Bloomsbury's Byzantium and the Writing of Modern Art

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The Graduate Center, City University of New York

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BLOOMSBURY’S BYZANTIUM AND THE WRITING OF MODERN ART

by

ELIZABETH SARAH BERKOWITZ

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2018
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by

Elizabeth Sarah Berkowitz

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Art History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
ABSTRACT

Bloomsbury’s Byzantium and the Writing of Modern Art

by

Elizabeth Berkowitz

Advisor: Rose-Carol Washton Long

“Bloomsbury’s Byzantium and the Writing of Modern Art” examines the role of Byzantine art in Bloomsbury art critics Roger Fry’s and Clive Bell’s narratives of aesthetic Modernism. Fry, in his pre-World War I and interwar writings and teachings on art, and Bell, in seminal texts such as Art (1914), have been branded by art historiography as the prime movers in a Formalist, teleological narrative of Modern art still prevalent in textbooks today. Fry’s and Bell’s ideas were later adopted by important Modernist authors and cultural figures, such as Alfred H. Barr, Jr., first director of New York’s Museum of Modern Art, and critic Clement Greenberg. Yet, less known is the integral role Byzantine art played in delimiting both Fry’s and Bell’s ideas of Modernism, and the art works they valued. Consistent with the international nineteenth- and twentieth-century interest in Byzantium, Fry and Bell each crafted an ahistorical idea of Byzantium. The Bloomsbury critics’ highly subjective definitions of Byzantine art and the Byzantine era allowed both Fry and Bell to project onto Byzantium qualities that aligned with their own intellectual interests. My dissertation uses these varied characterizations of Byzantium to reinterpret both authors’ writings on Modern art and subsequently to challenge canonical understanding of Western aesthetic Modernism. For instance, in my analysis of Fry’s and Bell’s idea of Byzantine art, I point to parallel qualities the critics’ valued in Modern pieces; and suggest that they used their concept of Byzantium to define a more secular, universalized
spiritual conception of art as an alternative and counterpart to mainstream religions. I also explain how the critics relied on their definition of Byzantium to each advocate for non-Western art’s aesthetic value, and I demonstrate how the authors utilized their characterization of Byzantine art to contest the precedent of both John Ruskin and establishment, Western art history. This dissertation unravels the myriad personal, intellectual, and contextual circumstances which led to Fry’s and Bell’s interpretation of Byzantine art, and, as a result, illustrates how art-world politics and world politics of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries impacted the writing of formative texts in Western Modern art.
To my parents,

Dr. Joanna Davis Berkowitz and Dr. Bruce Berkowitz,

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Introduction

Before the First World War, British art critics Roger Fry and Clive Bell, who were associated with the Bloomsbury artistic and intellectual group, composed some of Western aesthetic Modernism’s canonical texts. Less known is the fact that Fry and Bell used the art of the Byzantine Empire to advocate for nineteenth- and twentieth-century Modern work.¹ In Fry’s 1930 “Henri Matisse,” Fry noted that, in a turn to avant-garde aesthetics, “we may perhaps be allowed to use Byzantine as a term generally expressive of the recovery of the objet d’art from the predominance of the representative side of pictorial art.”² Similarly, in his 1914 Art, Bell commented: “This alone seems to me sure: since the Byzantine primitives set their mosaics at Ravenna no artist in Europe has created forms of greater significance unless it be Cézanne.”³ This dissertation, “Bloomsbury’s Byzantium and the Writing of Modern Art,” argues that Fry and Bell’s idea of Byzantium and Byzantine art determined the critics’ characterization and defense of Western Modern art. In so doing, “Bloomsbury’s Byzantium and the Writing of Modern Art” contends that the Byzantium Fry and Bell referenced, what I term “Bloomsbury’s Byzantium,” was less a historically accurate idea of the Byzantine Empire and its art, and more a construct particular to the societal and art world issues of Fry and Bell’s time. Through their citations of a Byzantine aesthetic of their own design, Fry and Bell argued for Modern art’s value and characteristics, and established their claims for intellectual originality, defining an idea of Byzantium distinct from that identified by their predecessors and peers.

The art historiographic stakes for examining how Fry and Bell’s turn to Byzantium shaped their narrative of artistic Modernism are significant, given that the critics’ aesthetic philosophies had a wide, and long reach. Fry’s and Bell’s writings, relationships, and the art
exhibitions they organized set the parameters for today’s idea of Western Modern art, as well as the aesthetic ideologies of the pre-World War II era. In writings such as Fry’s “The Last Phase of Impressionism (1908)” and Bell’s 1914 Art, the critics defined an international vision of progressive European art and promoted artists such as Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, Wassily Kandinsky, Duncan Grant, and Henri Matisse, among others. Fry and Bell’s involvement within Western avant-garde circles of the pre-World War I era also suggests that their theories influenced the taste-makers, writers, and artists of their day through their social connections as much as through their writings. In 1909, for example, Fry was a co-founder of the Modern Art Association with Ottoline Morrell, Dugald Southerland (“D. S.”) MacColl, and Charles John (“C. J.”) Holmes. Fry also had a relationship with American ex-pats and collectors Leo and Gertrude Stein, whose Parisian salon, a fertile site of intellectual exchange among the most progressive European artists, writers, and cultural figures, helped launch the careers of artists such as Pablo Picasso. Bell was a close friend of Pablo Picasso and the poet and author Jean Cocteau, among other avant-garde notables, and he remained a staunch supporter and promoter of Picasso until the end of Bell’s life.

Fry and Bell’s Modernism also achieved broad cultural impact through the exhibitions they staged. The critics’ best-known exhibition was Manet and the Post-Impressionists, colloquially entitled the “First Post-Impressionist Exhibition,” at London’s Grafton Galleries. From November 8, 1910, to January 15, 1911, Fry, with Bell’s help, mounted this ground-breaking show that introduced many in England to avant-garde French art, and that included twenty-one works by Paul Cézanne, thirty-seven by Paul Gauguin, twenty by Vincent Van Gogh, and other works by French artists such as Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, André Derain, Georges Rouault, and Maurice Denis. It was for this exhibition that Fry coined the term “Post-
Impressionism” to signal these artists’ distinction from what he viewed as more superficial contributions of Impressionist artists such as Claude Monet. Fry’s label “Post-Impressionism” quickly replaced the previously used identifier for these artists, “Neo-Impressionism,” and the designation “Post-Impressionism” has been in common use ever since. The art shown at the exhibit inspired the subsequent works of artists and writers. Yet, *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* was also a *succès de scandale*: visitors and critics who hadn’t yet encountered avant-garde French art’s non-naturalism subsequently dismissed Modern art as “bizarre, morbid, and horrible.” *Manet and the Post-Impressionists*, visited by about 25,000 individuals over the course of two months, demonstrated the extent of cultural resistance to avant-garde art, and thereby illustrated the revolutionary nature of Fry and Bell’s advocacy for these Modern artists.

Beyond *Manet and the Post-Impressionists*, Fry and Bell’s subsequent exhibitions and Fry’s Omega Workshops put their aesthetic ideologies into practice, and further disseminated their ideas. Fry and Bell worked together on the 1912 *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition* at the Grafton Galleries, and Fry organized other landmark exhibitions, such as a 1917 exhibition of children’s drawings, part of Fry’s exploration of “primitive” art. In 1912, Fry established the Omega Workshops, a collaborative artistic environment which produced decorative arts objects. Bloomsbury artists Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant were active Omega members, and designed screens, chairs, and other utilitarian objects in hybrid styles derived from Post-Impressionist, Byzantine, and non-Western artistic sources. The Omega Workshops exemplified the European pre-World War I avant-garde ethos of bringing aesthetic and philosophical values from the canvas to the home. In so doing, the Omega Workshops translated Fry’s and Bell’s ideas of Modern art into a radical reinvention of the domestic environment.
However, one of the critics’ more notable contributions to Western aesthetic Modernism was Fry and Bell’s connection between Byzantine and Modern art. Future authors on Modern art, such as Clement Greenberg, based their ideas not merely on the tenets of Fry’s and Bell’s versions of Modernism, but also on the critics’ identification of Byzantine art as Modern art’s ancestor. Greenberg, the American, Formalist art critic who established the art historical narrative of Abstract Expressionism, developed his writings under the influence of both Fry’s and Bell’s texts.¹⁵ Notably, in his 1951 essay “Cézanne,” Greenberg used Fry’s writings on Cézanne as a guidepost to craft his own response to Cézanne in kind.¹⁶ Greenberg more than once referred to Fry as one of the “last great art critics I’m aware of.”¹⁷ More important to this dissertation, however, is the extent to which Fry and Bell’s interrelationship of Byzantine and Modern art infiltrated Greenberg’s Modern art theories. Like Fry and Bell before him, Greenberg judged the quality of Modern works against Byzantine art as an aesthetic standard. In a 1944 essay in The Nation on “Abstract Art,” Greenberg defined Edouard Manet and Gustave Courbet’s nineteenth-century instigation of Modern painting as a historical return to the “hieratic flatness of Gothic and Byzantine.”¹⁸ For Greenberg, Byzantine art also explained the origins of abstraction. Greenberg’s 1958 essay “Byzantine Parallels” claimed that the “new kind of modernist picture,” found in “Gauguin,” “Late Impressionism,” and “American painters like Newman, Rothko and Still,” imitated the visual effects of “Byzantine gold and glass mosaic.”¹⁹ In his ninth seminar at Bennington College, presented on April 22, 1971, Greenberg described Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque as recapitulating “the flattest painting Western art had seen since the time of the Byzantines,” and reiterated Modernism’s Byzantine ties in his 1976 “Detached Observations” and 1983 “Beginnings of Modernism.”²⁰ Clement Greenberg’s theories
of Modern art then developed as much from consideration of Fry’s and Bell’s Modern art aesthetics, as from the critics’ connection between Byzantium and Modern art.\textsuperscript{21}

Fry and Bell’s interest in Byzantine art was consistent with a late-nineteenth-, early-twentieth-century fascination with all things Byzantium. To begin with, Fry and Bell’s formative years and the peak of their creative influence occurred just as Byzantium was codified as an academic field in England. In the late nineteenth century, the British School at Athens was founded with Richard MacGillivray (“R. M.”) Dawkins, the first professor of Byzantine studies at Oxford University, as director.\textsuperscript{22} The publications of Jean Louis (“J. L.”) Petit’s \textit{Remarks on Church Architecture} (1841), Henry Gally Knight’s \textit{The Ecclesiastical Architecture of Italy from the time of Constantine to the Fifteenth Century} (1842), and William Lethaby and Harold Swainson’s \textit{The Church of Sancta Sophia Constantinople} (1894), and the commissioned monograph of the Monastery of Hosios Loukas in 1889 by Robert Weir Schultz and Sidney Howard Barneys, inspired British study of Byzantium.\textsuperscript{23} In 1907, England established the “Byzantine Research and Publication Fund,” supporting the research, excavation work, and dissemination of books and results regarding Byzantine art and archaeology.\textsuperscript{24}

In Fry and Bell’s time, Byzantium also figured prominently in international archaeological explorations, politics, and popular expositions. In the nineteenth century, interest in the Byzantine past was spurred by knowledge of archaeological exploration and restoration work around Byzantine monuments, such as French archaeological explorations in Greece and Turkey, among other locations, and as well as by international politics that called attention to Byzantine sites, such as the 1866 return of Venice to Italian control, and the 1912-1913 Balkan Wars.\textsuperscript{25} Multiple exhibitions in England in the 1850s and 1860s juxtaposed Byzantine with Modern mosaic works, including the 1854 Crystal Palace Exhibition at Sydenham Hill, in which
there was a “Byzantine Court” as well as Byzantine artifacts on display. In addition, in the nineteenth century, British artists and artisans who wished to emulate the Byzantine works they admired were granted an ease of access to mosaic materials with Antonio Salviatia’s 1860 founding of a tesserae manufacturing company. British interest in Byzantine-inspired mosaic soon made its way into prominent public examples of interior decoration and design texts, such as Pre-Raphaelite Edward Burne-Jones’ late-nineteenth-century mosaic decorations for the seat of the Episcopal Church in Rome, S. Paul’s Cathedral, and Owen Jones’ 1856 *The Grammar of Ornament*.  

Fry and Bell also represented merely two prominent examples among many international Modern artists, critics, and architects who took interest in and inspiration from Byzantine art. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, artists such as the Viennese Secessionist and Symbolist Gustav Klimt, the French Symbolists, Fauve Henri Matisse, and even Modern architects such as Le Corbusier each differently used the non-naturalistic and anti-Classical art of the Byzantine era as inspiration and impetus for their landmark Modern works. Fry and Bell’s interest in Byzantine art was then partly a function of the degree to which Byzantium was an *au courant* topic of discussion in nineteenth- and twentieth-century academic and artistic avant-garde circles.

Byzantine art was also a biographical touchstone for Fry, Bell, and their Bloomsbury peers. This suggests that the extent to which Fry, Bell, and their circle appealed to Byzantium as an aesthetic inspiration can be attributed as much to the contemporary, prominent discussions of the period, as to the fact that Byzantium and Byzantine sites bookended critical moments in Bloomsbury members’ lives. The intensity with which Fry, Bell, and other Bloomsbury Group individuals described Byzantine monuments in writings and in art likely referred as much to the
works’ genuinely admired aesthetic qualities (discussed in this dissertation), as it did to the authors’ and artists’ recollections of equally intense personal events that occurred at these locations.

The designation “Bloomsbury” used in this dissertation’s title refers to the frequent meeting place for a once-a-week series of “at-homes” at 46 Gordon Square in the Bloomsbury district of London. These “at-homes” began in 1905, and were organized by Thoby Stephen and attended by his sisters, Vanessa, an aspiring artist, and Virginia, an aspiring author, as well as by his younger brother Adrian Stephen. During these early “at-homes,” coupled with a series of “Friday Club” artistic gatherings organized by Vanessa, the Bloomsbury Group engaged in frank discussions of sexuality, homosexuality and bi-sexuality, pacifism, unconventional living arrangements, and progressive, experimental art that came to exemplify the ideals of pre-World War I British bohemia. Bell, who, along with Lytton Strachey, Leonard Woolf, and John Maynard Keynes, was close friends with Thoby from Cambridge University, was a vocal participant and prominent figure in these “at-homes” discussions. Bell soon expressed romantic interest in Vanessa. After Vanessa rebuffed his marriage proposals in 1905 and 1906, Bell successfully proposed to Vanessa on his third attempt, and they married in 1907. Virginia soon married author and civil servant Leonard Woolf, and Strachey, Keynes, and Adrian Stephen cemented the participation of the artist Duncan Grant in the Gordon Square circle through Grant’s role in a complicated love quadrangle among Grant, Strachey, Keynes, and Adrian Stephen.

Fry, a man whom Vanessa Bell described as the “most important” Bloomsbury member, was more than a decade older than many of his Bloomsbury compatriots, and had an established career as an art critic and author by the time he joined the Gordon Square gatherings. Fry was
associated with *Burlington Magazine*, had accepted a prestigious position as Director of European Paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art to help build its collection, had acted as a private art adviser to the American wealthy, and had published seminal texts on Giovanni Bellini and Giotto. Yet, by 1909, Roger Fry had reached a professional turning point. Fry was let go from his position at the Metropolitan, and he returned to England adrift.\(^{35}\) A chance meeting with Clive and Vanessa Bell at a Cambridge Railway Station, either in 1910 or in 1908, sparked the collaborative work among all three that would later become central to Bloomsbury’s artistic legacy, and Fry looked upon the gatherings at Gordon Square as a fresh start.\(^{36}\) Fry, in turn, provided the Gordon Square crowd with professional legitimacy by association, and the networking and exhibition prowess of an internationally established art-world player.\(^{37}\)

Byzantium defined key moments in the lives of these Bloomsbury members. As romantic and interpersonal relationships among Bloomsbury Group individuals inspired, facilitated, or hindered the group’s aesthetic contributions, Bloomsbury’s biographical connections to Byzantium cannot go without mention. For Vanessa Bell, her first encounter with Venetian Byzantium occurred after the death of her father, the prominent nineteenth-century intellectual Sir Leslie Stephen, in 1904. Following Leslie Stephen’s death, Vanessa, Virginia, Thoby, and Adrian took a cathartic trip to Italy to mark the passage into a new era. Vanessa’s first contact with Venice, the site of one of the great Byzantine monuments, the Chiesa di San Marco (1094), would forever be entangled with a feeling of freedom to return to her painting career after years under Leslie Stephen’s thumb, acting as family caregiver, caretaker, and housekeeper.\(^{38}\) When Vanessa saw Venice, according to her biographer Frances Spalding, nothing “could detract from her joy.”\(^{39}\) In 1906, the Stephen siblings journeyed to Greece and Turkey, stopping at Corinth and Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul), the site of some of some of the most notable
Byzantine monuments, such as the Hagia Sophia (537). Virginia described the Hagia Sophia with awe in her diary, noting that it was “like a treble globe of bubbles frozen solid, floating out to meet us.” However, on this 1906 journey, Thoby contracted typhoid fever, from which he subsequently died upon his return to England. Following on the heels of Thoby’s death, Vanessa finally accepted Bell’s offer of marriage. For Vanessa, recollections of these first encounters with Byzantium were then likely inextricable from the life-changing events that succeeded them. As a consequence, Vanessa’s emotionally fraught associations with Byzantium and Byzantine art may partially explain the intensity and frequency of her painterly evocations of Byzantine models (see: chapter 4).

