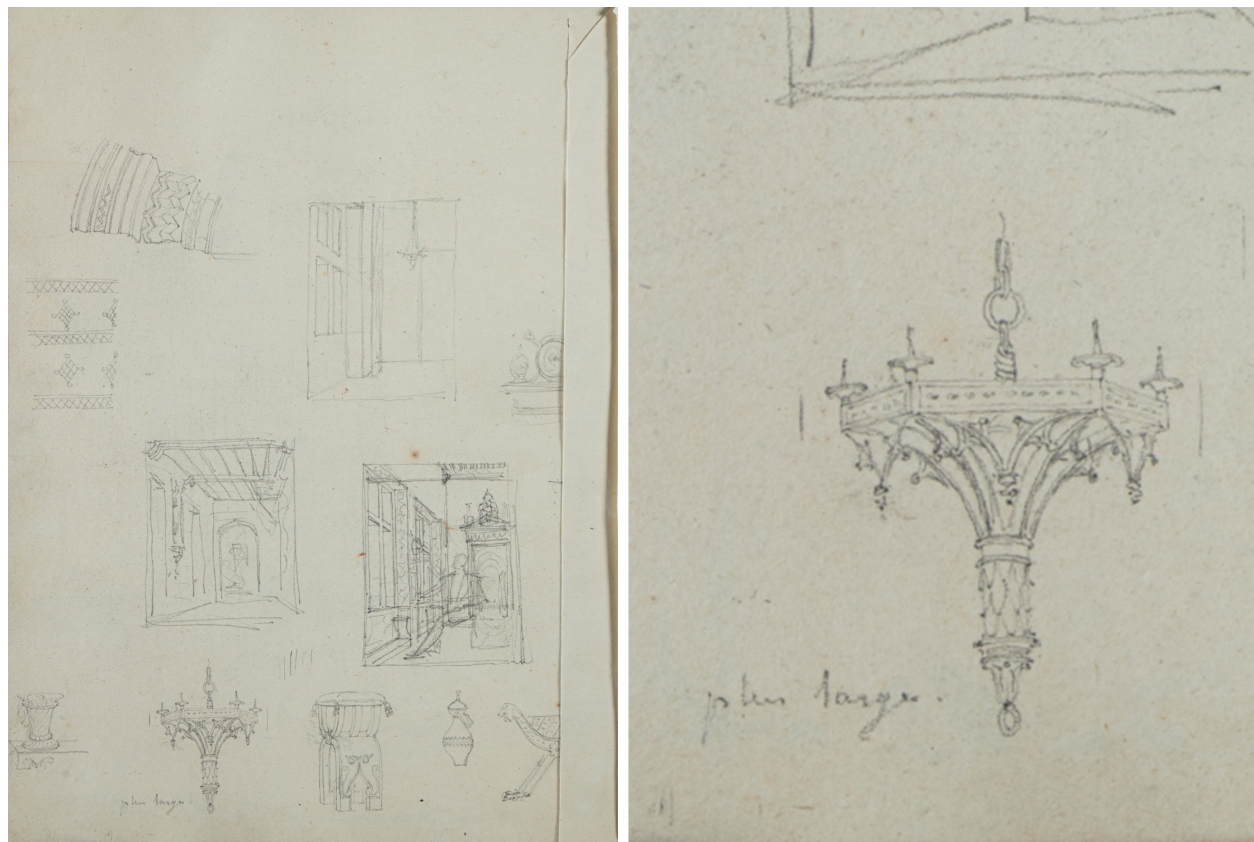
one of the examples we have before us, they came in the form of a circle surrounded by torches. Often these lamps were furnished with wax candles, and often also with cup lamps.”<sup>16</sup> On the one hand, it must have been the chandelier’s elegant form that caught the eye. On the other hand, though, by stressing repeatedly how it was “often” used, Pottier insists on its representative nature. It is presented as

<sup>16</sup> Nicolas-Xavier Willemin (plates), André Pottier (text), *Monuments français inédits pour servir à l'histoire des arts depuis le VI<sup>e</sup> siècle jusqu'au commencement du XVII<sup>e</sup>*, vol. 2 (Paris: M<sup>lle</sup> Willemin, 1839), 29: “Les deux petits lampadaires représentés sur la même planchet offrent un intéressant exemple de ce genre de meubles, qui affectaient, soit dans les églises, soit dans les riches habitations particulières, des forms aussi élégantes que variées. On leur donna souvent le nom de *couronnes*, lorsque, comme dans un des exemples que nous avons sous les yeux, ils se présentaient sous la forme d'un cercle entouré de flambeaux. Souvent ces lampadaires étaient garnis de chandelles de cire, et souvent aussi de lampes à godets.”

a typical example, informative of the living customs of the “French” fifteenth-century upper class on a broader scale.

