

Aubin-Louis Millin, programme du cours d'histoire des arts chez les anciens, Paris 1805 : with manuscript notes by Antoine Marie Chenavard

Autor(en): **Hurley, Cecilia**

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AUBIN-LOUIS MILLIN, PROGRAMME DU COURS D'HISTOIRE
DES ARTS CHEZ LES ANCIENS, PARIS 1805.
WITH MANUSCRIPT NOTES BY ANTOINE MARIE CHENAVARD

Cecilia Hurley



A recent acquisition by the Stiftung Bibliothek Werner Oechslin provides a precious document in our understanding of some of the earliest lectures in France in art history and archaeology. An octavo volume in blue wrappers with ruled borders executed in brown ink contains two works, one printed and one manuscript. The first one of these is the *Programme du cours d'histoire des arts chez les anciens*, Paris: chez Delance 1805, by Aubin-Louis Millin; the second is a set of manuscript notes taken by Antoine Chenavard, a student attending the lectures given from November 1808 to March 1809.

In the *Rapport sur la Bibliothèque nationale* written in late 1794 it was proposed that the role of the Cabinet des antiquités et des médailles should be enlarged.¹ No longer was the department to serve only as a depot for the collections housed therein, but an annual course of lectures on numismatics and antiquity was also to be given: “il faudrait que [...] les gardes donnassent tous les ans des cours publics de numismatique et d’antiquité”.²

The task was entrusted to Aubin-Louis Millin, appointed conservateur-professeur on the 22 prairial an III. Aubin-Louis Millin de Grandmaison (1759–1818) was educated at the Collège du Plessis. His earliest works were mainly concerned with natural history. During the Revolution he embraced the cause, dropped the “de Grandmaison” from his name and for a short while adopted the name of Eleutherophile Millin. He edited a journal (the “Chronique de Paris”), produced a number of pamphlets and also devoted himself to a study of French monuments threatened by revolutionary vandalism (*Antiquités nationales*, 5 volumes, 1790 – an VI). His Girondin sympathies did not pass unnoticed and he spent a period in prison, escaping the guillotine only because of the events of 9 thermidor. Soon after his release he was appointed to the newly created post of conservateur – professeur in the Cabinet des antiquités et des médailles. He was, according to Bon-Joseph Dacier, an ideal choice for this post since he was a “savant aussi versé dans la connoissance des monumens que dans celle des bons ouvrages archéographiques”.³ He was also a natural performer if we are to believe the numerous accounts of his paedagogic and social engagements. The duchesse d’Abrantès in her history of the salons of Paris recounts, for example, Millin’s willingness to attempt any role offered to him, from Othello to the Misanthrope.⁴

Remarkably little is however known about what were, after all, amongst the first institutionalised lectures in the history of art and archaeology in France.⁵ In his notice nécrologique, Charles-Guillaume Krafft helps to explain the reason for this ‘lacuna’ in our knowledge. After praising Millin for his prodigious memory and naturally methodical spirit, Krafft then goes on to explain that these gifts obviated any need for written transcripts of his lectures. With the exception of occasional noted excerpts from ancient texts, Millin would speak extempore, pausing from time to time to illustrate his argument with an object from the large collection of originals and copies in his own and in the library’s collections.⁶