For Roger Fry, the most significant elision of Byzantine art with his personal life occurred in 1911, when Fry embarked upon a journey to Constantinople with the Bells to see Byzantine mosaics. On this trip, Vanessa suffered a miscarriage and Fry took on the role of caretaker, thus instigating an affair between Vanessa and Fry. From that point on, Constantinople and Turkey became touchstones to which both Fry and Vanessa returned when discussing their relationship. In a letter to Vanessa from 1912, Fry, for example, appealed to his lover with the memory of “Do you remember in a cab going down from the Hotel at Constantinople to the bridge?” In her 1934 “Memories of Roger Fry” manuscript, following Fry’s death, Vanessa devoted an entire separate section to “Journey to Constantinople, 1911,” signaling the importance of this trip to both Vanessa and Roger’s relationship, and in Vanessa’s life, generally. Fry never fully recovered from the end of their affair in 1913, suggesting that, after 1911, Fry’s citations of Byzantium, particularly Turkish Byzantium, were possibly as much about valuing Byzantine works, as they were subtle ways to relive and remember the defining relationship of his life.
Similarly, while it may be true that, as Frances Spalding quotes the often-repeated statement that “Bloomsbury was a group of friends who all happened to be in love with artist Duncan Grant,” it is also true that many of Grant’s romantic entanglements involved Byzantine locations. In May of 1913, Vanessa, Bell, Fry, and Grant travelled to Italy to see Byzantine mosaics at sites in Ravenna, Venice, Spoleto, and Arezzo. It was on this journey that Vanessa felt her affections shift from Fry to Grant, and in 1913, Vanessa embarked on an affair with Duncan Grant that lasted for the remainder of her life. Prior to this moment, Grant’s long-standing affair with the economist John Maynard Keynes reached its zenith and decline with vacations they took together in 1910 and 1911 to locations with Byzantine monuments. In 1910, Keynes and Grant travelled to Greece and Constantinople, where they saw the mosaics of the Hagia Sophia and the Chora Monastery (1077), and Grant declared the Hagia Sophia to be the “greatest building he had seen.” In 1911, Keynes and Grant travelled to Sicily and Tunis, where Grant’s experience viewing the Norman cathedral of S. Maria la Nuova in Monreale (1174) inspired him to incorporate mosaic effects into this work. This latter trip was a failed attempt to recapture the passion Grant and Keynes once had in their relationship, embodied by the 1910 vacation. One could then view the arc of Grant and Keynes’ relationship as beginning and ending with Byzantine art. With these examples, it is logical to conclude that the frequency with which Fry, Bell, and their friends returned to Byzantine art as their artistic ideal must have been, at least in part, a projection or symptom of the intensity of feelings associated with Byzantine art in Bloomsbury biographies.

Yet, Fry and Bell’s citation of Byzantium was more than a reference to widespread contemporary interest in the period, or to the memories the critics and Bloomsbury members associated with Byzantine sites. Critical to this dissertation’s emphasis on both Fry’s and Bell’s
use of Byzantine art is the fact that the critics’ citation of Byzantine art was often an anachronistic misnomer. The Byzantine Empire began in 330 CE, and concluded with the 1453 fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks. Yet, the critics identified a Byzantine spirit in everything from their current political climate, to a diverse group of European artists across history, including Giotto, El Greco, William Blake, Paul Cézanne, and the mosaicist Boris Anrep. Such ahistorical applications of Byzantine art can partly be explained by Byzantium’s scholarly neglect until the middle of the seventeenth century. Despite increased academic attention to the period, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Byzantium still represented a less well-known, or less definitively established, artistic era. Byzantium’s relative “newness” in scholarship suggested a fluidity in Byzantium’s significance and historical demarcations that subsequently enabled artists and intellectuals to project onto the period their own associations and definitions. In the most recent publication addressing Byzantine art and Modernism, a selection of papers presented at a 2012 conference on the subject at Yale University, *Byzantium/Modernism: The Byzantine as Method in Modernity* (2015), editors Roland Betancourt and Maria Taroutina suggest that the Modernist understanding of Byzantium was one determined by subjective interpretation rather than historical accuracy. “Byzantium” in the Modern era was perceived to be less a chronologically specific designation, and more a symbolic *idea*, one that rendered archaeological or historical fact irrelevant to its Modernist use. Modern artists and scholars thus attributed to Byzantium contemporary values they already held for their own works. For example, according to Robert S. Nelson in “Modernism’s Byzantium Byzantium’s Modernism,” the Viennese Secessionist and Symbolist artist Gustav Klimt used the golden mosaics he had admired on trips to Byzantine sites in Venice and Ravenna to confirm his stylistic predisposition “to value flat, stylized displays of women,” with Klimt’s “interest in such
imagery in the first place that drew him to Byzantine mosaics.” In addition, twentieth-century collecting strategies for Byzantine art gravitated towards those works that appeared to validate non-naturalistic Modernist forms. In the 1920s and 1930s, for instance, according to Elizabeth Jeffreys, John Haldon, and Robin Cormack’s article, “Byzantine Studies as an Academic Discipline,” Byzantine artefacts appealed to collectors less on their own merits, and more from the alignment of the Byzantine coins and enamels’ “abstract qualities” with the similarly-abstract “taste of the time.” Byzantine art’s relationship to Modernism was then one of mutual construction, an idea of Byzantium crafted by the Modernists that facilitated, enabled, or supported both the advocacy for and the production of Modern avant-garde work.

To consider Fry and Bell’s ahistorical use of Byzantine art in relation to Modern work, an analogous use of Byzantium by Fry and Bell’s contemporary, the British poet William Butler (“W. B.”) Yeats, provides an instructive parallel. Between 1925-1926, Yeats composed and published his famous ode to Byzantium, “Sailing to Byzantium.” Yet, despite Yeats’ implication of an “Eastern” journey; visual language that suggested the Byzantine monuments in Ravenna, Italy; and a citation of the “holy city of Byzantium” (Byzantium’s capital Constantinople); the poem was inspired by Yeats’ visit to Stockholm, Sweden, where he saw the mosaics at the Stadshus (“Town Hall”). It was a Yeats-created “myth of Byzantium,” in which “Byzantium” was derived from a compendium of various sites and sources, both actually Byzantine and not. This dissertation similarly views Fry and Bell’s Byzantium. As was Yeats’, Fry and Bell’s concept of Byzantium constituted less a historically circumscribed artistic era and more a mythical ideal entitled “Byzantium,” and determined through an amalgam of the authors’ respective personal, cultural, and intellectual associations, needs, and circumstances.
“Bloomsbury’s Byzantium and the Writing of Modern Art” builds on and departs from the views of previous scholars who have argued for the significance of Byzantine art’s role in Fry and Bell’s writings. Art historian J. B. Bullen in “Byzantinism and Modernism” and his other publications that address Fry and Byzantine art claims that Fry interpreted Byzantine art to exemplify his Formalist theories, with Byzantine art’s tangible compositional elements Fry’s primary emphasis. Christopher Green, in “Expanding the Canon,” discusses Byzantium as merely a conceit for Fry to illustrate that Post-Impressionism paralleled the resurgence of art after the barbarian Sack of Rome. In Bloomsbury Rooms, Christopher Reed argues that Fry, Bell, and their friends’ citations of Byzantium and Byzantine art helped manifest the group’s social and sexual rebellion, as the cultural perception of Byzantium connected to a Mediterranean culture, freed from Protestant strictures against homosexuality, provided an analogue for sexual freedom, particularly among the homosexual members of Bloomsbury. In contrast to previous scholarship on Bloomsbury and Byzantium, this dissertation places Byzantium and its rhetorical role at the forefront, rather than at the support of Fry’s and Bell’s constructions of Modernist aesthetics, and adds to current literature the importance of Byzantium’s religious and spiritual connotations to the critics’ vision of Modernism.

In addition, this dissertation challenges Bloomsbury’s dismissal in academic historiography through its emphasis on Byzantine art’s integral role in both the foundation of Fry’s and Bell’s Modern art writings and in Bloomsbury art. In secondary literature, Bloomsbury art and writings have been continually challenged and attacked as insignificant, with declarations of value merely emblematic of the continued predominance and oppressions of the upper classes. Critics have also dismissed the value of Bloomsbury’s intellectual and artistic achievements as minimal, with cultural relevance attributed only to the mythologized and
titillating tabloid-esque fixation on the members’ personal lives. In addition, Bloomsbury’s artistic achievements, until recently, have tended to be marginalized in comparison with Bloomsbury’s literary achievements. For example, while Virginia Woolf’s writings have become a staple of high school and college classrooms, the Bloomsbury artists received their first collective exhibition as late as 1999, and Vanessa Bell received her first, large-scale, solo show and solo catalogue only in 2017, with the 2017 Dulwich Picture Gallery Vanessa Bell exhibition and catalogue. In the course of making a claim for Byzantium’s key role in the establishment of Bloomsbury Modernism, “Bloomsbury’s Byzantium and the Writing of Modern Art” argues that Bloomsbury’s turn to Byzantine art facilitated radical and revolutionary aesthetic and artistic innovations, and did so equally and simultaneously through text and art.

This dissertation deconstructs both Fry’s and Bell’s Formalist contributions and their understanding of Byzantine art before discussing the significance of the critics’ interrelationship of the two concepts. It should be noted that this dissertation focuses on Fry’s contributions far more than Bell’s. In part, this imbalance is a reflection of Fry’s scholarly leanings, as opposed to Bell’s critical ones; Fry was an educator, and Fry’s texts were more connected with a hyper-cognizance of art historiography. With the exception of Art and a select other texts, Bell’s writings focused less on art history and more on blunt art and literary criticism or on politics. In addition, while numerous, Bell’s writings are less easily accessible and his life has also been less thoroughly documented and examined than Fry’s. In the coming years, I anticipate these two issues to be rectified, largely due to the forthcoming publication of Mark Hussey’s Clive Bell biography and a surge of interest in Bell generated as a result.

Chapter 1 introduces Fry and Bell’s aesthetic Formalism to set the stage for Bloomsbury’s Byzantium’s place within their writings. This chapter re-conceptualizes both Fry’s
and Bell’s Formalist writings as an “affect-centric Formalism,” a concern with identifying an ideal effect on the viewer caused by quality form over the achievement of perfect compositional form itself. Chapter 2 contextualizes Fry and Bell’s idea of Byzantium within Byzantine historiography, and identifies the locations and periods of Byzantium Fry and Bell most often cited. In the process, this chapter elaborates on the ahistoricism of Bloomsbury’s Byzantium, and argues that the lack of this Byzantium’s historical accuracy enabled both Fry and Bell to distance their contributions from the writings of their nineteenth-century predecessor, John Ruskin. Chapters 3 and 4 explore how Bloomsbury’s Byzantium shaped Fry, Bell, and Bloomsbury’s writing and art. Chapter 3 both traces the previous authors on whom Fry and Bell relied to link Byzantium to Modern art, such as Julius Meier-Graefe and Maurice Denis, and deconstructs the function of Byzantium in Fry’s and Bell’s stories of Modern art. This chapter contends that Bloomsbury’s Byzantium served multiple, integral purposes in Fry’s and Bell’s arguments for the value of Modern art, ranging from a pedagogical function, as a teaching aid to help readers understand difficult avant-garde art, to a strategic one, its citation a means to incorporate non-Western art in the narrative of art history. Chapter 4 explores how the Bloomsbury artists; Fry, Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, and the artisans of the Omega Workshops; incorporated all aspects of Byzantine visuality into their twentieth-century art. Discussing oils, drawings, designs, and decorative arts objects as well as Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant’s Charleston farmhouse décor, chapter 4 notes that the Bloomsbury artists looked at more than Byzantine art’s appearance for inspiration. They aspired as well to capture the light effects of Byzantine interiors and the orientation of Byzantine architectural plans in their works. Chapter 5 investigates the role religion played in defining the parameters and significance of Bloomsbury’s Byzantium. Though the Bloomsbury group has typically been associated with an emphatic rejection of organized
religion, this chapter argues that religious feeling, spirituality, and the framework of organized religion were integral parts of both Fry’s and Bell’s defenses of Modern art. In their respective pursuits of an artistic experience akin to a religious encounter, but outside of organized religious practice, both Fry and Bell participated in the broader nineteenth- and twentieth-century struggle by artists and writers to describe transcendent encounters independent of language linked to religious belief. Chapter 5 demonstrates how Bloomsbury’s Byzantium helped Fry and Bell with this struggle to engage with ideas of transcendence and ecstasy outside of organized religion, and how Bloomsbury’s Byzantium ultimately redefined the critics’ affect-centric Formalism as a type of secular spiritualism. The concluding chapter argues for the long-ranging impact of Bloomsbury’s Byzantium on the narrative of artistic Modernism, tracing the legacy of Fry and Bell’s link between Modernism and Byzantium in the scholarship of the first director of the Museum of Modern Art, Alfred H. Barr, Jr.

At its core, “Bloomsbury’s Byzantium and the Writing of Modern Art” unpacks the causes and consequences of an incongruous juxtaposition between Byzantium and Modern art, but one that profoundly impacted current understanding of artistic Modernism. In so doing, this dissertation investigates the complicated, overlapping personal, societal, and political motivations that necessarily live behind the lines of any text. “Bloomsbury’s Byzantium and the Writing of Modern Art” therefore uses Fry and Bell’s link between Byzantium and Modernism as a case study to explore how the narrative of Modern art itself was written.

1. The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies notes that there is no official political or foundation date for what is known as the Byzantine era. Anthony Bryer, “Chronology and Dating,” in The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies, ed. Elizabeth Jeffreys, John Haldon, Robin Cormack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 32. However, it roughly coincides with the Byzantine Empire, which began in 330 CE and ended in 1453 CE with the fall of Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul) to the Ottoman Turks. The Christian church split into a western, Roman Catholic faction and an Eastern Orthodox one, an event known as the Great
East-West Schism (1054 CE). From then onward, the Byzantine Empire was considered part of “Eastern” Christianity, but at its inception until its defeat, the empire variously extended geographically, at points reaching north from Italy, east to Constantinople, and then to Africa, Greece, and Russia. When this dissertation refers to the “Western” vs. “Eastern” Byzantine Empires, it refers to Eastern Orthodox churches and art examples from territories that were predominantly “Western” Catholic after the East-West Schism of 1054 CE. “East” and “West” do not denote contemporary “Western” and “Eastern” territorial divisions or perceived divisions. At its height, the Byzantine Empire encompassed over one million square kilometers. In addition, as will be discussed further in chapter 2, the identification of works as “Byzantine” versus “Romanesque” or “Norman” or “Gothic” elided frequently in art history and particularly in Modernists’ attempts to reference a “Byzantine” inspiration. As a result, some sites that I claim Fry and Bell cited in connection with “Byzantine” art may be thought of today as strictly “Norman” or “Romanesque” or “Early Christian.” When I identify these sites as “Byzantine,” I do so in instances where Fry and Bell directly connected the location to Byzantium, either as a Byzantine work, or as an example of Byzantine style. Liz James, “Byzantium: A Very, Very Short Introduction,” in A Companion to Byzantium (West Sussex, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 1–2.