This reading was very much in line with Willemin’s ambition to provide a useful reference work to artists representing themes and scenes from the French national past. It also echoed the double shift manifest in contemporary history painting: from the Bible and Greek and Roman history and mythology, which had long been its core sources, history painting opened up to more recent and “national” subject matter. At the same time, artists became increasingly sensitive to notions of historical correctness and *couleur locale*, expressed in the smallest detail.





**Figure 3.** Fleury Richard (1777-1851), *Page from a sketchbook*, 1804. Graphite on paper, 288 x 227 mm (entire page). Lyon, musée des Beaux-Arts, Fonds Richard, inv. 2005-90. Image © Lyon MBA – Photo Martial Couderette.

Just as the author intended, the *Monumens français inédits* became a source of inspiration for many of these artists. We should not be surprised, then, to see Liédet's golden chandelier reappear in various mid-nineteenth-century paintings set in early modern France, like *The King Francis I visiting Benvenuto Cellini at the Castle of Nesle* (1845) by Joseph-Louis Grisée or Henri Valton's *Letter to the sovereign*.<sup>17</sup> The image even circulated well beyond the French border: it was copied, for instance, together with other motifs from Willemin's work in Samuel Rush Meyrick's illustrated antiquarian book *Specimens of Ancient Furniture*, published in London between 1832 and 1836.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Joseph-Louis Grisée (1822-1867), *The King Francis I visiting Benvenuto Cellini at the Castle of Nesle*, 1845, oil on canvas, 60 x 74 cm, private collection, published in Guy Stair Sainty and Nadia Tscherny eds., *Romance & Chivalry: History and Literature Reflected in Early Nineteenth-Century French Painting* (New York, London: Matthiesen Gallery and Stair Sainty Matthiesen Inc., 1996), 160, 259, cat. 33, fig. 130; Henri Valton (1798-1878), *Letter to the sovereign*, oil on panel, 79 x 62 cm, sale SVV Thierry de Maigret, Drouot, Paris, September 22, 2017, lot 217.

<sup>18</sup> Samuel Rush Meyrick (text), Henry Shaw (images), *Specimens of Ancient Furniture Drawn from Existing Authorities* (London: William Pickering, 1836), plate XXXV, no. 3.

### Fleury Richard and the National Past in French Painting

Thanks to Willemin's *Monumens français inédits*, Liédet's little, unassuming chandelier thus started to migrate and spread, moving from a manuscript to illustrated books and paintings, and from France to other parts of Europe. But Willemin and his collaborators were not the only ones studying manuscripts and historical objects in the Parisian libraries and the *Musée des monuments français* in the early years of the nineteenth century, and possibly not even the first to discover the charm of Liédet's chandelier, for we find the same motif (Fig. 3) in a sketchbook predating Willemin's plates, belonging to the painter Fleury Richard (1777-1852). Together with his close friend and fellow townsman Pierre Révoil, Richard had come to Paris from Lyon in order to study in the workshop of Jacques-Louis David.<sup>19</sup> Although their

<sup>19</sup> On Richard and Révoil, see: Marie-Claude Chaudonneret, *Fleury Richard et Pierre Révoil. La peinture troubadour* (Paris: Arthena, 1980); Patrice Béghain and Gérard

master was the uncontested chief of French Neoclassicism, Révoil and Richard were among the first to turn to medieval and early-modern France for inspiration for their paintings instead.

In their search for visual resources for works, Richard and Révoil had an approach very similar to that of Willemin. It is even imaginable, as Marie-Claude Chaudonneret suggests, that the men worked alongside each other in the Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, or at least exchanged their findings.<sup>20</sup> Richard’s many sketchbooks give us a fascinating insight into the type of material that they were after. On one page, in a sketchbook dating from around 1802-1804, Liédet’s chandelier reappears amidst other drawings of architectural decorations and pieces of historical furniture. Richard supposedly copied it from the original manuscript but slightly altered its proportions. An added note—“plus large”—seems to indicate that the original motif was broader, as indeed it is. Like Étienne-François Imbard, who had provided the drawing of the chandelier in Willemin’s recueil, Richard adapted the size and shape of the hanging triangle traceries on each flank. But whereas Imbard added a central floral decoration, Richard chose to emphasize the gothic ‘thorny’ structure of the traceries. Both artists thus interpreted the original motif differently. It is not unimaginable, however, that the two men were aware of each other’s work. They were both living in Lyon and members of the same Masonic lodge.<sup>21</sup>