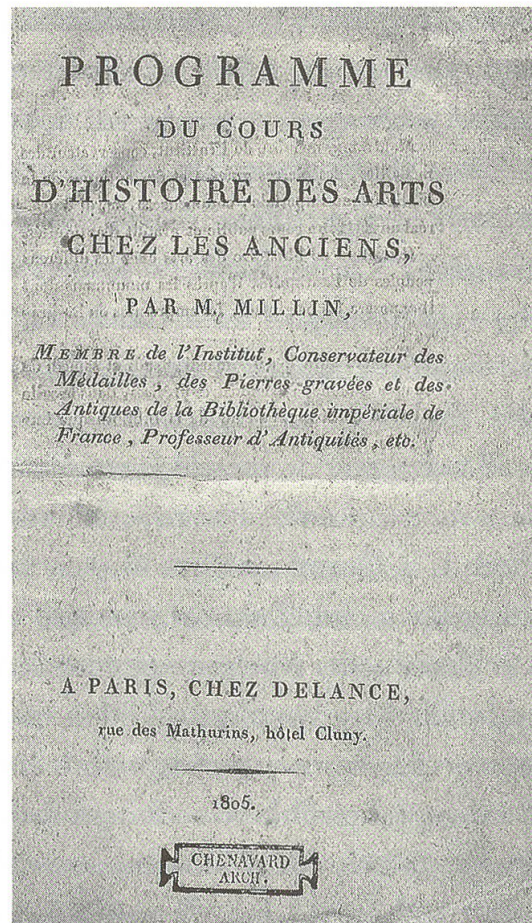
All that he did was, in Krafft’s words, to publish “de petits aperçus”. From the footnote accompanying this comment we understand that these are the following texts: *Introduction à l’étude des monumens antiques* (Paris 1796), *In-*

Introduction à l'étude des médailles (Paris 1796), *Introduction à l'étude des pierres gravées* (Paris 1796), *Discours prononcé par Millin à l'ouverture de son cours, le 4 frimaire an VII* (in *Magasin encyclopédique*, 5^e année, vol. I, 1799), *Programme d'un cours d'histoire de l'art* (Paris 1805), *Exposé du cours de mythologie de M. Millin* (Paris 1809), *Cours d'histoire héroïque* (Paris 1810), *Introduction à la connoissance des vases peints* (Paris 1811). Certainly Millin intended that these publications should serve as the written support for his students: "pour l'usage de ceux qui me font l'honneur de suivre le Cours que je donne à présent sur cette partie de l'Archaeologie. [...] Cette introduction est un court résumé de mes cahiers; elle sert de text à chacune de mes leçons; elle donne une idée de la méthode que je suis dans mon Cours".⁷ The practice was not unknown at the time. One of Millin's friends in Germany, Carl-August Böttiger, explains that: "Bloss zur Wiederholung für meine Zuhörer und also allein als Manuscript für Freunde, sind am Schlusse jeder Vorlesung gedruckte Blätter ausgetheilt worden mit dem Hauptinhalte der Vorträge und den nöthigen Citaten".⁸

The problem, however, is that of the historical distance. The texts or notes that are perfectly comprehensible to a student following a set of lectures are not necessarily of such help for those who come to study the teaching almost two centuries later. Whilst the *Introductions* pose a considerable number of questions about the understanding of archaeology in France at the time, they can at least be read as texts and are thus open to analysis. Much less easy of access is, for example, the *Programme du cours de l'histoire de l'art chez les anciens*.

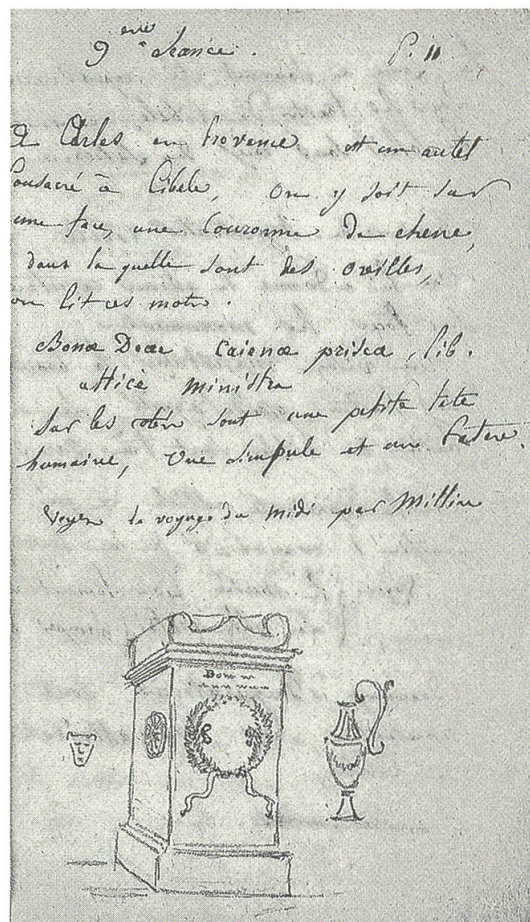
The *Programme du cours d'histoire des arts chez les anciens* published in 1805 consists of fifteen octavo pages with a series of words or phrases resuming the contents of the lectures. No continuous text is presented, not even an introduction or a conclusion to explain the methodology. Some attempt is made, both in the order of the words and in the typography, to guide the reader.