6. Fry met the Steins in 1908, forming a friendship that resulted in Leo Stein lending a Matisse and a Picasso to Manet and the Post-Impressionists. Ibid., 17.


10. J. B. Bullen, preface to *Post-Impressionists in England* (London: Routledge, 1988), xvi. Bullen points out that the contemporary vitriol surrounding Post-Impressionism was a function of the “virtues or evils of Post-Impressionism” being “deeply embedded in the social, political and philosophical climate of the period,” that was a time of “tumultuous, rapidly changing and complex years of English cultural life.” Anna Greutzner Robins suggests that part of the public objection to the exhibition derived from a conservative, moral objection to art works that brazenly displayed the human body, threatening to undermine the lingering “Victorian values” of the age. Robins, *Modern Art in Britain*, 16.


13. Ibid., 64. Fry’s advocacy for children’s art as that produced by natural “primitives” would later be embraced by post-World War II artists and collectives, such as Jean Dubuffet and the Art Brut-inspired artists, as well as the CoBrA group.

14. Christopher Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms: Modernism, Subculture, and Domesticity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004). The avant-garde desire to integrate art into everyday life is demonstrated by the radical domestic experiments of the Brücke group, Sonia Delaunay, and, later, the Bauhaus.


20. Clement Greenberg, “Night Nine, April 22, 1971,” in *Homemade Esthetics: Observations on Art and Taste*, ed. Janice Van Horne Greenberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 189; “Detached Observations” (1976), in *Late Writings*, 66-67; “Beginnings of Modernism” (1983), in *Late Writings*, 39–41. In “Beginnings of Modernism,” Greenberg defined a hallmark of Modernism as the “devolution of a tradition,” the “unraveling—not so much the dismantling—of the Renaissance tradition of commonsense rationality, conformity to ostensible nature…and conformity, too, to the way things in general seemed to happen.” While Greenberg noted that many may think that the “very fact of devolution might seem to account for the resistance to modernist innovation,” this conclusion only partially answered the question as to why there was, historically, such impassioned resistance to Modern art, and Greenberg noted that “the past offers one very clear precedent for creative devolution . . . that didn’t meet resistance.” Greenberg cited as an example the “creative devolution” of Greco-Roman pictorial art between the fourth and sixth centuries into Byzantine art, where, as in Modernism, “painting flattened itself out.” In Byzantine art, as with Greenberg’s praised works of Modernism, art became “autonomously pictorial.” The transition to Byzantine art was “accepted from the first, its products installed straightway in churches, palaces, other official places,” and represented very quickly not a devolution, but an “evolution, one of a largely new tradition of visual art and architecture.” Byzantine “devolution-evolution expressed a general and radical change insensibility,” and an ideal that Modern art aspired to emulate. As Greenberg stated, “whether the modernist devolution means the start of the evolution of a new tradition as the Byzantine devolution did, at least in visual art, remains moot, despite modernist architecture and maybe dance.” Greenberg continued by explaining why, despite similar paradigm shifts in approach to artistic production, despite the appearance of a “devolution” in art in the Byzantine shift from Greco-Roman naturalism to abstracted flatness akin to the driving motivations of Western Modern avant-garde art, Byzantine art, to Greenberg, met with less cultural resistance than did Modern art (39–41).

21. My dissertation’s exploration of Fry’s and Bell’s connection of Byzantine to Modern art also suggests an opportunity for future Byzantine scholars to investigate how Modern
scholarship affected Byzantine art historiography. Fry’s Modernist calls to Byzantium infiltrated the works of O. M. Dalton, the British Museum’s Byzantinist and later Keeper of the British and Medieval Antiquities Department (1921–28). Dalton’s seminal, and most widely influential publication was his 1911 *Byzantine Art and Archaeology*, which Fry reviewed for *Burlington Magazine* in 1913. Roger Fry, review of *Byzantine Art and Archaeology*, by O. M. Dalton, *Burlington Magazine* 22 (September 1913): 358. Dalton was a source for Fry and Bell’s understanding of Byzantine art, and Fry also worked with Dalton as a writer for *Burlington Magazine*, where Fry and Dalton’s work often appeared in the same issue. For example, in 1912, Dalton prefaced Fry’s article on J. P. Morgan’s Byzantine enamels, and Fry incorporated Dalton’s comments into the body of his article: “As Mr. Dalton has pointed out, these heads of the Apostles are oft-repeated traditional types.” Roger Fry, “An Appreciation of the Swenigorodskoi Enamels,” *Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 21, no. 113 (August 1912): 290, 293-294. Similarly, in 1926, Fry’s *Burlington Magazine* article on Siamese art was followed by Dalton’s “A Fourteenth Century English Ivory Triptych.” Roger Fry, “Siamese Art,” *Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 49, no. 281 (August 1926): 68, 72–75; O. M. Dalton, “A Fourteenth Century English Ivory Triptych,” *Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 49, no. 281 (August 1926): 74, 77-79, 83. After Dalton’s death in 1945, *Burlington Magazine* composed an obituary that praised Dalton’s tenure at the British Museum as well as his role as a contributor to the magazine (1904–26) and member of the magazine’s Consultive Committee (1916–27). Citation found in the March 1945 obituary of O.M. Dalton in *The Burlington Magazine*, clip found in the collection of O.M. Dalton’s papers at the British Museum, BEP Department. Critically, Fry and Bell’s connection of Modern art to Byzantine precedent made its appearance in Dalton’s texts. In the preface to his *East Christian Art: A Survey of the Monuments*, Dalton described the book as an adaptation of his earlier book, *Byzantine Art and Archaeology* from 1911. In *East Christian Art*, Dalton also cited the “value of modern art-criticism to our studies” as a model for Byzantinists to understand Byzantine objects as *art* works that possessed aesthetic as well as historical value. O. M. Dalton, *East Christian Art: A Survey of the Monuments* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), v-vi. Though I have not located any extant direct correspondence between Fry and Dalton, based on the degree of professional overlap and relationship, one can assume that professional communications between the two must have been extensive.


29. For a summary of recent publications dealing with the intersection of Modernism and Medieval art, not specifically Byzantine art, see Maria Taroutina, “Introduction: Byzantium and Modernism,” in Byzantium/Modernism, 8; Robert S. Nelson, “Modernism’s Byzantium, Byzantium’s Modernism,” in Byzantium/Modernism, 18; Bullen, “Byzantinism and Modernism,” 665; and Lewis, “Matisse and Byzantium,” 51–52. One of Matisse’s early supporters was Matthew Prichard, an advisor to Isabella Stewart Gardner and one of the key sources for Fry’s knowledge of Byzantine art. Prichard knew Matisse as early as 1909, and, according to Robert S. Nelson, over the years the two had many mutual exchanges of objects (such as Byzantine coins) and information about both Byzantine and Modern art. Robert S. Nelson, “Modernism’s Byzantium,” 24-27. Prichard’s involvement with both Byzantine art and Roger Fry will be discussed in chapter 2.

30. Thoby, the second child of Julia Duckworth Stephen and Sir Leslie Stephen, a prolific author, intellect, and the editor of the Dictionary of National Biography, originated the “at-
homes” so that his friends from Cambridge University could gather, reminisce, and continue the intellectual discussions that had occupied their university years.


33. Virginia and Leonard married on August 10, 1912. Lytton Strachey, a cousin of Duncan Grant, was also one of Grant’s early lovers, though Grant left Strachey for the affections of Keynes, albeit being temporarily swayed by affections for Adrian Stephen. Ibid., 12.


35. Fry was let go from the Metropolitan Museum following his transition to a diminished position in order to accommodate his wife’s mental illness and care back in England, and an accidental “bidding war” for an artwork on behalf of the Metropolitan, against the personal acquisition interests of the museum’s president, J. P. Morgan.

36. According to Frances Spalding, the date was 1910. Spalding, Bloomsbury Group, 54. Vanessa Bell remembered the date as 1908. Vanessa Bell, “Memories of Roger Fry,” October 1934, TGA20096/1/8-9, Vanessa Bell Manuscripts. Vanessa had actually met Fry previously, as she had sat next to him at a dinner in 1905 or 1906. In her letters to Clive between 1910 and 1911, Vanessa noted that Fry was a frequent visitor to Gordon Square and their country home at Asheham, acted as a surrogate father figure to her children in Clive’s absence, ate with the family, provided stimulating conversation, and, in keeping with Fry’s apparently sensitive physical disposition, often stayed the night in various states of gastrointestinal distress. Correspondence and Other Papers Relating to Roger Fry, Vanessa Bell, Clive Bell, Duncan Grant, and Others, 8010.2.63, 8010.2.67, 8010.2.68, 8010.2.71, 8010.2.84, Charleston Trust Collection, Tate Archive, London.

37. “Dear Mrs. Bell, / I should immensely like to come and start a discussion at your club…Would Feb 25th be too late I might have something ready by then.” Fry to Vanessa Bell, January 19, 1910, 8010.5.590, Charleston Trust Collection.


39. Ibid.

41. Ibid., 58–59.


43. Bell, “Memories of Roger Fry.”

44. Writing to his lover Helen Anrep in 1926, Fry stated, “My passion for Vanessa was the intensest [sic] thing in my life; it’s impossible that that should be repeated, but you are infinitely better as my wife than she would have been.” Fry to Helen Anrep, October 1, 1926, in *Letters of Roger Fry*, 2: 597. After Fry’s death, Vanessa took on the task of designing and decorating Fry’s casket. Unknown author to Vanessa Bell, 8010.5.589, Charleston Trust Collection.


46. Spalding, *Vanessa Bell*, 120. The union of Vanessa and Grant produced one daughter, Angelica, whose parentage was claimed by Clive Bell partly to ensure her a stake in his inheritance, and partly for the sake of propriety. She chronicled the trauma Vanessa Bell inflicted upon her by the concealment of her true parentage in her memoir. Angelica Garnett, *Deceived with Kindness: A Bloomsbury Childhood* (London: Pimlico, 1984).

47. Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits*, 56; Frances Spalding, *Duncan Grant* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1997), 5, 94. In fact, Fry and the Bells’ fateful 1911 trip to Turkey and Greece was planned as the reverse of Keynes and Grant’s travels to Byzantium, with the stop in Bursa on the recommendation of Grant. Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms*, 69.

48. Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, 107. This is another instance in which semantic messiness causes problems. Monreale and its mosaics were variously referred to in Fry and Bell’s writings. In Fry’s 1911 lecture on monumental painting, he described Monreale both in contrast to Byzantine aesthetic, and as an extension and continuation of Byzantine art. Roger Fry, “Six Lectures on Monumental Painting,” manuscript, 1911, REF1/88, Fry Papers. Because the mosaic inspiration Bloomsbury artists cited was Byzantine, even if the contemporary designation of a monument may fall under the category of “Norman” as opposed to “Byzantine,” the point is that Bloomsbury members saw it through the lens of the latter, and the former often as an iteration of Byzantine style (see chapter 2).


51. Kostis Kourelis notes that even by the time of peak archaeological interest in Byzantium, the 1920s and 1930s, the academic and historical study of Byzantium was still lacking, forcing universities to, in his words, “experiment” with how to present Byzantium. Kourelis, “Byzantium and the Avant-garde,” 426.


56. Ibid., 10.


59. Reed, Bloomsbury Rooms, 67, 70–71.

60. This view has been promoted most notably by the Marxist cultural theorist Raymond Williams, who attributed the Bloomsbury group’s relevance and preeminence largely to Bloomsbury’s privileged status. Williams argued that, despite their seemingly progressive views and avant-garde contributions, the group remained merely a “fraction” of the ruling class, one which served to progress and challenge the ruling class’ status quo, but a part of that class nonetheless. Raymond Williams, “The Bloomsbury Fraction,” in Problems in Materialism and Culture (London: Verso, 1980), 150–51.

61. Rachel Kerri Teukolsky claims that Fry and Bell’s writings have been overshadowed by distracting investigations into the “sensational Bloomsbury love-matches.” Rachel Teukolsky, “The Literate Eye: Victorian Art Writing and the Prose of Modern Aesthetics” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2004), 270–71. Kate Whitehead argues that Bloomsbury members, whose radio appearances included consultations on everything from literature and art to “marriage” and “grouse shooting,” became “publicly identified not with their literary or artistic styles, but with a certain ‘lifestyle.’” Kate Whitehead, “Broadcasting Bloomsbury,” Yearbook of English Studies 20 (1990): 121.
62. One recent study by Grace Brockington, *Above the Battlefield: Modernism and the Peace Movement in Britain, 1900-1918*, makes the case that Bloomsbury art’s radicalism has been misunderstood. The consistency of the artists’ Post-Impressionist-inspired aesthetic before, during, and after the First World War should be treated less as a symptom of a-political, detached denial of the global upheaval, and more as a political gesture, signaling Bloomsbury’s pacifist resistance to war. Brockington describes Bloomsbury’s practice as a calculated “assurance that pre-war values and expectations can survive,” and a way to “perform peace.” Grace Brockington, *Above the Battlefield: Modernism and the Peace Movement in Britain, 1900-1918* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 3, 18, 52.

63. Shone, “The Artists of Bloomsbury,” 11. Sarah Milroy and Ian A. C. Dejardin, eds., *Vanessa Bell* (London: Dulwich Picture Gallery, 2017). Christopher Reed makes the case that Bloomsbury’s exclusion from dominant narratives of Modern art can be attributed to the art historical bias against the “feminized” sites within which Bloomsbury made its most prominent aesthetic innovations: the decorative and domestic spheres. Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms*, 5–7. The gender politics of Bloomsbury artistic and cultural reception have been noted by Lisa Tickner and further explored by Reed. According to Tickner, in comparison with more celebrated avant-garde British groups, such as the Vorticists, led by Wyndham Lewis, whose “machine aesthetic” appeared therefore more “radical” and “virile,” the artistic contributions of Bloomsbury were feminized, and “came to embody a domestic, decorative and Francophile ‘traditional modernism,’” one in which Vanessa Bell’s domestic scenes of Studland Beach with her family represented an “invisible modernism of social and sexual relations.” Lisa Tickner, *Modern Life and Modern Subjects: British Art in the Early Twentieth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 194. See also Christopher Reed, “Bloomsbury Bashing: Homophobia and the Politics of Criticism in the Eighties” (1991), in *Queer Bloomsbury*, ed. Brenda Helt and Madelyn Detloff (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 36-63. Such associations between the anti-Bloomsbury sentiment, effeminacy, homophobia, and the decorated interior were contemporary to Fry and Bell’s time. For instance, Geoffrey Grigson’s obituary of Roger Fry, published in *The Bookman*, noted that “Mr. Fry also liked Duncan Grant. Also I have no doubt he liked Lytton Strachey and Virginia Woolf, and other products of the girlish vision, or of art in the withdrawing-room.” Geoffrey Grigson, “The Work of Roger Fry,” *The Bookman*, October 1934, p. 37, ProQuest British Periodicals (3083666). The implication here is that Fry’s taste should be questioned as emasculated, since he liked the works of Duncan Grant, Lytton Strachey, and Virginia Woolf—linked, presumably, because of their known homosexuality and/or, in the case of Woolf, unluckiness in having been born female.
Chapter One: Fry, Bell, and Affect-Centric Formalism

In art historiography, Roger Fry and Clive Bell remain inextricably linked as art critics who created what today is considered Modernist aesthetic Formalism.\(^1\) Formalism is a methodological development of ideas particular to the nineteenth-century Aesthetic movement, and constitutes an approach best defined as artistic assessment without contextual consideration.\(^2\) Mary Devereaux in “More than ‘Meets the Eye,’” for instance, identifies Formalism as the belief that the “configuration of formal elements that meets the eye—line, mass, shape, light and shade” are the “only elements intrinsic to the work, and it is to these and only these that our attention ought to be confined.”\(^3\) In Formalist art history, artworks are inherently “good” or “bad,” rather than subject to cultural systems of value which act to define “good” or “bad.”\(^4\) This chapter argues that the significance of Fry and Bell’s Formalism has been misplaced, and re-conceptualizes Fry and Bell’s writings as an “affect-centric” Formalism.\(^5\) Defined as affect-centric Formalism, I argue that both authors were concerned less with perfect form, and more with the emotional effects generated by perfect form. Ultimately, as will be discussed in chapter 5, Byzantium’s most important role in Fry and Bell’s aesthetics was a consequence of Fry and Bell’s affect-centric Formalism, as Byzantium as an artistic ideal enabled Fry and Bell to recast their concerns with aesthetic emotion as a search for a secular spiritualism through art.