Next to the chandelier in Richard’s sketchbook, there is a small sketch of the composition of a painting. It is a preparatory drawing for *The King Francis I and his sister, Marguerite of Navarre* (Fig. 4), which Richard presented at the 1804 Paris Salon exhibition.<sup>22</sup> Represented is the French Renaissance King Francis I, as he shows his sister a witty verse he carved in the glass window of the castle

of Chambord.<sup>23</sup> The scene takes place in a richly decorated historical interior, with a familiar, golden hexagonal chandelier prominently hanging from the ceiling in the upper right corner. Upon close inspection, we see that Richard slightly altered the shape of the chandelier yet again in the final painting, making it broader, transforming the decorative dots on the frame into floral motifs, and adding more ‘thorns’ to the hanging traceries.

The painting met with public acclaim at the Paris Salon as an eloquent example of the new *genre anecdotique* painting that set the reputation of Richard and Révoil.<sup>24</sup> It tapped into a very popular vein of historical imagination which relied on great attention to detail and intimate or anecdotal representations of historical figures to bring the (national) past closer to the public than ever. In his review of Richard’s painting, the French critic Jacques-Philippe Voïart praised precisely its capacity to “transport” the public into Renaissance France. According to him, the meticulous representation of details like the golden chandelier contributed to the seductive realism of the scene.<sup>25</sup>

After the Salon exhibition of 1804, where it was bought by Empress Joséphine, the painting reappeared in public at the Salon of 1814.<sup>26</sup> In the intervening years, it was part of the small gallery of modern paintings installed in the music room of Joséphine’s *château* at Malmaison, next to the gallery of antique sculptures and old master paintings.<sup>27</sup> Despite the private nature of the residence and its galleries, these appear to have been accessible to visitors, especially when the empress was not at home.<sup>28</sup>

Bruyère, *Fleury Richard (1777-1852). Les pincesaux de la mélancolie* (Lyon: Éditions LivresEMCC, 2014).

<sup>20</sup> Chaudonneret, *Fleury Richard et Pierre Révoil*, 21-22.

<sup>21</sup> Imbard was a founding member of the local Scottish lodge of Isis, in which Richard’s close friend the architect Joseph-Jean-Pascal Gay served as Worshipful Master, and which Richard also joined as member in 1809. See: *Tableau des frères composant la R. L. d’Isis du rit écoss. philosophique* (Lyon: J.B. Kindelem, 5812 [1812]), 6, 14-15; Chaudonneret, *Fleury Richard et Pierre Révoil*, 47, 53.

<sup>22</sup> Fleury Richard, *The King Francis I and his sister, Marguerite of Navarre*, oil on panel, 78 x 66 cm, Arenenberg, Musée Napoléon, inv. 1906/7, n°541.

<sup>23</sup> “Souvent femme varie, bien fol est qui s’y fie” (Women are ever changing, one is a fool to trust them).

<sup>24</sup> On this genre of painting, see: Chaudonneret, *Fleury Richard et Pierre Révoil*; Béghain and Bruyère, *Fleury Richard*; François Pupil, *Le style troubadour, ou la nostalgie du bon vieux temps* (Nancy: Presses universitaires de Nancy, 1985); Stephen Bann and Stéphane Paccoud eds., *L’Invention du passé. Histoires de cœur et d’épée en Europe, 1802-1850* (Paris/Lyon: Hazan/Musée des beaux-arts, 2014).

<sup>25</sup> [Jacques-Philippe Voïart], *Lettres impartiales sur les expositions de l’an XIII, par un amateur* (Paris: Dentu, an VIII [1804]), 8, letter 25: “Voyez encore ce lustre doré, la transparence de ces rideaux! Cette perspective d’une longue galerie... Enfin tout appelle l’œil, le satisfait, et nous transporte véritablement au siècle de la renaissance de l’art!”

<sup>26</sup> Salon of 1804, no. 377; Salon of 1814, no. 1389.

<sup>27</sup> *Catalogue des tableaux de Sa Majesté l’impératrice Joséphine, dans la Galerie et Appartemens de son Palais de Malmaison*, Paris: Didot jeune, 1811, 25, no. 196.

<sup>28</sup> Alain Pougetoux, *La collection de peintures de l’impératrice Joséphine* (Paris: Réunion des musées Nationaux, 2003), 38-39.





**Figure 4.** Auguste Gaspard Louis Desnoyers (1779-1857), after Fleury Richard. *The King Francis I and his sister, Marguerite of Navarre*, 1817. Engraving, 604 x 272 mm (plate). Coburg, Kunstsammlungen der Veste Coburg, Print Cabinet, inv. X, folio 351, 1a. Source: Kunstsammlungen der Veste Coburg.