Seven main divisions are established: "Généralités; Sculpture; Peinture; Mosaïque; Glyptique; Numismatique; Architecture". Within these classes, subdivisions are established with the aid of paragraph divisions and italics. Thus, for example, in the class Sculpture we find one short introductory paragraph: "Définition de ses différentes parties. – Statuaire. – Plastique. – Toreutique. – Leur histoire chez différens peuples". There then follows a series of twelve paragraphs, each of which is signalled by a phrase in italics. The first six of these refer to the art of sculpture as practised by different nations. After this treatment of the sculpture of the various ancient peoples come six further paragraphs: "Partie mécanique de l'art; Procédés de l'art; Bustes; Ani-



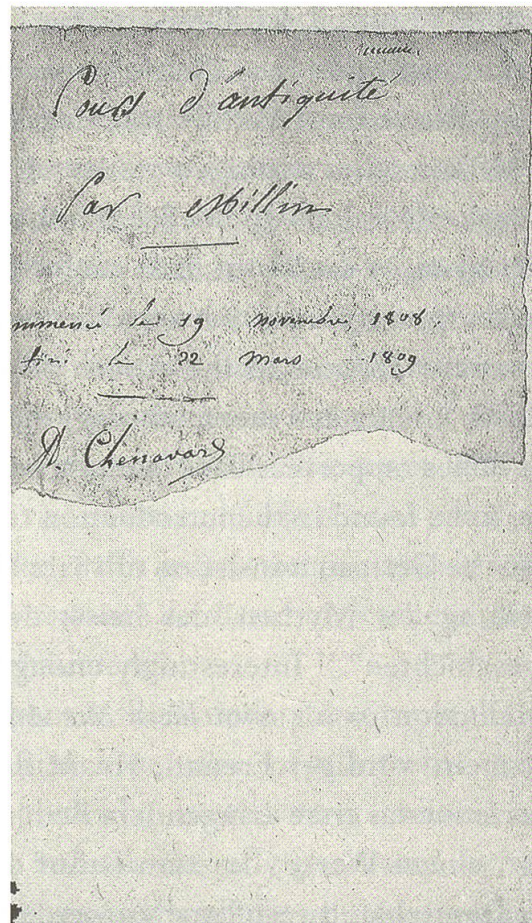
maux; Toreutique; Meubles, instrumens”. Perhaps it is asking too much from the author to present what he had planned as being merely the summary of his lecture course in polished and engaging prose. There remains, nevertheless, the question of how the modern reader is to glean from these keywords the major direction of his teaching.

Bound immediately after the *Programme* are the manuscript notes taken by Antoine-Marie Chenavard, an architect born in Lyons in 1787 and who died there in 1883. In 1804 he arrived in Paris to study at the Académie d’Architecture, before spending over three years in Italy. For the rest of his life he worked in Lyons and the surrounding district, first as an architect and then as Professor of Architecture at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts de Lyon. He restored several buildings in the area, and also devoted a significant part of his time to the publication of a number of texts and collections of plates. The manuscript comprises some 94 octavo sheets, for the most part covered recto and verso with a series of notes in brown ink; a number of sketches, some in pencil, some in pen and ink are also to be found amongst the notes. Before the notes comes a half-sheet glued onto the recto of the last blank sheet of the *Programme* and bearing the title: “Cours d’antiquité | Par Millin | Commencé le 19 novem-



bre 1808 | fini le 22 mars 1809 | A. Chenavard”. The beginning of each “séance” is marked, and a total of 46 are included. However no further indication of dates is provided: the general rhythm of the lectures would seem to be two or three per week, tallying well with the indications we have in the *Programme* where on the verso of the title-page it is stated that “Ce cours aura lieu les mardi, jeudi et samedi de chaque semaine”.