In discussing Fry and Bell’s writings in tandem, this chapter and this dissertation as a whole do not minimize the significant intellectual divergences between the two critics, but rather direct attention to two, key points of overlap between Fry and Bell’s respective approaches to art and aesthetics. The first significant overlap constitutes the subject of this dissertation. Both Fry and Bell similarly conceptualized an idea of Byzantium, and used their shared concept of
Bloomsbury’s Byzantium in the same manner throughout both authors’ writings. The second significant point of convergence between Fry and Bell is the focus of this chapter, Fry’s and Bell’s aesthetics as affect-centric Formalism.

Though examination of each author’s body of work yields as many differences as similarities, fundamentally, Fry’s and Bell’s writings share the same DNA. Fry and Bell’s close personal relationship, ties to the Bloomsbury circle, and collaboration on the *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* and *Second Post-Impressionist* exhibitions suggest a kinship in thought at a core, foundational level. Indeed, in their own time, the idea that Fry and Bell were halves of a whole, or that Bell was a substitute or cipher for Fry’s ideas, predominated public perception. In 1914, William Rothenstein wrote to Bell, praising *Art* as a direct descendent of Fry’s ideas: “It is a case once more of ‘in the beginning was the word,’ and the word takes the place of the art, and the word is ‘Roger!’” After Fry’s death in 1934, the head of the Talks Department at the British Broadcasting Corporation (“BBC”) wrote that while he would have preferred Fry as a speaker for an upcoming debate on art and representation, after Fry’s passing “his mantle [had] fallen upon the shoulders of Bell.” Even Fry himself aligned the two as co-conspirators in Modern art advocacy. Letters between Fry and Bell from 1910 suggest that the critics intended to start a paper together, and, in an undated letter between Fry and Bell, Fry wrote that Bell should “go straight ahead with your preface and I shall be able to fit in” as it was “so good for the public to have the same thing said twice over differently.”

Fry’s and Bell’s similar biographical and educational foundations support the intellectual parallels between their writings. Both Fry and Bell grew up in relative financial security, which enabled each to pursue his creative passions without much concern for monetary need. Fry’s financial situation partly reflected family money, more so after the death in 1913 of his uncle.
Joseph Storrs Fry, chocolate magnate, who bequeathed a generous sum to all his nephews and nieces. Bell was born into a family which made its name in the coal industry, and Bell and his family lived “comfortably,” in the words of Bloomsbury scholar Richard Shone. According to Shone, though close to it, both critics were not part of the upper-class. In British distinctions of social stature, Fry, Bell, and their Bloomsbury peers, “did not live in Mayfair or Belgrave Square,” the boys of the family were educated but “not at Eton or Harrow,” and the girls “‘came out’” in society but “were not expected to be presented at Court.”

Both Fry and Bell attended Cambridge University, albeit at different times, and each identified the experience as a formative one in their lives and intellectual development. Fry’s father, the distinguished lawyer Sir Edward Fry, had originally hoped to become a scientist, but, as a Quaker, Edward Fry was barred from university by dictates that university admittees must be Anglican. His son, Roger, was then groomed to fulfill the life Edward Fry never had, once the bans on non-Anglican admittance were lifted by Cambridge and Oxford in 1871. Fry entered King’s College, Cambridge in 1885, intending to pursue science, but turned to the study of art over his father’s objections. Fry thrived at King’s College, joined the secret Cambridge intellectual society the Apostles, and formed a group of close friends with whom, in conversation, he began to question his previously held beliefs on faith, life, and art. Bell enrolled at Trinity College at Cambridge in 1899 where he met Thoby Stephen, Leonard Woolf, and Lytton Strachey, the core group of friends that established Bloomsbury as a unit beginning with Thoby’s 1905 “at-homes” at 46 Gordon Square.

While Fry’s and Bell’s professional tracks differed, with Fry pursuing academic positions and lectures, and Bell later in life serving as an advisor on the British Council to promote British art abroad, both Bell and Fry distinguished themselves, making their names as art critics and
theorists over the course of several decades. Both promoted Modern art on public platforms, and
sometimes, as with their defenses of Post-Impressionism, jointly contested public opinion. After
graduation from Cambridge, Fry co-founded the Burlington Magazine in 1903, serving both as
an editor and as a contributor, and wrote for Apollo and the Athenaeum. Fry lectured at
Cambridge and elsewhere, gave talks on BBC Radio, and was named Slade Professor of Fine Art
at Cambridge University in 1933, an honor he had long sought.14 Bell’s literary output was fairly
prodigious and wide-ranging. Bell began writing book reviews for the Athenaeum in 1906, and
published political treatises (“Art and War” [1915]; On British Freedom [1923]; Civilization
[1928]; Warmongers [1938]; “Peace at Once” [1915] [which the Mayor of London ordered
burned as a threat to the populace]), a text on Marcel Proust (Proust [1928]), and writings on art
and aesthetics (Art [1914], Since Cézanne [1923], Enjoying Pictures [1934], and An Account of
French Painting [1932], among others).15 Throughout his career, Bell often lectured on art, but,
in conversation with Bell’s biographer, Mark Hussey, Hussey noted that while Bell received
offers for formal teaching positions, he never accepted.

The fruit of the critics’ overlapping intellectual and professional achievements can be
identified in those foundational aspects of Fry’s and Bell’s writings that exemplify the qualities
of art historical Formalism. Both Fry’s and Bell’s writings, for instance, appeared to isolate the
conditions of “art”—its composition, creation, and reception—from the circumstances of
“life”—the contextual factors determining a work’s composition, creation, and reception. Bell in
his 1914 Art stated that “to appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing from life,”
while Fry claimed in his 1917 “Art and Life” that art’s “special spiritual activity,” while “open at
times to influences from life” was “in the main self-contained.”16 Fry and Bell’s joint emphasis
on form itself as an innate signal of value, however, has been typically associated in scholarship
with Bell’s idea of significant form, first articulated in *Art*. Bell in *Art* described significant form as a collection of “lines and colors combined in a particular way” designed to “stir our aesthetic emotions,” with aesthetic emotions defined as the emotions universally experienced as a condition of encountering good art. To Bell, significant form, as a result, could link a diverse range of good art objects derived from a varied set of cultural values. By virtue of each work’s possession of the correct proportion of lines and colors, resulting in the ability to provoke aesthetic emotion, Bell was able form a common comparative ground among “Sta. Sophia and the windows at Chartres, Mexican sculpture, a Persian bowl, Chinese carpets, Giotto’s frescoes at Padua, and the masterpieces of Poussin, Piero della Francesca, and Cézanne.”

However, Fry’s and Bell’s aesthetics weren’t always in sync, as Fry’s disdain for Bell’s significant form indicates. Significant form as a concept was anathema to Fry’s sensibilities, particularly the degree to which Bell identified the representational forms that might arise from significant form’s lines and colors as unimportant to an assessment of artistic value. In his article “Retrospect,” closing off his 1920 *Vision and Design*, Fry noted that Bell’s idea of significant form went “too far” in his declaration that “representation of nature was entirely irrelevant” as, according to Fry, “even the slightest suggestion, of the third dimension in a picture must be due to some element of representation.” Therefore, while “significant form” is a concise way to argue for Bloomsbury’s role instigating Modernist Formalism, secondary literature often mistakenly attributes “significant form” to both Fry and Bell. “Significant form” signifies an extreme extension of the mutual interests that occupied both Fry’s and Bell’s aesthetics, but has historiographically (though incorrectly) served as a convenient shorthand for both Fry and Bell’s seemingly Formalist isolation of art from life.
Similarly, while Fry and Bell were often grouped together in both their time and today as the “Bloomsbury art critics,” contemporaries and secondary literature have almost equally drawn a wedge between the alignment of the two, viewing Bell’s intellectual contributions as marginal in comparison to Fry’s, or as merely a poor derivation of Fry’s ideas. In Spalding’s biography of Vanessa Bell, she characterizes Clive Bell and his work by damning with faint praise. Speaking of his writings, she says: “His chief gift . . . lay not in his own creativity but in his ability to appreciate the work of others.”

In Wilfred Stone’s transcript of interviews with living Bloomsbury members in the late 1950s and 60s, he recounts visiting Bunny Garnett and Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell’s daughter, Angelica (Bell) Garnett, and asking them if “Clive Bell ever had an idea that Roger Fry hadn’t had first.” Stone notes that Bunny and Angelica, laughingly, conceded that Fry was “the greater critic,” but that Bell was, in part, “an important critic in his own right.” Such assessments—that while Bell was a good critic who profited off of others’ ingenuity, Fry was a better critic who generated the ingenious ideas—were voiced in Fry and Bell’s time. Reviewing Bell’s section on English artists in the 1912 “Second Post-Impressionism Exhibition” catalogue, Collins Baker, in a 1912 Saturday Review article, noted that “Mr. Clive Bell’s contribution is a muddle of clouded thought, loose argument, historical inaccuracy and phrases.” Baker then assured readers that Fry’s contribution on the French artists, in contrast, was praiseworthy, and from a man whose “conviction none I think would question.”

This dismissal of Bell’s contributions in comparison to Fry’s is partly explained by the dramatic temperament distinctions between the two critics. In accounts of the pair from their time to the present, Fry is described as the tender-hearted, empathetic scholar and intellectual, while Bell is described more as a playboy aristocrat. Such characterizations may have unintentionally predisposed Bloomsbury chroniclers to dismiss or diminish the pleasure-seeking
Bell’s intellectual contributions or his seriousness as a scholar in favor of Fry, whose personality appeared to match the gravity of his ideas. Fry was the kind-hearted caregiver who nursed Vanessa back to health in Constantinople, listened to Vanessa when she was in the throes of maternal anxiety, and wrote dedicatedly to wife Helen Fry and her doctors even after she was committed to a mental institution in 1910. Fry stood up to J. P. Morgan and the board of the Metropolitan to fight for, essentially, “flex time,” to work only part-time in New York so he could return to England and care for his wife. Fry was a devoted parent (by early twentieth-century standards) and was a parental figure to Bloomsbury offspring. Angelica (Bell) Garnett in her memoir recounted Fry’s visits to Charleston, Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant’s farmhouse in East Sussex, with great fondness. Quentin Bell, Vanessa and Clive Bell’s son, later a distinguished art historian himself, described Fry in a 1964 lecture as his own “first teacher.” In memoirs, letters, biographies, and almost every critical account of Fry’s life, Fry is held up as a compassionate man who was passionate about art. He was forgiving, to a fault: despite the lingering pain of Vanessa leaving him for Duncan Grant, Fry remained on close terms with both, and was a frequent guest at Charleston.

Clive Bell was more of an outwardly colorful character. In contrast to Fry’s more constricted and bookish youth, Bell grew up in a manner typical of the British upper to upper-middle class, enjoying hunting and sport. Frances Spalding, in The Bloomsbury Group, describes Bell as an “excellent host” with an “appetite for gaiety,” with Bell only feeling happy if everybody around him felt the same. Thoby Stephen described Bell as a “cross between Shelley and a country squire” to account for Bell’s Romantic spirit and aristocratic interests, and Russian mosaicist Boris Anrep depicted Bell in his 1933 The Awakening of the Muses mosaic at the National Gallery as the personification of Bacchus. Bell was also somewhat of a
womanizer. Bell’s marriage to Vanessa became a union of friendship rather than marital love after Clive and Vanessa’s sister Virginia’s at least three-year-long emotional affair. In his bedroom at Charleston, Bell hung two 1924 female nudes by Dunoyer de Segonzac, each work foregrounding the nude’s splayed genitalia.

Potential for scholarly bias aside, there is truth to the assessment that Bell relied on Fry’s ideas as a foundation for his own aesthetic theories. In his 1956 memoir *Old Friends*, Bell described his connection to Fry’s work thusly: “I thought and reasoned and invented and arrived at conclusions as he did, only I thought and reasoned and invented less well.” As the years passed and their lives and relationships expanded and shifted Fry seemed to resent this reality, with Fry often accusing Bell of snobbery at best, and plagiarism at worst. In 1918, Fry praised Bell to Vanessa, claiming that he was “amazing in the quality and flow of his mind, and the quality gets better,” and Bell noted in *Art* that while he and Fry “still disagree[d] profoundly,” conversations with Fry shaped Bell’s text, resulting in Bell owing him a “debt that defies exact computation.” By 1919, however, Fry began to take aggressive stands to distinguish his ideas from Bell’s. In a letter to the *Burlington Magazine* editor in August 1919, Fry stated: “Whatever Mr Clive Bell may have said, I personally have never denied the existence of some amount of representation in all pictorial art.” Fry also felt that Bell directly plagiarized his ideas. In a letter to Jean Marchand dated December 19, 1921, Fry claimed that while he “hadn’t even heard of Clive Bell’s article” he “shall perhaps be able to guess whence comes the inspiration you refer to. Certainly he can be very annoying. I think his criticism have done me more harm than all the others.” Fry’s mild annoyance at Bell eventually became more vitriolic. In a letter to Helen Anrep from August 13, 1926, Fry stated:

I can’t write now because Clive’s come in and it keeps muddling me. Now he’s gone off to Scotland taking a copy of the proof of my first article on aesthetics. He asked if he
could have it and I didn’t see how to refuse it but asked him to keep what he has to say till the time came for a review…But I daresay it will all the same furnish material for a good many articles for Vogue and elsewhere between now and then, but short of accusing him of plagiarism I didn’t see what could be done.37

Writing to Helen Anrep in June of 1933, Fry noted that a colleague’s review of a Duncan Grant exhibition “put[t] to Clive Bell a thing I was first to say…But I daresay Clive repeated it without acknowledgement. It wouldn’t be the only time.”38

Bell’s positive feelings on and for Fry were similarly eroded by time. In his memoir Old Friends, Bell’s tribute to Fry was as much a celebration of Fry’s achievements (“he was one of the most remarkable men of his age, besides being one of the most lovable”) as it was an opportunity to include little side-comments of irritation at aspects of Fry’s temperament. (Fry was an obstinate, “champion gull,” who was suspicious “not of the crooks, but of old friends and well meaning acquaintances” and could be “as censorious as an ill-conditioned judge.”)39

This dissertation, however, contends that despite interpersonal divisions and ideological distinctions dividing the critics from one another in life and in secondary literature, Fry’s and Bell’s writings’ advocacy for Modern art possessed the same conceptual underpinning and occurred through similar argumentative paradigms. The remainder of this chapter argues that the significant overlap between Fry’s and Bell’s writings was not the degree to which their ideas aligned with Formalist values. Instead, this chapter states that what constituted the most substantial and revolutionary contribution of both Fry’s and Bell’s aesthetics was the critics’ joint definition of an affective artistic ideal. The lynchpin of both Fry’s and Bell’s aesthetics was the pursuit of emotions generated by exposure to good compositional form, rather than an emphasis on the forms themselves.

An interest in privileging form as an affective vessel appears as early as the late nineteenth century, in Fry’s 1891 dissertation manuscript on Phenomenology and Greek art. Fry
voiced his interest in representations that focused on “things as we know them to be rather than as they appear,” a quality that Fry used to explain the value of imperfectly-represented art forms such as those created by children. In his 1909 “An Essay in Aesthetics,” Fry claimed that the role of form was to “generate in us emotional states.” In Fry’s 1910 “The Post-Impressionists,” Fry distinguished the art of the Post-Impressionists from that of the Impressionists by stating that, unlike the latter, the former were concerned not “with recording impressions of colour or light,” but rather with how such impressions enabled them to “express emotions which the objects themselves evoked.” By 1924, in “The Artist and Psycho-Analysis,” Fry defined art as a means through which one could access “the substratum of all emotional colors of life,” something that “underlies all the particular and specialized emotions of actual life.” The effect of the encounter with the object, rather than the tangible compositional value of the object itself, was what constituted the claim for aesthetic value in Fry’s Formalism.