With Richard's painting as well as others that followed, the Burgundian chandelier was appropriated into the historical imagination of French national past, imagined through the framework of the monarchy. This is not devoid of irony, considering the eternal rivalry between the dukes of Burgundy and the French crown, of which the animosity between Francis I and Philip de Good's great-great-grandson Charles V was only the latest testimony.

The many reproductions inspired by Richard's composition attest to the popularity of the composition. The large, high-quality copper engraving made by Auguste Desnoyers in 1817 (Fig. 4) contributed to making the composition known to a broader public and probably served, in turn, as a model for other reproductions on all sorts of supports and objects.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> We find it for instance as illustration in the *Petit almanach des dames. Huitième année* (Paris: Rosa, [1817]), in an anonymous engraving published by François Janet (Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, inv. RP-P-1920-1298), on a porcelain teacup (Parisian

And, once again, we see that images travel. Desnoyers' print, for instance, reappears in England on the curious scrap-work folding screen assembled by Charles Dickens' friend William Charles Macready.<sup>30</sup> The same composition is reproduced in print in a small German literary keepsake for the year 1821.<sup>31</sup> And as early as April 1817, shortly after its publication, Desnoyers' print also reached the German city of Coburg, on the northern border of Bavaria, where Ernest III, Duke of Saxe-Coburg and Saalfeld, was preparing to get married.

manufactory, ca. 1820-1830, Rueil-Malmaison, château de Malmaison, inv. inv. MM 2002.4.1), on a porcelain vase (sold at auction at Tajan, Paris, September 21, 2007, lot 89), in a bronze pendule clock (ca. 1830-1840, Mobilier national, inv. GML-6761-000) or in the decoration of the letter "F" in the *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* by Pierre Paroussé (vol. 8, Paris: Administration du grand dictionnaire universel, 1872, 1).

<sup>30</sup> Four-leaf, folding scrap-work screen, ca. 1860, 202 x 77.5 cm each panel. Dorset, Sherborne House. See: Patrick Elliott, ed., *Cut and Paste. 400 Years of Collage* (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2019), 66-67; "Sherborne House Macready Screen", University of Kent, accessed July 15, 2022, <https://research.kent.ac.uk/macready/>.

<sup>31</sup> Engraving by Karl August Schwerdgeburth after Fleury Richard, in *Taschenbuch zum geselligen Vergnügen auf das Jahr 1822* (Leipzig: Gelditsch, Vienna: Gerold, [1821]).



## A German Duke and his Neo-Gothic Palace

Ernest III of Saxe-Coburg and Saalfeld—better known after 1826 as Ernest I of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha—was not a prolific art collector in those years, but he did collect prints. From letters and invoices kept in the ducal archives, we know that Desnoyers' print had been sent to the Duke in early April 1817 by the publishing house and print dealer Artaria and Fontaine.<sup>32</sup> Based in Mannheim, this firm regularly sent selections of new prints and books to the court in Coburg, from which the Duke retained the things he wanted. On May 22, a list of objects retained by the duke was sent back to Mannheim, and on it figured Desnoyers' print of *The King Francis I and his sister*.<sup>33</sup> The print kept today in the Print Cabinet of the Veste Coburg is probably the very sheet acquired by Ernest I in April 1817.

In these same months, the Duke oversaw the completion of the redecoration of his charming little palace of Rosenau, near Coburg. This was to become the family's summer residence, as well as the setting for the ducal wedding festivities in August 1817. It was also the place where Albert, the second son of Ernest I and Luise and future consort of the British Queen Victoria, was born in 1819. Between 1808 and 1817, Ernest I ordered the edifice, the main structure of which goes back to the early fifteenth century, to be redecorated in neo-gothic style.<sup>34</sup> Both the duke and his future wife loved the fairy tale-like recreations of medieval and chivalric culture by the popular German novelist Friedrich de la Motte-Fouqué, and their palace was made to match. The work was finished just in time for wedding festivities, which culminated in an actual knights' tournament and a ball in medieval and "old German" ("alt deutsch") dress in the elegant Marble



**Figure 5.** Joseph Ulrich Danhauser (1780-1829), Danhauser furniture factory, Vienna Neo-gothic chandelier, 1817. Gilded cherrywood and Holzbronze. Rödental near Coburg, Palace of Rosenau, Inv. R VIII 1. Source: photo by the author.