The structure of the teaching is quite easy to reconstruct from the notes taken by Chenavard. After three lectures devoted to preliminaries such as a definition of archaeology and some generalities on the relative age of painting and sculpture and on recommended reading in mythology, Millin then proceeds to the main subject matter. Each divinity is taken in turn and a guide given to the major attributes, the differing representations, with reference to the monuments illustrating them. There are frequent mentions made both to works in the Cabinet des antiquités and to those illustrated in one of the major recueils, such as Johann Joachim Winckelmann’s *Monumenti antichi*, Luigi Lamberti’s and Ennio Quirino Visconti’s *Sculture del Palazzo della villa Borghese detta Pinciana*, Visconti’s *Museo Pio-Clementino* and his *Monumenti gabini*. On occasions a note of criticism is to be found in fol. 37 v: “Un grand



Perhaps most striking of all is that, judging from the notes that Chenavard has made, there seems to be little attempt on Millin's part to discuss the difference between fable and mythology, a difference that has been shown to be of very great importance during the eighteenth century.¹⁰ The two domains identified by Jean Starobinski are described thus: "l'un s'établit au niveau de tous les faits de la culture (poésie, théâtre, ballets, peinture, sculpture, arts décoratifs) où les motifs mythologiques sont repérables; l'autre est constitué par l'ensemble des textes historiques, critiques, spéculatifs, qui tentent d'élaborer un savoir sur les mythes, une science des mythes" (p. 233). The "motifs" are identified with fable, whilst the "savoir" is to be understood as mythology. Nowhere in the notes left to us by Chenavard do we see any attempt made to establish such a distinction. No definition is given either of the word "fable" or of the word "mythologie". Recommended further reading is listed, but the selection of titles confines itself to the ancient authors such as Homer, Apollonius of Rhodes, the tragedians, the lyric poets, Ovid, Horace etc. Amongst the modern works quoted are to be found Lilio Gregorio Giraldi's *De Deis gentium varia et multiplex historia*, the works of the abbé Banier and François-Joseph-Michel Noël's *Dictionnaire de la fable* (Paris 1801).

The argument could be advanced that these are after all nothing more than one student's lecture notes and that they do not necessarily prove that such reflections were entirely absent from Millin's teaching. A rapid survey of the opinions expressed in Millin's other writings would tend, nevertheless, to suggest that such theoretical discussions do not seem to have interested him. It is notable that in his *Dictionnaire des Beaux-Arts*, published only two years before this course, he makes no distinction between the two. The entry "Fable" is included only as a cross-reference to the article "Mythologie", in which Millin allows the reader to understand that mythology is for him no more than a collective noun: "les fables rapportées dans la mythologie".¹¹ An even clearer statement of this is to be found in the introduction to his *Galerie mythologique*, quoted here from the German translation of 1820: "Die Mythologie [...] ist die Zusammenstellung der Mythen, das heisst der Erzählungen von Götter- und Heldengeschichten".¹² Interestingly enough Böttiger mentions this book in the introduction to his own *Ideen zur Archäologie der Malerei* (Dresden 1811): "hat mein würdiger Freund, Hr. Millin in Paris in seiner Mythologischen Gallerie für das erste dringendere Bedürfnis aller Kunstliebhaber trefflich gesorgt, einem Werke, das zum Behuf der Künstler auch so bald als möglich nach Deutschland verpflanzt zu werden verdient".¹³ Such a comment by the German scholar reinforces the idea that Millin's writings were indeed rich sources for the artist or amateur who needed details on individual myths ("fable") but that it was not here that one would find the systems and theories developed by a Creuzer, a Herder or even Böttiger himself in his *Ideen zur Kunst-Mythologie*.¹⁴ Not that Millin alone was subject to such criticism. Böttiger speaks rather disparagingly of a general French and English mania for classical subjects – "der Gräcismus bei den neubackenen Republikanern in Gunst stand, Einfluss auf jene bekannten Nachäffungen antiker Formen und Trachten" – which led to his work *Sabina* appearing "bloß aus Aufsätzen im Modejournal" and to a vision of Aristophanes as having been no more than "ein Vorläufer Gillray's, Hogarth's Geisteserben".¹⁵