Bell’s texts argued similarly. While significant form, that ideal combination of lines and colors, may have been Bell’s touchstone to mark good art, what made significant form “significant” began and ended not with form, but instead with aesthetic emotion. Bell claimed that the “starting-point for all systems of aesthetics must be the personal experience of a peculiar emotion,” what Bell termed the “aesthetic emotion.” Significant form represented the common quality to all objects that inspired aesthetic emotion. Significant form was then less an actual combination of lines and colors, and more a placeholder term denoting form’s effect, the aesthetic emotion that both determined and was determined by the form itself. In his 1923 Since Cézanne, Bell described the identifying characteristic of a “good” work of art as the work’s capacity to elicit in viewers “that emotion which we call aesthetic.” Similarly, in his 1934 Enjoying Pictures, Bell distinguished between the composition of an image as the “matter that
clothes and carries that essence,” and significant form, that was, instead, the “essence,” “the vital spark in every work of art” that “inform[ed]” the bodies “on which it relie[ed] for existence.”

Fry’s and Bell’s emphases on the immaterial, emotional consequences of experiencing form may be traced to their reliance on the philosophical models of Denman Ross, Henri Bergson, and Heinrich Wölfflin. Denman Ross was an art professor at Harvard University when Fry began his career, and one of Ross’ most notable texts, the 1907 *A Theory of Pure Design: Harmony, Balance, Rhythm*, provided Fry with a model and a vocabulary for a “scientific” approach to identifying and categorizing aesthetic affect. The aspect of Ross’ work most pertinent to discussions of Bloomsbury Formalism and affect was the extent to which Ross’ quality of form was determined by form’s effect on the viewer’s experience. Ross’ method, the scientific breakdown of art works into their composite parts, represented a study in which Ross illuminated the mathematical and optical reasons for perceiving proportions, or being attracted to certain shapes. In other words, Ross’ work privileged viewer response as a means to discover and understand his aesthetic categories of “Harmony,” “Balance,” and “Rhythm.” As both Fry and Bell would later similarly argue, to Ross an ideal compositional form was a function of form’s ability to affect its viewers, “the arrangement and composition of lines and spots of paint for the sake of Order and Beauty,” designed “to give pleasure to the eye of the designer.”

The philosopher Henri Bergson’s work directly or indirectly may also have provided a model for Fry and Bell’s concern with aesthetic emotional effect. Bergson was a known entity to both Fry and Bell, and a common reference point for both the Bloomsbury circle and other British avant-gardes prior to World War I. In Bergson’s 1896 *Matter and Memory*, Bergson, among many other things, laid the groundwork for a provocative relationship between the
viewing body and the work of art. In chapter 1, Bergson described a situation in which the viewing body and the “images” of the surrounding world mutually affected one another: the “image” of the world “transmit[ted] movement” to the viewing body, while the viewing body “influence[d] external images” by giving “back movement to them.” The body was here described as “an image which act[ed] like other images, receiving and giving back movement.”

To understand the world, the body must have absorbed information from the surrounding world of images, shaped those images in accordance with the parameters of the body, and then engaged with the surrounding world based on the images the body received and to which it responded. Key to this structure was the degree to which the surrounding world was not composed of material things, but rather constituted a collection of “images” which were meaningful and sensical to the viewing body only by impacting, engaging with, and altering that body. In this example, Bergson articulated a schema which privileged a dynamic, and yet immaterial relationship between the world and the body, one in which images were functional and meaningful guides to connect with the surrounding world only if they were active, affecting and changing the body, with the body responding in kind. This model for an active relationship between “image” and viewing body was akin to Fry and Bell’s model for the affective power of good art on the viewer.

In addition, Fry demonstrated a knowledge of and affinity for the works of art historian Heinrich Wölfflin, whose writings on aesthetics, architecture, and the Baroque period often relied on an empathetic understanding of artistic production. In Wölfflin’s “Prolegomena to a Psychology of Architecture,” his 1896 dissertation, Wölfflin ascribed quality and value to architectural forms by virtue of how those forms corresponded to ideal proportions in the human body, claiming that “Physical forms possess a character only because we ourselves possess a
body,” as “we gather the experience that enables us to identify with the conditions of other forms.” Wölfflin noted in his Introduction that images appeared more or less attractive, colors more or less bright and vivid, subjects more or less appealingly done as a function of individual preference, and, consequently, of the artists as individuals creating differently from one another. One could view Wölfflin’s project overall as a compensation for the subjective and empathetic visual experience he detailed in “Prolegomena to a Psychology of Architecture,” and therefore, in its inspiration for Bloomsbury aesthetics, as a project which privileged the affect of a work of art as integral to its comprehension. Fry and Bell then found in the collective inspiration of Ross, Bergson, and Wölfflin paradigms to assess artistic value which privileged intangible aesthetic response and emotional reactions over the art object’s physical composition. That the thrust of Fry’s and Bell’s aesthetic programs emphasized an artistic ideal derived not from form, but from form’s effect on the viewer is a testament to these sources of influence.

Discussing Fry’s and Bell’s writings through the lens of aesthetic emotion or affect supports this dissertation’s description of Bloomsbury’s Byzantium. Fry’s and Bell’s Formalist theories praised art in relation to its ability to provoke an esthetic emotion in the viewer. As such, Fry and Bell privileged an aesthetic standard of quality which was inherently highly subjective and a construction of the viewer, rather than a clearly delineated description of valued compositional qualities. As will be further discussed in chapter 2, Bloomsbury’s Byzantium similarly represented a highly subjective, rather than fact-based entity. This dissertation’s interpretation of Bloomsbury’s Byzantium as an idea of the period, rather than a historically accurate citation of an era then finds support in the analogous structure of subjective, viewer-generated meaning which represented the core of Fry and Bell’s aesthetic philosophy.
A few, previous scholars have analyzed aspects of Fry and Bell’s focus on artistic emotion, but I would argue that Fry and Bell’s Formalism defined primarily through emotional response can best be understood as what scholar Todd Cronan labels “affective formalism” in his text *Against Affective Formalism: Matisse, Bergson, Modernism.* Affective formalism describes the “experience of an artwork” as a “highly charged physical encounter that involved sensations passing directly into the body of the viewer through qualities inherent in line and color,” a concern which “denies both representation and intentionality” as the “artist and the medium dissolve into material flows of sensory and affective currents.” While the purpose of Cronan’s text may have been to underscore the insufficiency of affective formalism to describe the actual activities of Modernist practice, Fry and Bell’s version of Formalism appears to align with the description of affective formalism Cronan challenges.

I would, however, qualify Cronan’s definition of affective formalism. Given that Fry and Bell’s writings relied on a concern with affect and emotional response to art, Fry and Bell’s Formalism should be viewed less as a purely affective formalism in Cronan’s terms, and more as an “affect-centric” Formalism, one which had as its primary focus the achievement of a particular emotion through and from form. This distinction posits Fry and Bell’s Formalism as less a naïve or malicious plot to erase the contextual identities forming and determining artistic value and viewer response, and more as a quixotic quest to find, identify, and quantify aesthetic emotion. “Affect-centric” is synonymous with the single-mindedness of Fry and Bell’s aesthetics, a complex interrelationship of form, affect, and viewer which drove their narrative of art history.

As will be demonstrated in the following chapters, Byzantine art helped calibrate Fry and Bell’s affect-centric Formalism as a model through which the authors determined the qualities of
aesthetic emotion and the art which produced it. Byzantine art provided Fry’s and Bell’s aesthetics with an ideal form capable, to Fry and Bell, of eliciting the strongest aesthetic emotion. As subsequent chapters will prove, Bloomsbury’s Byzantium ensured that Fry and Bell’s immaterial aesthetic emotion was imbued with sufficient importance and gravity, and ultimately helped redefine the critics’ Formalist paradigm for art as a model of secular spiritual devotion.


4. Formalism as a methodology is inherently problematic, as it denies the subjective perspectives that shape the creation and reception of art in favor of a seemingly iron-clad assertion of objective quality. As a consequence of eliminating creative context and the social and historical circumstances affecting a work’s creation and reception, Formalist interpretations of art history become inherently exclusionary, arguing for an objective assessment of artistic worth which actually constitutes one, particular subsection of society’s perspective on aesthetic value. The current debates in art history regarding the expansion of the Western canon, and the need to include global and diverse perspectives on artistic creation, are part of an on-going response to the degree to which the Formalist myth of objective value in the discipline resulted in the privileging of a white, male, and Western view of art.

5. The concept of “affect-centric” Formalism will be discussed more extensively later in this chapter.
6. As Adrienne Rubin states, Though Clive Bell’s name is often associated with ‘significant form,’ he popularized rather than formulated the concept”—the “concept” was thus “formulated” by Fry. Adrienne Rubin, Roger Fry’s ‘Difficult and Uncertain Science’: The Interpretation of Aesthetic Perception (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2013), 1n2.

7. William Rothenstein to Clive Bell, March 23, 1914, 8010.2.410, Charleston Trust Collection, Tate Archive, London.

8. C. V. Salmon, quoted in Sam Rose, “The Visual Arts in the BBC’s ‘The Listener,’ 1929–1939,” Burlington Magazine 155 (September 2013): 608. Fry’s unexpected death in 1934 was a consequence of an infection following a fall while with his partner, Helen Anrep, in France.

9. Fry to Bell, June 28, 1910, in Letters of Roger Fry, ed. Denys Sutton (London: Chatto and Windus, 1972), 1:335. In his annotated version of this letter, Sutton noted, “Presumably RF and Bell were trying to start a paper.”

10. This inherited sum provided the start-up funding for Fry’s Omega Workshops. Julian Fry, interview by S. P. Rosenbaum, published on the occasion of the exhibition Roger Fry: Artist and Critic, Scarborough College, January 28–February 16, 1977, REF/13/31, 10, Roger Elliot Fry Papers, King’s College Archive Centre, Cambridge, UK (hereafter, Fry Papers).


12. Ibid., 30.

13. More than one Fry biographer, contemporary, or scholar, has noted that Fry’s approach to art and art criticism was heavily informed by his scientific background. One example is Julian Fry, interview by S. P. Rosenblum, 12. Fry’s relationship to the science of artistic analysis pervades even his earliest works. In an undated, unpublished article from the article “Chance Patterns in Nature and Man-Made Patterns in Art,” Fry reverts to biological analogy to describe how he hoped his readers would respond to his defense of Modern artists: “If I have succeeded in changing your opinions about the value and importance of certain artists . . . I shall only have infected your brains with some new microbes; but if I have given you the hint of a new way of looking at pictures I really shall not have wasted your time.” Roger Fry, “Chance Patterns in Nature and Man-Made Patterns in Art,” REF1/55, Fry Papers. His 1891 dissertation hinges on applying the “science of phenomenology” to a study of Greek art, and Fry demonstrates here a knowledge of previous scholars who have attempted to apply the science of perception and sensation to art appreciation. Describing the perceptual effect of certain color choices, Fry claims that he conducted an experiment with color tones “a deep base, the interior of
which was covered with soot, and which was observed at the nearest distance that a foreground
object would be seen in a picture and on a clouded day out of doors” to address the effect of the
“luminosity of the air” on color perception. Roger Fry, “Some Problems of Phenomenology and
its Application to Greek Art,” dissertation manuscript, Cambridge University, 1891, REF1/13,
Fry Papers.

14. Bell described Fry’s lecture technique in 1936, detailing how Fry pushed to broaden
the viewpoint of his audience, putting up a work by Henri Matisse to a lecture an audience
“composed chiefly of Academy and Slade students” specifically to provoke a reaction and then
chastise the group into paying attention: “And may I recall, for my own amusement, how the
lecturer, who knew his British audience to a T., drawing himself up to his full height, putting on
his most crusader-like expression and his most pulpit-worthy voice, and feeling the while for his
old school tie, said gravely . . . ‘Seeing that most of the painters about whom I hope to speak are
my personal friends, I trust I shall be spared the pain of listening to personal insults.’ The effect
on a British audience . . . was, I need hardly say, exactly what the lecturer knew it would be.”
Clive Bell, “The Foundations of a Great Age,” handwritten draft for a lecture, 1936,
Trinity/BELL/4/3, Papers of Arthur Clive Heward Bell, Trinity College Library, Cambridge,
UK. Regarding the Slade Professorship, Fry had first been rejected from this position in 1904.

15. For the anecdote about the Mayor of London ordering Bell’s pamphlet to be burned,
see Mary Ann Caws and Sarah Bird Wright, Bloomsbury and France: Art and Friends (Oxford,

(1920; reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 1998), 6. In addition, Fry praised the Post-
Impressionists in 1912 because their “new and definite reality” was removed from life, a self-
contained new realm of aesthetic experience gained not through the imitation of form, but the
creation of form; they desired “not to imitate life, but to find an equivalent for life” outside of

17. Indeed, Michael T. Saler codes Modernist Formalism as synonymous with Bell’s idea
of “significant form,” and links both Fry and Bell’s aesthetics to an acceptance of “significant

18. Bell, Art, 16–17. The concept of a binary between “good” and “bad” art was directly
articulated by Bell in Art. However, this binary should be understood to have a dual meaning:
“good” in the sense of “good vs. bad” qualitative judgments on art, and “good” in the sense of G.
E. Moore’s essential, inherent, indefinable “good.” Bell, Art, 37.

19. Ibid., 17.


24. Ibid., 182.


26. Woolf scholar Mark Hussey is currently writing a biography of Clive Bell; this text will certainly expand on and challenge the limited, and often dismissive assessments of Bell’s intellectual and cultural contributions.

27. Spalding, Vanessa Bell, 93.

28. Angelica Garnett, Deceived with Kindness: A Bloomsbury Childhood (London: Pimlico, 1984). Fry’s son, Julian, however, presented a slightly different version of his father than that publicly expressed by either Fry’s daughter, Pamela, who was heavily involved in preserving her father’s legacy, or by Vanessa’s children, Quentin and Angelica. In a 1977 conversation with S. P. Rosenbaum to mark an exhibition of Roger Fry’s paintings and drawings at Scarborough College, Julian testily responded to Rosenbaum when asked whether or not Fry spoke with him about the 1910 Post-Impressionist exhibition: “Why should he? After all he was busy enough discussing it with people who mattered rather than with his offspring.” To the question of his upbringing, Julian Fry responded, “As a child of seven I didn’t know him very well. He was in New York, he was always away, he came and kissed us good-night, but it was my mother and one of her sisters, Aunt Edith, who had the most to do with our upbringing.” His Aunt Joan became a mother figure from seven years old on. Julian Fry contended that it was a combination of Roger Fry’s frequent travels and absence from their lives, and the instability of his mother Helen Fry, caused by mental illness, which caused a deep distrust of adults throughout his childhood and throughout Pamela’s as well. Fry, interview by S. P. Rosenblum, 6.


31. Thoby Stephen, quoted in ibid., 45. In this 1933 mosaic, Boris Anrep paired Bell’s Bacchus as a central figure with an image of Sir Osbert Sitwell as the personification of Apollo. Sitwell was a writer and sometime art critic within the Bloomsbury circle. One may assume that perhaps a more fitting pairing would have been with Bell’s Bacchus against Fry’s Apollo; however, as, at this point, Fry had begun his relationship with Anrep’s estranged wife, Helen, one may also assume that Fry was perhaps a *persona non grata*.


36. Sutton notes that this article has yet to be identified. Fry to Jean Marchand, December 19, 1921, in *Letters of Roger Fry*, 2:519–20. Mark Hussey believes this article may be Clive Bell’s “The Critic as Guide,” published in the October 26, 1921 *New Republic*.


40. Fry, “Some Problems of Phenomenology and its Application to Greek Art.”


44. Bell, *Art*, 16.

45. Ibid., 17.


Ross’s influence on Fry should be assumed to be reciprocal, with Fry’s ideas eventually affecting Ross’s work. In *On Drawing and Painting*, for example, Ross discussed “Post-Impressionist” works merely two years after Fry introduced the term at the 1910 *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* exhibition, though Ross stated he saw the Post-Impressionist examples not at *Manet and the Post-Impressionists*, but rather at the Salon d’Automne. However, it is worth noting that such influence may have been more of “awareness” of Fry’s ideas than anything else—Ross denigrated and criticized the Impressionists, Post-Impressionists, and Futurists equally. Denman Waldo Ross, *On Drawing and Painting* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1912), 113, 117.