Hall on the palace's ground floor.<sup>35</sup> This Marble Hall was the *pièce de résistance* of the newly decorated palace. Opening onto the adjacent terrace, it owes its—slightly deceiving—name to the plaster imitation marble that covers the walls and columns that define the space. The hall has doors and windows with pointed arches and a white cross-vaulted ceiling covered with golden-painted decorations. Its real eye-catchers, though, are three large hexagonal chandeliers hanging from the ceiling between the columns in the central nave (Fig. 5). These were produced in Vienna by the manufactory of Joseph Ulrich Danhauser. They are also 'fake': made of gilded wood and so-called *Holzbronze*, a kind of molded wood paste that Danhauser had patented.<sup>36</sup> The order for the production of the chandeliers, including a detailed design drawing with instructions (Fig. 6), was sent from Coburg to Vienna on May 13, 1817.<sup>37</sup> Due to delivery problems, the chandeliers arrived too late for the wedding festivities, but they

<sup>32</sup> Coburg, Staatsarchiv, LA A 6648, fol. 14 recto (document dated April 11, 1817), no. 38: *François I<sup>er</sup> et sa sœur*.

<sup>33</sup> Coburg, Staatsarchiv, LA A 6648, fol. 19 recto no. 38 (first version of the list of chosen works dated May 1<sup>st</sup> 1817) and p. 21 verso, no. 38 (corrected version of the list dated May 22, 1817).

<sup>34</sup> Norbert H. Ott, "Schloß Rosenau. Vom Rittergut zur herzoglichen Sommerresidenz," *Jahrbuch der Coburger Landesstiftung* (1969), 61-154, specifically 79-92; Sabine Heym, *Ferienreich und Ritterwelt. Die Rosenau als Ort romantisch-literarischen Welterlebens* (Munich: Bayerische Schlösserverwaltung, 1996); Sabine Heym, *Schloss und Park Rosenau: Amtlicher Führer* (Munich: Bayerische Schlösserverwaltung, 2011).

<sup>35</sup> Heym, *Ferienreich und Ritterwelt*, 246; Heym, *Schloss und Park Rosenau*, 24. See for this event also: Franziska Ehrl, "Carl Alexander Heideloff und das Ritterturnier bei Schloss Rosenau im August 1817," *Kulturgut* 53(2017), 1-5.

<sup>36</sup> Lorenz Seelig, "Wiener Biedermeier in Coburg," *Alte und Moderne Kunst* 26, nos. 178/179 (1981), 7; Christian Witt-Döring and Jean Hopkinson, "A Group of Early Seat Furniture with Composition Decoration, From the Danhauser Furniture Factory," *Furniture History* 29 (1993), 148-149.

<sup>37</sup> Staatsarchiv Coburg, LA A 6641, fol. 137. Seelig, "Wiener Biedermeier in Coburg," 7, note 76.

