Today, the question of the origins of Christian aesthetics is no longer a topical issue in medieval art history, although a persuasive answer has never been formulated. One of the reasons for this oblivion deals with the looming figure of Josef Strzygowski, who published his pivotal volume Orient oder Rom in 1901, now discredited for its racial and proto-Nazi ideas. However, the debate does not concern Strzygowski alone: the prodromes of this critical concept go back to the nineteenth century, when the Russian, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires fought to control contested territories, and studies of the humanities mirrored these conflicts.

This volume, originating in the urgency to reflect on this pivotal conundrum in our field, attempts to reconstruct the (mis)fortune of a question that, according to Alois Riegl, “is the most important and most trenchant one in the entire history of mankind to date”.


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