49. Ibid., 6.

50. Bergson was a prominent influence on Fry’s mentor Bernard Berenson, the Italian Renaissance art historian, as well as on Fry and Bell’s source for knowledge of Byzantium, Matthew Prichard (as will be discussed in chapter 2). Bell also cited knowledge of Bergson in his text on Proust, musing on the function of the subconscious versus consciousness, and claimed that “only in consciousness can intellect bear on experience; and by intellect only can experience be made intelligible. This fundamental difficulty is recognized and stated emphatically by Proust’s intellectual master, Bergson.” Clive Bell, *Proust* (London: Hogarth Press, 1928), 38. In an introductory letter to Prichard that Fry composed for Bell in 1911, Fry warned Bell that Prichard was “a great Bergsonite, so you must either avoid that subject or be prepared to listen.” Fry to Clive Bell, January 26, 1911, in *Letters of Roger Fry*, 1:339. Notably, scholars have pointed to evidence of Bergson’s work in Virginia Woolf’s writing. Of the many citations in which this link is mentioned, see, for example, Paul Tolliver Brown, “Relativity, Quantum Physics, and Consciousness in Virginia Woolf’s ‘To the Lighthouse,’” *Journal of Modern Literature* 32, no. 3 (Spring 2009): 39–62; Erwin R. Steinberg, “G. E. Moore’s Table and Chair in ‘To the Lighthouse,’” *Journal of Modern Literature* 15, no. 1 (Summer 1988): 161–68; Floris Delattre, *Le Roman Psychologique de Virginia Woolf* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique, 1932), 127–42; and Jan Heinemann, "The Revolt Against Language: A Critical Note on Twentieth-

52. Fry was an admirer of Wölfflin, and favorably reviewed the fourth edition of Wölfflin’s text on the Baroque in 1921. Roger Fry, “The Baroque Author(s),” *Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 39, no. 222 (September 1921): 145–48. Additionally, Fry’s reading lists included Wölfflin’s 1905 text on Albrecht Dürer. Roger Fry, “Notebook Diaries, 1900–1911,” REFS/2, Elliot Roger Fry. In his 1926 article “The Seicento,” Fry praised Wölfflin’s book on the Baroque, *Principles of Art History*, his work on the High Renaissance, and his views on Impressionism, but particularly his ability to look at art “with some understanding of the problems of the creator. He does not merely see what there is in a work of art, but he knows that mental conditions in the artist’s mind are implied by that configuration.” Roger Fry, “The Seicento” (1926), in *Transformations: Critical and Speculative Essays on Art* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1926), 97. Indeed, early in his career Fry demonstrated a knowledge or understanding of the phenomenological methodologically similar to Wölfflin’s. Fry’s 1891 dissertation was entitled “Some Problems of Phenomenology and its Application to Greek Art,” and Fry was aware of phenomenological aesthetic analysis in the work of Emmanuel Loewy, as in, for example, Loewy’s 1907 book *The Rendering of Nature in Early Greek Art*. Roger Fry, “The Art of the Bushmen” (1910), in *Vision and Design*, 70.


55. For scholars who previously discussed Fry, Bell, and aesthetic emotion, see, for example, Christopher Reed. In *Bloomsbury Rooms*, Reed re-characterizes one of the most oft-quoted sources used to classify Fry as an art historical Formalist, his 1917 “Art and Life,” as a contextually specific, political document. When Fry calls to a “disinterested” artistic experience, “renouncing impulse to possess or control,” Reed classifies this as both a pacifist gesture, deliberately against the government’s forced conscription rule towards the end of the First World War, and an anti-commercialist statement, as Fry juxtaposed his “disinterested vision” to the
“consumer’s possessive gaze.” Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms: Modernism, Subculture, and Domesticity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 9. In another thread, Reed points out that Fry and Bell’s Formalism was used merely as a means to access a deeply felt, subjective, and immaterial aesthetic emotion. Reed, in a different interpretation of Fry’s aesthetics in “Forming Formalism,” cites subjective, “emotional experience” as the core of Bloomsbury Formalist critique. Christopher Reed, “Forming Formalism: The Post-Impressionist Exhibitions,” in *A Roger Fry Reader* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 55. Christine Froula links Fry’s perception of form as a vehicle to access aesthetic emotion to her thesis that Fry and Bell’s writings perpetuated Kantian aesthetics. While Bell directly acknowledged his debt to Immanuel Kant’s eighteenth-century writings, Froula claims that Fry’s theories also echoed Kant, as Fry, like Kant in his *Third Critique*, sought form as a gateway to a “new and definite reality.” Bell, *Art*, 8. Christine Froula, *Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Avant-garde: War, Civilization, Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 15. David K. Holt attributes Fry’s concern for aesthetic effect over tangible form as a function of Fry adhering to a Kantian-inspired ideal of a “mystical correspondence with an ideal nature,” with art able to penetrate *through* the world of “objective nature” to *see* and understand it through an “aesthetic sense.” David K. Holt, “Postmodernism: Anomaly in Art-Critical Theory,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 29, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 92. Adrienne Rubin accentuates this notion by declaring that Fry’s formalism was not focused on “the formal characteristics found in works of art themselves” but rather on the “internal processes involved in visual aesthetic experience, processes through which formal compositional qualities are apprehended by the beholder.” Rubin 2.

Chapter Two: Defining Byzantium

Fry and Bell conceptualized their idea of Byzantium as much through study of Byzantium as a historical period as through a loose, historically inaccurate interpretation of Byzantium. In part, Fry and Bell crafted their Bloomsbury Byzantium as beneficiaries of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries’ increase in scholarly attention to the period, as described in the introduction. With greater knowledge and awareness of the period and its monuments, Byzantium became a more-often cited source in the writings Fry and Bell each relied upon to develop his aesthetics. However, the critics ultimately framed, selected, and identified qualities in Byzantine models that connected to the values they wished to see in Byzantium. This chapter argues that, despite their sustained academic study of Byzantium, Fry and Bell defined their Bloomsbury Byzantium not as a historically accurate period or artistic style, but instead as a symbol. Conceived symbolically, Bloomsbury’s Byzantium was then able to function within Fry and Bell’s writings as a tool to position the critics in relation to the definition and use of the period promoted by the previous generation of non-Byzantine art historians and critics, such as Bernard Berenson and John Ruskin.

Fry’s opinion on Byzantium shifted over time, and Fry was not always supportive of Byzantine art as an aesthetic ideal. In travels to Italy following his Cambridge graduation, Fry wrote to his mother from Ravenna on May 14, 1891. Here, Fry claimed that while he was glad to see the Byzantine monuments, as they were important to understand the “transition from Classic to medieval art,” he found Byzantine art to be “degraded and conventional to a degree.” In his 1898 lecture series on fourteenth- to sixteenth-century Venetian art, Fry referred to Byzantine art pejoratively as “purely decorative.” Even in 1908, when writing to his assistant at the
Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bryson Burroughs, Fry used “Byzantine” as a condescending adjective. Though writing to Burroughs to praise a Gustave Moreau painting, Fry noted that the work had “all his strange Byzantine decadent-impressionist fantasy,” linking Byzantine art both with decadence and with the Impressionist art Fry later criticized. ³

In part, such distaste for Byzantium and Byzantine art can be explained by the fact that Fry and Bell’s earliest exposure to scholarship on Byzantine art was undoubtedly negative. Dating from the time of the Renaissance, and even into the twentieth century, the prevailing historical perspective on Byzantium has been pejorative. This suggests that the majority of landmark texts addressing Byzantium that Fry and Bell would have encountered during their school years primed the critics to view Byzantine art unfavorably. According to Liz James, in her introduction to A Companion to Byzantium, generations of scholars derided the Byzantine empire for, variously, its “tedious history (all emperors with the same name), lack of literature (where is the Byzantine Iliad or Odyssey? Tragedy, comedy or poetry?), unrealistic art all looking the same (seen one icon seen them all), overmastering clericalism. . .and general lack of fun.”⁴ F.K. Haarer, in “Writing Histories of Byzantium: the Historiography of Byzantine History,” notes that the majority of sources that shaped negative views on Byzantium adopted the convention that Byzantium either explained or embodied the decline of the Roman Empire.⁵

One of the most notable early examples of texts that connected Byzantium to the fall of Rome is Giorgio Vasari’s The Lives of the Artists (1550). Bell demonstrated a knowledge of Vasari, and Fry, as a Renaissance art historian by training, knew Vasari’s Lives well, and directly attributed negative views on Byzantium to Vasari’s influence.⁶ In an undated notebook in the King’s College, Cambridge archives, Fry noted that the “theory of complete stagnation under Byzantine influences till the end of the 13th century” was due to Vasari.⁷ Vasari held Roman and
Classical physiognomy as a visual ideal for Renaissance artists, which rendered Byzantium, the empire believed responsible for the Roman Empire’s end, an integral component of Vasari’s story. According to Vasari, as opposed to the “degree of excellence and perfection they had previously displayed,” artists after the fall of Rome demonstrated a gradual “decline” in the arts. Vasari used “the works in sculpture and architecture executed in Rome under Constantine” as “ample testimony” to his point. Vasari declared that these works of the early Byzantine Empire demonstrated the “want of good masters,” as Byzantine art was “extremely rude” in execution. With “examples [that] may be seen in the city of Ravenna” as proof, Vasari concluded that “sculpture had fallen to decay in the time of Constantine, and with it the other noble arts.”

Vasari’s Lives began with the departure from Byzantium’s aesthetic horrors, tracing art’s resurrection with Cimabue through the masterworks of Michelangelo and the Italian Late Renaissance.

After Vasari, the scholar who, with followers such as Friedrich Hegel, was most responsible for adverse perceptions of Byzantium and Byzantine art on the eve of the Modern era, was eighteenth-century historian Edward Gibbon. Bell referred to Edward Gibbon’s Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, and in a c. 1939 typescript “Byzantine Art and the Christian Slope,” Bell bemoaned a general imperfect and imprecise understanding of Byzantine art due to the fact that “we do not read Byzantine literature and do read Gibbon.” In his Cambridge University Extension lectures on “Florentine Painting,” dating from between 1894-1910, Fry critiqued the outdated distaste for Byzantine art by quoting a passage from Gibbon’s Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, indicating a knowledge of Gibbon’s work.

Gibbon’s 1776-1788 publication, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, denigrated Byzantium aesthetically, politically, and theologically, and did so with such panache that,
according to Haarer, Gibbon’s text was almost singularly responsible for the “prevailing view of Byzantium” as the embodiment of decadence, barbarity, irrationality, folly, and anti-Romanness.14 In his article from a 1977 conference on Gibbon, Steven Runciman claims that Gibbon’s text “killed Byzantine studies for nearly a century.”15 In chapter 48 of Decline and Fall, Gibbon described the narrative of the Byzantine Empire as a “tale of weakness and misery,” as the subjects of the Byzantine Empire “assume[d] and dishonor[ed] the names both of Greeks and Romans” and presented a “dead uniformity of abject vices. . .neither softened by the weakness of humanity, nor animated by the vigor of memorable crimes.”16 In his final assessment of the Byzantine Empire, Gibbon declared Byzantium an unworthy, corrupt, effeminate, ineffectual empire, overrun by courtiers and clerics, and responsible in its decadence for the degradation of Rome, the once-great empire.17

By the nineteenth century, though still widely read, Gibbon’s text was losing some of its influence as an anti-Byzantium screed. In the 1909 London reprint of Gibbon’s Decline and Fall, volume 1, J. B. Bury, who Haarer credits with the flourishing of academic Byzantine studies in the United Kingdom in the early twentieth century, wrote in his introduction that there “has been a gradual reaction” against Gibbon’s “point of view” on Byzantium, “which may be said to have culminated during the last twenty years of the nineteenth century.”18 Bury attributed this shift to George Finlay’s 1841 History of the Greek Revolution that investigated the Byzantine empire as it extended to Greece.19 By 1876, with a later edition of Finlay’s text, “it was being recognized that Gibbon’s word on the later Empire was not the last,” and Bury noted the increase in scholarship contesting Gibbon’s views ever since.20 Therefore, when Fry and Bell were in the midst of university studies in the late nineteenth century, they were also in the midst of a changing academic perspective on Byzantium, exemplified by the beginnings of scholarly
backlash against Gibbon’s work. Fry’s fluctuating viewpoints on Byzantium and Byzantine art are symptomatic of these larger academic shifts towards Byzantium in Anglo-academia.

As this dissertation topic suggests, any early distaste for Byzantine art the critics may have harbored soon gave way to a more forgiving, and, ultimately, celebratory view. For both Fry and Bell, engagement with the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century burgeoning scholarship on the Byzantine era countered the Gibbon and Vasarian narratives of their youth, and provided a knowledge base from which to develop a positive view of the period. Bell’s study of the historical Byzantine era, for example, is evidenced in his citation of Byzantine scholars in Art and in other publications, and the presence of texts on Byzantine art in his Charleston library. For Fry, notebooks or datebooks in the King’s College archives contain lists of books that included a significant number of texts on Byzantine art and the Byzantine Empire. The selection of texts Fry listed in his notebooks indicate that Fry had a geographically broad knowledge of Byzantine sites, even if, as will be discussed, he focused his critical attentions on only a few. Fry’s notebooks also include quotations and summaries of several texts on Byzantium, presumably intended for further study or for Fry’s use in a future publication. In one notebook, for instance, Fry included transcriptions of Henry Thode’s Franz von Assisi und die Anfänge der Kunst der Renaissance in Italien, first published in 1885. Fry’s notes on Thode’s text included Fry’s own commentary critiquing Thode’s view on Byzantium, suggesting that, by the time of this undated notebook’s writing, Fry was well-versed in Byzantine art, enough so as to have formed an opinion on Byzantine attributions and chronology.

The academic sources on Byzantium Fry and Bell consulted were texts that challenged the Gibbon and Vasarian views on the period. Works by authors such as Nikodim Pavlovich (“N. P.”) Kondakov (Fry spelled the name as “Kondakoff”), Charles Diehl, Jean Paul Richter, and
Alicia Cameron Taylor, provided Fry and Bell with a systematic study and categorization of the Byzantine era. These authors also departed from the prevailing narrative that Byzantium caused the Fall of Rome, and that Byzantine art thereby represented a degradation of Roman Classicism. Instead, each of these authors differently sought to redefine the period on its own terms.

One of Fry’s notebooks contained notes Fry took on N. P. Kondakov’s 1886-1891 *Histoire de l’art byzantin*. The passages Fry selected from Kondakov were related to dating and defining Byzantine art, and the distinctions among Early Christian, “Roman-oriental,” Romanesque, and Byzantine art, suggesting that Fry used Kondakov’s text to establish a concrete chronology for and definition of the Byzantine era. Yet, *Histoire de l’art byzantin* would also have provided Fry with a “scientific” and comprehensive study of a Byzantine aesthetic beyond Constantinople and the monumental Byzantine mosaics at Ravenna. *Histoire de l’art byzantin* discussed, for example, German, Russian, and French iterations of Byzantium, as well as Byzantine miniatures and manuscripts. In addition, Kondakov presented a paradigm in which Byzantium was connected to the development of Western art history as a derivation and progression of Greek art. This valorization of Byzantium echoed the sentiment of another, seminal Kondakov text, his posthumous English-language *The Russian Icon* (1927); the text was reissued in 2008 as *Icons*. Though *Icons* spent much time establishing the Russian Orthodox icon tradition as a development out of Byzantine inspiration, Kondakov provided a serious and detailed iconographic study of Russian and Byzantine icons, and grounded his assessment of Russian icons within praise of the Byzantine era. Kondakov, for example, described the Russian icon as the product of a gradual development of technique, with Byzantium as a critical interlocutor between an earlier, Egyptian style and the ultimate design of the Russian icon. Contrary to the Vasarian bewailing of Byzantium’s loss of technique, to Kondakov, the
Byzantine icon advanced portrait conventions inherited from the skilled artisans of Egypt and Syria in conjunction with function. The Byzantine icon, for instance, adapted the previous generations’ “realist principle” of portrait depictions for a “generalized ideal model” so as to represent the “ideal features of Christ, the Virgin Mary, S. Nicholas and the like.” In addition to providing Fry with detailed description and visual analysis of icon painting, Kondakov’s texts then provided a genealogy of Byzantine art that coded the period as one of progressive technique, where non-naturalism was not indicative of a degraded style, but rather of the development of a style to better suit its religious purpose.