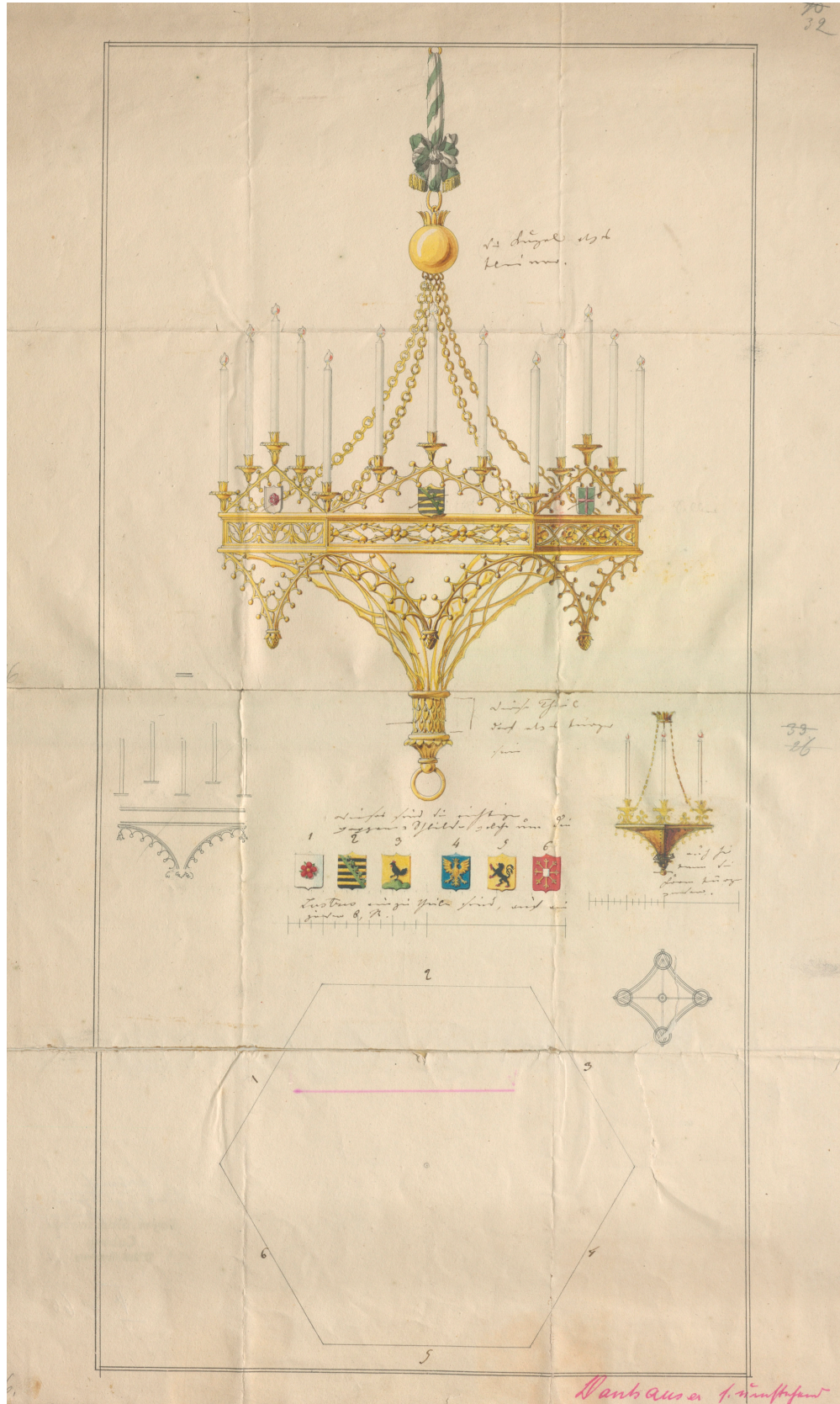


Figure 6. Design for neo-gothic chandeliers for the palace of Rosenau, 1817. Cobourg, Staatsarchiv, Plansammlung, Nr. 2491. Source: Cobourg, Staatsarchiv.



were there when, two years later, Prince Albert was baptized in the Marble Hall.<sup>38</sup>

Minor modifications and additions—like the erected triangular gables with candles—notwithstanding, the resemblance between these chandeliers and the ones we saw earlier is obvious.<sup>39</sup> More precisely, a comparison of the design with the motifs from Liédet’s miniature, Willemin’s illustrated book, and Richard’s painting suggest a close proximity to the latter. The shape of the finial, the floral decoration on the frame, and the thorny structure of the hanging tracteries all seem to indicate that the chandelier in Richard’s painting might have served as a model. It is very well possible, as I would like to argue here, that the chandeliers hanging in the Marble Hall were, in fact, inspired by Desnoyers’s print reproduction of the painting. As we have seen, Ernest I had acquired this print from Artaria and Fontaine somewhere in April or early May 1817, while the order for the chandeliers was sent to Danhauser in Vienna on May 13. The fact that the catalog of Josef Danhauser did not yet contain any neo-gothic designs at the time supports the idea that the design was done in Coburg.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, handwritten inscriptions on the sheet show that Duke Ernest I was personally involved in the design. His comments, for instance, that the length of the finial should be reduced, were adopted in the final objects.

The chandeliers blend in quite harmoniously with the palace’s new neo-gothic décor. Yet, transposed into this new context and transformed into actual tridimensional objects, the visual motif we are tracing here takes up a whole new set of associations and ideological references, ranging from dynastic

self-glorification and the fanciful fairy tale-like inventions in popular contemporary novels to the contemporary romantic representation of German people as the natural heirs of European medieval culture. With its transformation, the Palace of Rosenau became an early architectural expression of the growing interest in the mythical German Middle Ages and their modern representation, in which these elements could collide.<sup>41</sup>

In December 1806, when Ernest succeeded his father in the duchy of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld, the duchy had just joined the Napoleonic Confederation of the Rhine and was under French administration. Ernest himself, however, had fought as an officer in the Prussian army against the French in the Battle of Jena-Auerstedt and felt morally obliged to support also the Russian army in which he held the rank of major general.<sup>42</sup> Like many of his family members, the young Ernest held an anti-French stance, but he found himself compelled to accept the alliance with the Confederation of the Rhine in order to secure his duchy and his position as its ruler.<sup>43</sup> After signing the Treaties of Tilsit (1807), when he gained government over the duchy, Ernest sought to consolidate his position by asserting his family’s age-old dynastic power over the region. The gothic references in the architecture of Rosenau contributed to emphasizing the historical ties between the land, the dynasty, and the palace as its stronghold. The six titular coats of arms inserted in each flank of the chandeliers, clearly visible in the design drawing (Fig. 6), serve a similar purpose. They refer to historical territories of the ancient House of Wettin— from which the dukes of Saxe-Coburg and Saalfeld descended—which had been largely fragmented since.<sup>44</sup> The coats of arms stress the dynasty’s glorious past and its long-lasting regional power.