Further questions about Millin's understanding and use of the literature of his time are raised by the passage in the *Programme* where he names six nations in his discussion of sculpture: the Egyptians, the Hebrews, the Persians, the Indians, the Etruscans and the Greeks. No separate place is therefore accorded to the Romans in this scheme. Their sculpture is seen as being a mere continuation of Greek sculpture, meriting only three key phrases: "Sculpture depuis les premiers Empereurs jusqu'à Antonin Caracalla. – Depuis cet Empereur jusqu'à Constantin. – Dans le Bas-Empire".¹⁶ As Böttiger pointed

out in a piece on archaeological collections, since the time of Anton Raphael Mengs there had been an awareness of the need to distinguish clearly between Greek and Roman works.¹⁷ Even Winckelmann, although slightly reluctant to subscribe entirely to the thesis of Mengs, was prepared to begin a chapter devoted to Roman art with the following words: “Quoique l’histoire des arts qui tiennent au dessin se trouve chez les Romains, en général, comprise dans ce qui regarde celle des arts chez la Grèce, il est cependant nécessaire que nous en parlions séparément; d’autant plus que différens antiquaires font mention d’un style de l’art propre aux statuaires romains”.¹⁸ Millin’s *Programme* leaves us, however, with the impression that he is not willing to devote even the slightest attention to the question of whether or not Roman sculpture should be considered separately: this impression is entirely supported by the article “Romains” in his *Dictionnaire des Beaux-Arts* where the idea of Roman art is dismissed as being a “chimère”.

Such questions about Millin’s understanding of the most recent literature in his subject and his incorporation of it into his teaching could easily be multiplied. Of more particular interest here, however, is the relation between the two parts of the volume recently purchased by the library. When the manuscript notes are compared with the printed document found at the beginning of the volume there is seen to be very little clear correspondence between the two. The *Programme* deals largely with the techniques of the various arts and the types of monuments produced, whilst the manuscript notes provide more details on the iconographical attributes of the various divinities. The explanation lies in Millin’s separation of the two elements of his teaching: “dans mes Cours sur l’Histoire de l’Art je traite de la sculpture, de la peinture, de la gravure, de l’architecture dans différentes époques chez les Aegyptiens, les Grecs, les Romains et les anciens peuples de l’Orient; dans mon cours de mythologie, ce sont les monumens antiques eux-mêmes que j’examine: elle me sert à les distribuer dans un ordre méthodique; je fais connoître l’histoire de chacun d’eux, les explications diverses qui en ont été données, les ouvrages où ils sont [sic] été gravés ou décrits, et le jugement qu’on en doit porter relativement à l’histoire et à l’art”.¹⁹ Thus we see how the two major but clearly separated elements of Millin’s teaching – the one dealing with techniques and the other more closely connected with iconology – are reunited in this one volume.

Millin’s teaching at the Cabinet des antiquités et des médailles illustrates only too clearly the complexity of the intellectual exchange between France and Germany at the end of the eighteenth century. At a time when Winckel-

mann was highly regarded in France, his vision of ancient art was still far from completely assimilated. Millin was proud of his knowledge of German scholarship, but seemed incapable of understanding the true extent of its novelty. Whilst Böttiger was developing a cultural approach to ancient mythology, Millin sought only to broaden the knowledge of fable amongst the citizens of the new Republic – a knowledge formerly reserved for the educated elite.