Another textual source on Byzantium, cited in both Fry’s and Bell’s writings, was the work of Byzantinist Charles Diehl. In his notebooks, Fry listed Diehl’s *L’art byzantine dans l’Italie méridionale* (1894); *Justinien et la Civilisation byzantine au 6. Siècle* (1901); and *Figures Byzantines* (1909). Bell cited Diehl, generally, in *Art*. He owned two copies of Diehl’s *Manuel d’art byzantin*, first published in 1910 and reissued around 1925. In texts covering a wide-range of topics relating to Byzantium, including Byzantium in Africa and texts on Byzantine historiography, Diehl argued for a re-evaluation of the period, and desired that Byzantium, overall, be better studied, respected, and understood. In Diehl’s texts, Fry and Bell would have encountered a revisionary approach to the Byzantine art and Empire. Diehl’s *Figures Byzantines*, for instance, in addition to detailing the history, lives, and lifestyles of Byzantine citizens (including Empress Theodora and a bourgeois Byzantine family), described Byzantine mosaic in sumptuous detail and praise. In lieu of viewing the all-over ornamental interiors of Byzantine secular and sacred spaces negatively as decadent, Diehl’s descriptions interpreted decadence as an aesthetic asset. For example, Diehl described the interior of Emperor Basil I’s private chambers as “une merveille” (“a marvel”). He defined the variety and abundance of
mosaic decorations as a wondrous, all-encompassing display of imperial power, rather than an indication of decline from the values, aesthetic, and political authority of ancient Rome. In *Histoire de l'Empire byzantine*, Diehl claimed that incorrect definitions of Byzantium’s origins contributed to a misunderstanding of the period. Instead of viewing Byzantium in relationship to Rome, Diehl argued that Byzantium should be addressed in connection to the Orient and the East. In this manner, Diehl’s emphasis on the exotic, Eastern aspects of the Byzantine Empire provided a narrative of Byzantium as new, different, and apart from the Western Classical canon—an ideal that, as this chapter and others will demonstrate, became crucial to the appeal of Byzantium for Fry and Bell.

Fry also noted German scholar Jean Paul Richter and British scholar Alicia Cameron Taylor’s *The Golden Age of Classic Christian Art*, first published in 1904, in his writings. In notes on “The Ruccellai Madonna” (1285) by Duccio, for a possibly unpublished article between 1895-1900, Fry cited a “Dr. Richter,” and in “The Last Phase of Impressionism” Fry emphasized Richter and Taylor as guideposts to understand the mosaics at S. Maria Maggiore. In Richter and Taylor’s text, the authors used the term “Byzantine formalism,” which they distinguished from a “period of decadence” and from the works they called “Classic Christian Art.” Richter and Taylor considered Byzantine art to be the “mother” of Classic Christian art, and linked “Pre-Giottoesque” art to the “Byzantine tradition” just as Early Christian art connected to the “classic” tradition of ancient Rome. Though Richter and Taylor covered the sites of San Vitale, S. Maria Maggiore, and other mosaic works that Fry and Bell later labeled as “Byzantine,” Richter and Taylor categorized them as “Early Christian,” though connected to an earlier Byzantine era. Given that Fry and Bell primarily chose to call these same sites “Byzantine” instead of “Early Christian,” one may assume that the lack of negativity Richter and
Taylor adopted towards the sites they covered, the extensive visual analysis and research they conducted on the various sites, and the high regard in which they held mosaics were the sources of attraction. Whether or not Richter and Taylor called these works “Byzantine” or “Classic Christian” or “Early Christian” was perhaps of less importance than whether or not Richter and Taylor praised and systematically studied these monuments. Critically to Fry as well was the fact that Richter and Taylor grounded Byzantine art within a lineage connected to Early Italian (“Pre-Giottoesque”) work. The authors then provided the critics with a study of Byzantium that viewed the period within an artistic continuum, one that abutted but yet differed from the Classical to Renaissance trajectory of Western art history to date. Such a lineage would later become essential to Fry’s early training, and to both Fry’s and Bell’s later writings that similarly situated Byzantine art as predecessor to proto-Renaissance work.

Fry and Bell’s study of Byzantium extended beyond texts, as both critics befriended Byzantinist Matthew Stewart Prichard. Prichard was a British-born curator and Byzantinist who was inspired and influenced by the Byzantinist Thomas Whittemore, who had worked on restoring the Hagia Sophia mosaics. Prichard was employed in various capacities at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and by Isabella Stewart Gardner as deputy director of her then-nascent art collection. Eventually, Prichard returned to Europe in 1906, where he became an acquaintance and supporter of Henri Matisse. Prichard soon befriended and mentored Matisse’s son-in-law Georges Duthuit, an author who famously connected Matisse’s practice to Byzantium and also wrote on Coptic art (Fry would write a review of Duthuit’s *La Sculpture Copte* in *The Burlington* in 1932). Until his death in 1936, Prichard was a strong advocate for scholarship on Byzantine art, and both organized conferences on the subject and worked on Whittemore’s publications on the Hagia Sophia mosaics.
Fry and Prichard became acquainted in 1905 through Gardner, and at a moment of transition for both scholars. At the time, Prichard was soon to leave the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and Fry had embarked on his short-lived tenure at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. According to J. B. Bullen in *Crosscontinental Currents*, Prichard was impressed with Fry and found him to be an inspiring critic, and Prichard’s enthusiasm for Byzantium at this moment nurtured and progressed Fry’s already-developing attention to the period.\(^4\) In 1905, both Prichard’s and Fry’s respective interests in Byzantine art were beginning to elide with a fascination for Modern work.\(^4\) Prichard and Fry’s relationship continued after Prichard left America for Europe in 1906, and he and Fry met up while abroad.\(^4\) In 1908, according to Bullen, Prichard’s interest in Byzantium was “more exclusive, fervent, and fastidious than Fry’s.” As a consequence, “during this period he entered into a serious dialogue with Fry about the connections between Byzantine art and modern work.”\(^4\) By 1909 Prichard had introduced Fry to Matisse while in Paris, and Prichard was writing to Gardner of the connection he observed between Matisse’s practice and Byzantine models.\(^4\) Until about 1910, when Prichard and Fry grew apart over Prichard’s distaste for Fry’s aesthetic programs, Prichard and Fry participated in a reciprocal intellectual exchange on Byzantine and Modern art.\(^4\) Prichard should then be credited as an integral source for Bloomsbury’s embrace and understanding of Byzantine art.

Yet, despite Fry’s and Bell’s increased knowledge and their pivots towards a positive assessment of Byzantium, their understandings of the period were problematic. What Fry and Bell’s Byzantium was, where it was located, and its beginning and end remained questions variously answered by the critics over the course of their careers, and often defined independent of the Byzantine Empire’s geographic and chronological demarcations. For instance, to Fry and Bell, “Byzantine art” encompassed monuments both historically identified as “Byzantine” as
well as those that typically were not. Fry and Bell adopted, and at various points qualified, the definition of Romanesque and Norman art and architecture, often identified in textbooks due to the styles’ round arches, as forms of Byzantine art. In his 1932 *An Account of French Painting*, Bell directly claimed Romanesque art as a form of Byzantine art, stating that the “mural masters of Saint Savin [an eleventh-century abbey church in Poitou, France] and Montmorillon” [a twelfth-century Romanesque chapel in Montmorillon, France] were “living on the Byzantine tradition, but adding something not strictly hieratic,” while paintings at the S. Savin were in a “Romanesque manner,” that he identified as “Byzantine modified by the naïf vigor and sensibility of western barbarians.” In his 1920 review “Modern Paintings in a Collection of Ancient Art,” Fry viewed Byzantine and Romanesque objects as synonymous, discussing the merits of writing on “such subjects as Byzantine art or Romanesque sculpture,” and the display of “Modern French artists beside Romanesque sculpture and Byzantine miniatures.” In the historiography of Byzantine art, “Romanesque,” a designation for c. eleventh-century art and architecture established in 1813 by William Gunn, in the text *Origin and Influence of Gothic Architecture*, published in 1819, was a term often coded as synonymous if not interchangeable with “Byzantine.” J. B. Bullen points out in *Byzantium Rediscovered* that the British in particular regularly elided “Romanesque,” “Norman,” and “Byzantine” as descriptors of round-arched architecture, though as a “result of blurring and confusion, rather than of strong historical connections.” While Fry’s and Bell’s anachronistic connections between Romanesque art and architecture and Byzantine art and architecture were therefore part of a common misrepresentation of Romanesque style, they foreshadow the degree to which their idea of Byzantium departed from reliance on factual, historical or chronological delimitations of the era.
Though Fry and Bell tended to focus on early Byzantine sites in Ravenna and the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, Fry and Bell’s periodization of Byzantium varied across the decades and among their writings, and consequently didn’t conform to a historically circumscribed chronology of the empire. In *Art*, Bell located the “incubation” period of Byzantine art as the moment when the “East finally dominated the West” in the hundred years between 350 CE and 450 CE.\(^5\) Bell specifically marked this moment as the creation of the Galla Placidia mausoleum in Ravenna in 450 (despite what Bell termed the “nasty, wooly realism about the sheep”).\(^5\) To Bell, the sixth-century Ravenna sites of S. Vitale (547), S. Apollinaire-Nuovo (561), S. Apollinaire-in-Classe (549), and the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople (532-537) subsequently represented the greatest achievements of Byzantine art.\(^5\) Bell mentioned the Byzantine art of the “ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries” as not as good as that of the sixth century, but he conceded that the work of these later centuries was still of superior quality to other forms of art both then, and at present.\(^5\) In a footnote in *Art*, Bell definitively marked the end of the Byzantine era as the thirteenth century, when Byzantine art’s influence waned.\(^9\) Bell’s chronological demarcation for Byzantine art then began around the fourth and fifth centuries, reached a peak in the sixth century, and slowly declined until its demise in the thirteenth. However, while Bell sustained this chronology throughout his early writings, by c. 1939, when he wrote the unpublished manuscript “Byzantine Art and the Christian Slope,” his understanding of Byzantine art had expanded. As a consequence, Bell’s timeline and valuation of Byzantine art periods shifted. As opposed to emphasizing early Byzantine art, Bell claimed in 1939 that “Constantinople between five and twelve hundred” was an art historical focal point.\(^5\) Bell still maintained the end of Byzantine art in the later thirteenth century, but, in a change from his
earlier views, by 1939, he identified the ninth through the early thirteenth centuries (“867 to 1204”) as “the second great age of Byzantine art, and, as many hold, the greatest.”

Overall, like Bell, Fry emphasized the significance of the early Byzantine period, though the locations and works Fry cited signified a much broader understanding of Byzantine art and Byzantium’s potential reach, generally, than Bell’s early assessment. Fry’s writings contained references to a “school of Constantinople around the year 1200;” Russian icons or works from the twelfth-, thirteenth-, and fifteenth-centuries; a reference to the “survival of Byzantine till beginning of neo Gothic tradition” (date unspecified); and a thirteenth-century Armenian manuscript. However, which Byzantine period received Fry’s highest praise or greatest censure, and the dates Fry gave to those periods, varied among his publications. In a 1911 Slade lecture, Fry claimed Ravenna’s sixth-century monuments as the start of the Byzantine aesthetic. Yet, in notes Fry took on N. P. Kondakov’s 1886-1891 *Histoire de l’art byzantin*, Fry identified the start date for Byzantine art not with sites in Ravenna, but as beginning with the eleventh-century Eastern and Western split in the Byzantine Empire (a consequence of the “East-West Schism” in 1054, that ultimately divided the church into Eastern Orthodox and [Western] Catholic), and after the Eastern Empire had had contact with Islam. In Fry’s 1917 “Art and Life,” Fry located the end of Byzantine art in the twelfth century with the “change from Romanesque to Gothic,” but in his 1911 Slade Lectures on Monumental Painting, Fry gave the date of the tenth and eleventh centuries as “Byzantine art [coming] to its apogee” while also citing the twelfth-century mosaics at Monreale as a height of Byzantine success in the “perfect adaptation of artistic means to their expressive purposes.”

Similarly, which sites Fry and Bell discussed as Byzantine departed from the sites historically prominent during the Byzantine Empire. Most notably, Fry and Bell’s works
described a geographically Italian, “Western” Byzantium, that constituted an emphasis at odds with Byzantine centers of power over its approximately 1100 years of existence. In a map of the Byzantine Empire about 1050, from Liz James’ *A Companion to Byzantium*, the majority of territories under the control of the Byzantine Empire were examples of “Eastern” Byzantine, and found in modern-day Croatia, Turkey, Greece, and extending into parts of modern-day Russia. “Eastern” and “Western” Byzantium refer to the geographical divisions of the 1054 East-West Schism, with “West” designating Eastern Orthodox strongholds in now predominantly Catholic countries. Yet, the Byzantine sites both Fry and Bell mentioned by name most frequently in their writings were representative of the Italian, “Western” Byzantine, rather than the “Eastern” Byzantine tradition. Searching for mention of specific, “Eastern” or non-Italian Byzantine sites among Bell’s eight writings surveyed that discussed Byzantium, three texts specifically addressed non-Italianate Byzantine sources. In Fry’s notations of “Eastern” Byzantium, among Fry’s sixty-six texts, letters, lantern slide boxes, and unpublished manuscripts that mentioned Byzantine art and were examined for this dissertation, three texts identified Constantinople generally as the embodiment of Byzantine; two directly referenced the Hagia Sophia, though one as a lantern slide; and one text mentioned S. Irene in Turkey. No texts mentioned Chora Monastery in Constantinople, either as Chora or as Kariye Kamii; though one lantern slide in Fry’s collection was of an image of “St. Rene” (possibly a misspelling of S. Irene) in Constantinople. Fry’s writings and slides included nine texts that referenced a Russian Byzantium generally, one text that pointed to a Bulgarian Byzantium, and two texts that discussed an Armenian Byzantium. There was one mention of Hosios Loukas in Greece in a 1932 letter from Fry to Helen Anrep, and one mention of “Salonika mosaics” in an undated notebook.
In comparison, references to “Western,” Italianate Byzantium predominated in both Fry’s and Bell’s works. Of the seventy-six discrete mentions of sites singled out as or related to Byzantium among the sixty-six texts and slides in which Fry mentioned Byzantium or a Byzantine site, fifty-four of the sites were Italian ones (71% of the Byzantine locations). Within those seventy-six mentions of Byzantine sites, Fry identified thirty-two discrete locations. Italian Byzantine sites accounted for twenty-nine of the thirty-two sites (approximately 91% of the locations mentioned). Of the instances in which Fry identified an Italian Byzantium, Ravenna generally and sites in Ravenna, such as San Vitale and the Basilica S. Apollinaire Nuovo accounted for fourteen of the textual mentions; locations in Sicily accounted for eleven; locations in Venice accounted for eight; and the majority of Italianate Byzantine sites identified by Fry were in Rome, accounting for sixteen textual mentions.69 In addition, Rome provided a greater diversity of locations in Fry’s listing of Byzantine or Byzantine-related sites. Fry mentioned twelve different Roman sites, including S. Francesca Romana, S. Cosimo and Damiano, “S. Padrouziana” (possibly a misspelling of S. Pudenziana), S. Marco in Rome, S. Maria Maggiore, and S. Clemente.70 For comparison, Fry mentioned five specific sites in Ravenna. In Bell’s texts, Bell singled out Italian Byzantine locations on fourteen discrete occasions, as opposed to the ten discrete occasions in which Bell mentioned non-Italian (mostly Turkish) Byzantine sites.71 Contrary to the predominantly “Eastern” geography of the Byzantine Empire, Fry’s and Bell’s examples of Byzantine inspiration were derived geographically from a predominantly Italian, “Western” Byzantine context. Fry and Bell therefore took liberties with the geographic emphasis for their Byzantium. The critics defined the location of their Byzantium as a departure from the sites representative of the historical Byzantine Empire.
Curiously, however, when discussing Italian, “Western” Byzantine works, Fry and Bell touted Byzantium as an “Eastern” influence.72 In this disconnect between citations of “Western” Byzantine sites while describing Byzantium as “Eastern,” Fry and Bell recapitulated a longstanding tension between describing the Empire as “Eastern” or “Western” within Byzantine scholarship.73 Bell in *Art* consistently referred to the impetus for the beginning of his esteemed sixth-century Byzantine art as coming from the “new spirit of the East” and the moment when the “East finally dominated the West,” defining the Byzantine spirit as a revival of the “moribund Roman world” that “came from the East.”74 In the first lecture on “Transition from Classical to Modern Art,” part of his Cambridge University Extension lectures, dating from between 1894-1910, Fry touted the superiority of Byzantine art as a consequence of its Eastern origin. Without the “distracting interruptions of Gothic and Lombard invasions,” the “superiority of Eastern art” resulted in it being “practiced continuously in the eastern Empire,” and “prevented it from going through the same stages of progressive decay as the art of the Western Empire.”75 Fry later referred to Byzantine influence as a “foreign” influence on Italian artists, and, in an excised passage describing Duccio’s work, Fry denoted “Byzantine” as synonymous with “Eastern influence.”76 In his 1911 Slade lecture on Monumental Painting, Fry coded Byzantium as from the “Eastern Empire,” and subsequently described the monuments of Ravenna as belonging “to the East and not to Rome.”77 Fry and Bell’s identification of an “Eastern” influence for their Byzantium, despite predominantly discussing Western Byzantine monuments, suggests the constructed nature of Fry and Bell’s textual definition of their Byzantium and its distance from a consistent, fact-based citation of the Byzantine era.