<sup>38</sup> Seelig, “Wiener Biedermeier in Coburg,” 7.

<sup>39</sup> Today, two of the three chandeliers lack the characteristic tracteries and finial hanging down in the middle of the structure, as well as the coats of arms decorating the crown. Mid-nineteenth-century drawings of the Marble Hall’s interior, like the water-colours by Georg Konrad Rothbart (inv. RCIN 920466) and Ferdinand Rothbart (inv. RCIN 920467) in the British Royal Collection, however suggest that these elements were present on all three chandeliers in their original state. See: Ott, “Schloß Rosenau,” fig. 22b; Heym, *Schloss und Park Rosenau*, 25. As Lorenz Seelig notes, the chandeliers were not in the best condition when they arrived in Coburg, they seemed to have been finished hastily and some were broken. Seelig, “Wiener Biedermeier in Coburg,” 7.

<sup>40</sup> Seelig, “Wiener Biedermeier in Coburg,” 7. Seelig later suggested the drawing was made in Vienna: Lorenz Seelig, “Wiener Architekturzeichnungen in Coburg,” *Alte und Moderne Kunst* 28, nos. 186-187 (1983), 28. In neither one of the articles Seelig makes the connection with (Desnoyers’ print after) Fleury Richard’s painting or the other visual models of the chandelier.

<sup>41</sup> Earlier examples of neo-gothic architecture on the European continent are the Gothic House at Wörlitzer Park near Dessau (1774-1813), the Löwenburg on the Wilhelmshöhe near Kassel (1793-1800) or Franzensburg near Vienna (1798-1801). These do not necessarily reflect the same cultural and ideological references.

<sup>42</sup> Erich Keerl, “Herzog Ernst I. von Sachsen-Coburg zwischen Napoleon und Metternich: Ein deutscher Kleinstaat im politischen Kraeftespiel der Grossmächte 1800-1830” (PhD diss., Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, 1973), 59, 66.

<sup>43</sup> Keerl, “Herzog Ernst I. von Sachsen-Coburg”, 55-63, 66-68, 71-73.

<sup>44</sup> These are the coats of arms of the county of Altenburg, the duchy of Saxe, the county of Henneberg, the Palatinate Saxe, the Margravate of Meissen and the duchy of Cleves. Seelig, “Wiener Architekturzeichnungen in Coburg,” 28, note 38; Heym, *Schloss und Park Rosenau*, 82.

Secondly, as Napoleon's armies pursued their conquest of Europe, gothic architecture was increasingly celebrated in the German states as an authentic expression of northern European historical culture, as opposed to "foreign" (French) classicism. The origins of this discourse go back to the late eighteenth century, with Goethe's famous praise of the Strasbourg cathedral as authentic *German* architecture overtly questioning the universality of the classical model.<sup>45</sup> In the early years of the next century, these ideas resonated particularly in Prussia, where Karl Friedrich Schinkel, privy assessor of buildings to the Prussian building commission, elaborated on the implementation of the Gothic as the 'national' style of the German people.<sup>46</sup> Ernest I, who spent some time in Berlin in 1806, must have appreciated these efforts because, in 1810, he invited Schinkel to design the new neo-gothic façade of his Ehrenburg Castle in Coburg. In parallel, Schinkel also executed designs for Rosenau, but little of this work was actually realized.<sup>47</sup>

By the time of the War of the Sixth Coalition, in which Ernest I switched to the allied camp again and fought as a Prussian general against the French, this cultural rhetoric had gained a more fiercely nationalist and anti-French fringe. It presented Gothic architecture as an eminent expression of the romantic spirit of the European Middle Ages, the essence of which still lived on in the German states, in their popular culture, or in the dynastic traditions of its many territories.<sup>48</sup> The French, on the other hand, by adopting a foreign 'Latin' language and embracing classicism, Enlightenment, atheism, and Revolution, were accused of breaking ties with their own and Europe's cultural roots. For a ruler like Ernest I, who actively strived to affirm the position of his duchy

after the Treaties of Tilsit in 1807 and again at the Congress of Vienna (1814-1815), the reference to medieval culture, dynastic lineage, and German heritage, therefore, served as a claim to recognition not only within the German cultural sphere but also on the broader European stage.