- 1 Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Cabinet des manuscrits, n.a.f. 2836, foll. 133–149 (an abridged version was published by J. Guillaume, *Procès-verbaux du comité d'instruction publique de la Convention nationale*, 6 vols., Paris 1891–1907, vol. VI (1907), pp. 351–357). On the history of the Bibliothèque nationale see S. Balayé, *La Bibliothèque nationale des origines à 1800*, Genève 1988. For the history of the Cabinet des médailles see: T. Sarmant, *Le cabinet des médailles de la Bibliothèque nationale 1661–1848*, Paris 1994.
- 2 Guillaume, *op. cit.*, p. 356.
- 3 B.-J. Dacier, *Rapport historique sur les progrès de l'histoire et de la littérature ancienne depuis 1789, et sur leur état actuel*, Paris 1810, p. 76.
- 4 L. Junot, duchesse d'Abrantès, *Histoire des Salons de Paris*, Paris 1836–1838, 6 voll., vol. IV, p. 275.
- 5 L. Therrien, *L'histoire de l'art en France: genèse d'une discipline universitaire*, Paris 1998.
- 6 Ch.-G. Krafft, *Notice sur Aubin-Louis Millin*, Paris 1818.
- 7 A.-L. Millin, *Introduction à l'étude des pierres gravées*, Paris 1796, p. VII.
- 8 C. A. Böttiger, *Ideen zur Archäologie der Malerei. Erster Theil. Nach Maasgabe der Wintervorlesungen im Jahre 1811 entworfen von C.A. Böttiger*, Dresden 1811, p. IX.
- 9 A.-L. Millin, *Introduction à l'étude des monumens antiques*, Paris 1796, p. 10.
- 10 J. Starobinski, *Fable et mythologie aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles*, in *Le remède dans le mal: Critique et légitimation de l'artifice à l'âge des Lumières*, Paris 1989, pp. 233–262.
- 11 A.-L. Millin, *Dictionnaire des Beaux-Arts*, Paris 1806, 3 v., vol. II, p. 568.
- 12 A.-L. Millin, *Mythologische Gallerie*, Berlin & Stettin 1820, p. 183. A similar approach is to be found in Millin's introduction to his reedition of Chompré's *Dictionnaire abrégé de la fable* where no attempt is made to establish a clear-cut distinction between the two. Mythology is again used as the generic term, whilst the individual stories are fables. The Chompré is very closely linked to the question being considered here, since Millin states in the introduction (quoted here from the Italian edition): "Molti articoli sono estratti dai volumi del mio Corso d'Antichità", in *Dizionario portatile delle favole per l'intelligenza de' Poeti, delle Pitture, delle Statue, delle Sculture, delle Medaglie [...] compilato da Chompré e considerabilmente accresciuto da A. L. Millin*, Bassano 1804, p. X.
- 13 C. A. Böttiger, *Ideen zur Archäologie der Malerei. Erster Theil*, Dresden 1811, p. X–XI.
- 14 C. A. Böttiger, *Ideen zur Kunst-Mythologie*, Leipzig 1830.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. XI.
- 16 A.-L. Millin, *Programme*, Paris 1805, p. 4.
- 17 "Über Museen und Antikensammlungen. Eine archäologische Vorlesung, gehalten den 2. Januar 1807", in C. A. Böttiger's *kleine Schriften archäologischen und antiquarischen Inhalts, gesammelt und herausgegeben von Julius Sillig. Zweiter Band*, Dresden & Leipzig 1838, pp. 3–24, here p. 18. A. Potts, *Greek sculpture and Roman copies I. Anton Raphael Mengs and the eighteenth century*, in: "Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes", XLIII, 1980, pp. 150–173.
- 18 J. J. Winckelmann, *Histoire de l'art chez les anciens*, Paris an II, vol. II, p. 161.
- 19 Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Cabinet des manuscrits, n.a.f. 24528, fol. 29.