In the absence of political unity as a nation, gothic style, and architecture came to embody a strong German cultural identity, imagined through the notion of historical, cultural (and for some dynastic) continuity, in opposition to modern-day France. In Rosenau, this translates into an outspokenly historical as well as Nordic cultural orientation, privileging German and British references at the expense of anything French. This is most visible in the octagonal library, which contained almost exclusively literature in German and English, and was decorated with medieval scenes from an old English ballad and novels by Friedrich de la Motte-Fouqué and Walter Scott.<sup>49</sup> From this perspective, it may seem ironic that the model for the eye-catching chandeliers in the Marble Hall came from France, associated with a scene representing a French king and his sister. But King Francis I was not a modern Frenchman. He was a late representative of that medieval European court culture with which modern France had broken and of which the German people, their rulers above all, imagined themselves to be the true heirs. Moreover, the roots and heyday of the Ernestine branch of the House of Wettin, from which Ernest I descended, go back to that same historical period. Founded by its progenitor Ernest, Elector of Saxony (1441-1486) in 1464, the Ernestine line enjoyed the prestigious electoral privilege until 1547, the year King Francis I of France died. Ernest, by 'decorating' the chandelier of Francis I with his family's historical coats of arms, seems to formulate an identity that was dynastic, German, and thoroughly European all at once.

What the itinerary of Liédet's chandelier shows us is that the shaping of national cultural identities as it unfolded in the early nineteenth century was

<sup>45</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Von Deutscher Baukunst. D. M. Ervini a Steinbach. 1773," in Johann Gottfried Herder ed., *Von Deutscher Art und Kunst* (Hamburg: Bode, 1773), 121-136. William Douglas Robson-Scott, *The Literary Background of the Gothic Revival in Germany. A Chapter in the History of Taste* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), 91-95.

<sup>46</sup> Klaus Niehr, *Gotikbilder, Gotiktheorien: Studien zur Wahrnehmung und Erforschung mittelalterlicher Architektur in Deutschland zwischen ca. 1750 und 1850* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1999), 215-224; Georg Friedrich Koch, "Schinkels architektonische Entwürfe im gotischen Stil, 1810-1815," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 32, nos. 3/4(1969), 262-316.

<sup>47</sup> Ott, "Schloß Rosenau," 81-82; Anette Faber, "Der neugotische Umbau von Schloß Ehrenburg nach den Plänen Karl Friedrich Schinkels, 1810-1840," *Jahrbuch der Coburger Landesstiftung* (1985), 281-394.

<sup>48</sup> In this respect, the link with Johann Gottlieb Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation* (*Reden an die Deutsche Nation*, 1808) is also relevant, see: Niehr, *Gotikbilder, Gotiktheorien*, 216-217.

<sup>49</sup> Heym, *Feenreich und Ritterwelt*, 247-253. Coburg, Staatsarchiv, LA A 6847, *Verzeichnis der in dem Herzogl. Sommerschlosse Rosenau befindlichen Bibliothek*.

an international phenomenon indeed. Appropriating elements from other cultural spheres to define one's 'national' cultural identity was not only common practice, but it was also justified on the basis of contemporary conceptions of 'national' culture that had the idea of a shared European past, present, or future at their core. The rhetorical walls erected during the following century, defining each country and national culture as intrinsically different from its neighbors, tend to blur our understanding of such (older) conceptions of cultural identity in Europe. Even today, we are, more than many of us like to admit, programmed to think along these entrenched national lines.

These chandeliers encourage us not to take the discourse of cultural nationalism at face value and to dive deeper into its underlying mechanics instead. Cutting right through the national frameworks, these chandeliers lay bare the constructed nature of notions related to national identity and the national past, as well as the complexity of the European visual culture that these notions are built on. What's more, they show us that both phenomena are, in fact, intrinsically intertwined. The exploration and imagining of national pasts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries generated a wealth of visual material. Travelers, print reproductions,

and illustrated books facilitated the cross-border circulation of this material and allowed for it to be adapted to and integrated into other 'national' contexts. Transnational circulation and exchange fueled the construction of national visions of the past.

The story of our chandeliers illustrates this beautifully, but it is just one example of many. That is what we need to keep in mind: it is visual motifs like these, discreet and unassuming, circulating more or less under the radar and without many people noticing, that shaped European visual culture. This is Europe, the very fabric of European visual culture. It exists all around us. Seeing it requires a broad scope—an openness to engage with a great variety of disciplines, objects, and materials, with popular as much as with elite culture, and with a range of cultural spheres and systems of thinking. It requires paying specific attention to images, objects, and texts that *circulate*, even—or especially—to those that do not meet our own aesthetic or intellectual standards and therefore end up in the margins of our cultural canons. Finally, it requires a continuous questioning of the nationalist paradigms that still, intentionally or not, blur our sight and hinder our apprehension of transcultural phenomena and their impact on 'national' identity formation.