Fry and Bell therefore defined their Byzantium as independent of the historical delimitations of the actual Byzantine Empire’s chronology and geographic scope. Nowhere is
this more apparent than in the fact that Fry and Bell’s most predominant citations of “Byzantine” actually occurred unattached to any specific example of Byzantine art or any specific Byzantine period. Among the sixty-six texts, slides, letters, and lectures examined for this dissertation in which Fry mentioned Byzantium, thirty-two of those texts contained a reference to Byzantium in general—sometimes in addition to discussions of specific Byzantine sites, but sometimes without elaboration of a specific Byzantine location. In most instances of Byzantium’s mention, Byzantium served as a generic placeholder for artistic values against or through which Fry and Bell could position non-Byzantine works. Fry’s articles “Children's Drawings” (1917), “Three Pictures in Tempera by William Blake” (1904), and many other texts, mention “Byzantine” influence or “Byzantium” as a point of reference or comparison, without specifying which Byzantine, from where, or any specific Byzantine site.  

In his 1911 Slade lectures on “Monumental Painting,” for example, Fry discussed Giotto’s work by claiming that Giotto was “in touch with Byzantine feeling”—what Byzantine, and from where, decidedly absent. In his 1913 review of American folk songs and the Ballet Russes at the Coliseum, Fry wrote the following about Byzantine art and Byzantium, without elaboration: “Yes Byzantinism was surely needed once,” and “No one would have been more pleased than myself had Byzantinism remained a potent and life-giving inspiration.” In Fry’s 1927 text Cézanne, Fry stated of Cézanne’s work that “The composition is almost as elementary as that of a Byzantine icon,” without identifying a specific Byzantine icon, or from which geographic region. For Bell, six of the eight Bell texts consulted for this dissertation that mentioned Byzantine art or Byzantium referred to a place- and time-less “Byzantine.” In Bell’s 1923 Since Cézanne, Bell’s six mentions of Byzantium and Byzantine art took the form of generic identifiers. In Bell’s 1928 Civilization, Bell referred to “a Byzantine mosaic or a Poussin, a figure,” no further details.
given. In his 1951 *Modern French Painting*, Bell grouped together a supposedly generic “Byzantine” with a diversity of other styles, stating: “A nice appreciation of Cézanne and Seurat came rather later, to be followed by enthusiasm for Byzantine, Sumerian, Negro, Scythian, and savage art.”

Practicalities partly explain the overall ahistoricism implicit in Fry’s and Bell’s characterizations of Byzantium and Byzantine art. For instance, Fry’s and Bell’s interests in a Western, as opposed to an Eastern Byzantium, can be attributed both to the fact that the Byzantine sites the authors most frequently visited were in Italy, and that Fry’s formative years as a scholar occurred under the tutelage of Renaissance art historian Bernard Berenson, who connected a Byzantine inspiration to early Italian work. With these examples, Fry and Bell’s understanding of Byzantium as a historical period was compromised, whether by geopolitical realities impeding their access to Byzantine locations or by the overbearing presence of an authoritative mentor, shaping a first contact with the period. Fry and Bell’s Byzantium then points to the role contextual circumstances played in the formation of art historical concepts.

Geographically, the critics’ encounters with Byzantium occurred not with the monuments of Eastern Byzantium, but with the Western examples. In the nineteenth century, Constantinople was the victim of unstable politics, between the Crimean War in 1853 and the Russo-Turkish War in 1877. In the twentieth century, the 1912-1913 Balkan Wars made travel to the region problematic. As a result of political unrest, combined with Muslim authorities who did not, in J. B. Bullen’s words, “welcome casual visitors to Hagia Sophia,” Constantinople was difficult to visit, foregrounding the more accessible Italianate Byzantine sites in the minds of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Byzantine champions. Fry’s travels reflect this geo-political reality. Fry had his first visit to Italy in spring of 1891, visiting sites in Rome, Sicily, Naples, Ravenna, and
Venice. He returned to Italy in 1897, visiting Rome and Naples, and again in 1902 to Venice. In 1908, Fry again visited Rome, and in 1911 Fry had his first visit to Constantinople and Bursa with the Bells. After this 1911 trip, Fry made other trips to Italy in 1912 and 1913 (the latter with Grant and the Bells to see Ravenna and Venice), then again after World War I in 1920 and 1929, visiting Venice. In 1931 he returned to Rome. However, after 1911, Fry didn’t again return to Constantinople.

A secondary explanation for the predominance of Italo-Byzantine in Fry and Bell’s discussions stems from the fact that a critical foundation of Fry’s understanding of Byzantium was the connection between early Italian Renaissance and Byzantine art discussed by Fry’s mentor, Italian Renaissance art historian Bernard Berenson. Fry had a close professional and personal relationship with Berenson, and admitted a formative intellectual debt to Berenson and his ideas. Fry used Berenson as, according to Francis Spalding in her Fry biography, a “sounding board against which Fry could test his opinions,” and Fry utilized Berenson’s professional standing to ensure the “continuing success of [Fry’s] career.” Fry’s contacts with Isabella Stewart Gardner were strengthened through Berenson’s recommendation, as Berenson was Gardner’s personal curator/collector/advisor/art historian, and Berenson provided recommendation letters and testimonials for Fry’s job prospects. On a personal level, Fry defended Berenson against New York society figures who derided Berenson for his Jewish ancestry, and Fry’s correspondences with Berenson and his wife Marie included discussions of Fry’s wife Helen’s personal health, his family, their travels, as well as more official conversations about Fry and Berenson’s mutual interest in Italian Renaissance connoisseurship.

Berenson’s scholarship paved the way for Fry to understand Byzantine art through a link between Byzantine and early Italian art. In a Cambridge University Extension lecture, which the
King’s College, Cambridge Archives date to between 1894-1910, Fry singled out Berenson’s *Central Italian Painters of the Italian Renaissance* (first published in 1897) as a source for the connection between the art of Duccio and the Byzantine aesthetic of Constantinople. In that text, Berenson suggested that the “school of Central Italian painting which illustrates the Middle Ages” was perhaps inspired by “Etrurian genius reviving” or “Byzantium” wafting “over seas.” Berenson’s text included a long footnote in his section on Duccio on Duccio’s connection to Byzantine sources, claiming that “Duccio must have got his training from some Byzantine master, perhaps at Constantinople itself.” Berenson’s footnote continued by professing “pleasure in finding similar views regarding Duccio’s education expressed by Dr. J.P. Richter,” who later co-wrote *Classic Christian Art*, and who was “the only critic of our day who adds to a profound knowledge of Italian art a thorough acquaintance with the art of Byzantium.” From these brief passages, in a text assiduously studied by Fry, Berenson indicated a support for Byzantine art as a valued aesthetic, a knowledge and praise of recent literature on Byzantine art, and an ease and willingness to view artistic contributions of the Italian Renaissance through the lens of a Byzantine influence.

Further evidence for Berenson as a key source for Fry’s linkage between Early Italian and Byzantine art is found in collection notes for the 1893 Cambridge University’s Fitzwilliam Museum purchase of Sienese and Early Italian works from collector Charles Butler. It is likely both Fry and Bell encountered the Fitzwilliam’s Butler collection as students during their years at Cambridge. However, on a professional level, Fry was aware of the Butler collection at least as early as 1901, if not before, and was in discussion with Berenson regarding the Butler holdings. Both Berenson and Fry were also responsible several years after its acquisition for assessing the Fitzwilliam Butler collection. Multiple object files from the 1893 Butler purchase
suggest that Berenson was asked to do connoisseurship work on the collection around 1909, with Fry, around 1912, called in to reexamine Berenson’s attributions. One of the 1893 Butler works whose records indicate that first Berenson and then Fry were consulted regarding attribution is a late thirteenth-century “Sienese School” crucifixion (Fig. 2.1). Critically, the object files for this work linked Sienese art to a Byzantine aesthetic, as a statement from the time of its original purchase by Butler identified it as Sienese “genre byzantine.”

What the Fitzwilliam files imply is that at the time the Early Italian works were acquired by the Fitzwilliam, there was a textual connection confirmed or witnessed by Berenson and then by Fry between these Early Italian objects and a Byzantine style.

Berenson’s tutelage on the link between early Italian and Byzantine art can subsequently be found in Fry’s early art historical writings on Duccio and Cimabue, and especially in Fry’s career-making 1900 and 1901 articles on Giotto, published in the Monthly Review. Here, Fry’s references to Byzantine art provided both a counterpart, indicating where Giotto’s production diverged from what Fry termed his Byzantine influence, and a mode of continuation, a way to elaborate on Giotto’s successes with Byzantine models as proof. For Giotto’s frescoes in the Upper Church of the Basilica of S. Francis of Assisi (completed before 1300), Fry noted that Giotto’s Crucifixion contained motifs “such as the floating drapery of Christ, which show Byzantine reminiscences.” While “less accomplished than the works of the later Byzantine school,” Giotto’s “serious attempt” to “give dramatic reality to the scene” was in contradistinction to the approach the “less human Byzantines” would have given. Fry’s connection of Byzantine art to Giotto or proto-Renaissance masters continued until the end of his life. In Fry’s essay “Vitality” from his Last Lectures, Fry noted that from the “Italo-Byzantine tradition” artists such as Giotto defined the first “truly Italian art” with a “sudden outburst of
creative energy” and an “intense vitality of the imagery” that “disappeared as rapidly as it had come on.” Bell’s writings followed Fry’s lead, and similarly connected Giotto to Byzantium. For example, in his 1923 *Since Cézanne*, Bell noted that “Giotto and his successors…carry on the Byzantine tradition.”

Yet, practicality can only go so far to explain the extent to which Fry and Bell’s Byzantium deviated from historically accurate or even consistent assessments of Byzantine art and the Byzantine Empire. That the most prominent use of “Byzantine” in Fry and Bell’s texts occurred as a generic term absent of any specific example of Byzantine art is a telling detail to decipher just what was Bloomsbury’s Byzantium, in part because such ambiguity and lack of specificity characterizes the entirety of Fry’s and Bell’s approaches to the period. As chapter 3 will discuss, Fry and Bell were interested in creating a genealogy for Modern art, one that traced Modern art’s lineage back to the archaic precedent of Byzantium. Yet, the historical inaccuracies and ever-shifting definitions inherent to Fry and Bell’s conception of Byzantium and Byzantine art qualify Byzantine art’s true role in any attempt to generate a new narrative of art history’s progress. The lack of consensus between Fry and Bell and among the writings of either author regarding Byzantine art’s chronology and its most important, quality periods; Fry and Bell’s varying and anachronistic definition of Romanesque art as Byzantine; and their emphases on the importance of Western Byzantine sites over the more significant sites in the larger and more powerful Eastern Empire; imply the irrelevance of actual historical demarcations for the period. Viewed collectively, Fry’s and Bell’s choices regarding how to define (or not) their Byzantium then indicate that what Byzantine *actually* was either in Fry’s and Bell’s experiences or as a marker of a work of art, was less important than what Byzantine art *suggested* to Fry and Bell.

For example, of the small number of named Eastern Byzantine sites Fry and Bell mentioned, the
majority of that very small number cited the Hagia Sophia as the exemplar of an Eastern Byzantine aesthetic. Hagia Sophia was a curious location for Fry and Bell to focus on, as during their 1911 visit to Constantinople, the only Byzantine church they were able to see was the Chora Monastery—they were not able to see the Hagia Sophia. Yet, nowhere in the writings surveyed for this dissertation did Chora, also known as Kariye Kamii, make an appearance. What was “Byzantine” historically and in Fry’s and Bell’s experiences was therefore not as important as what “Byzantine” could represent as a symbol in Fry’s and Bell’s aesthetic programs.

As one prominent example, Fry and Bell used their idea of Byzantium symbolically to distance themselves from their nineteenth-century predecessor, the critic John Ruskin. Through Fry’s and Bell’s focus on Italianate Byzantium, the critics defined their idea of Byzantium as counter to that promoted by Ruskin. In this instance, Fry and Bell referenced Byzantium not to mark a discrete, historically grounded period and its specific works, but rather the critics used Byzantium as an ideological position paper.

Ruskin truly was a touchstone for, specifically Fry’s early aesthetic education. In Fry’s 1891 Cambridge dissertation on “Some Problems of Phenomenology and its Application to Greek Art,” for example, Fry used text from Ruskin’s 1843 Modern Painters to underscore his arguments throughout his thesis. In fact, Fry, under the sway of Ruskin’s writings, participated in a number of the Arts and Crafts-inspired organizations during the nineteenth century, including the Arthur H. Mackmurdo Century Guild, the Art-Workers’ Guild, and the Guild and School of Handicraft. Additionally, Ruskin’s work foreshadowed Fry’s later approaches. In “How to Read a Painting” from Modern Painters, Ruskin noted that “a great composition always has a leading emotional purpose…to which all its lines and forms have some relation.”
Similarly, in his 1909 *New Quarterly* article, “An Essay in Aesthetics,” Fry identified art’s “essential importance” as the expression of emotion, and described the ideal work of art capable of producing such emotions as “forms being presented to us in such a sequence that each successive element is felt to have a fundamental and harmonious relation with that which preceded it.”

In his 1859 *Two Paths*, Ruskin defined the perfect artwork as that which encapsulated the unity, the “whole” of an entity, rather than “more intense perception of one point than another,” that then enabled a viewer to “find his own special pleasure in the work.”

In “An Essay in Aesthetics,” Fry likewise noted that the “chief aspect of order in a work of art is unity,” such that one could then contemplate the work in its entirety rather than passing “outside it to other things necessary to complete its unity.”

Yet, despite Ruskin’s apparent influence on Fry’s writings, both Fry and Bell deliberately and vocally positioned their aesthetics as antithetical to Ruskin’s ideas. In Fry’s review of Bell’s *Art*, Fry described Ruskin’s work as “muddle-headed but prophetic imitations of the truth.” In his 1921 “Architectural Heresies of a Painter,” Fry defined Ruskin’s analysis of architecture as “morbid historico-social over-sensitiveness.” In his article “Retrospect” written for *Vision and Design*, Fry further denigrated Ruskin’s approach, labeling Ruskin’s mind as “exuberant and ill-regulated,” and, in a review of Kenneth Clark’s text on *The Gothic Revival*, Fry declared Ruskin’s writings on Gothic art to be “pathetic form.” Bell was no less critical of Ruskin, writing in *Art*, for example, of the “cloudy rhetoric of Ruskin.”

As Christine Roth described in her introduction to Ruskin’s *The Two Paths*, whereas Ruskin believed that “contended individuals, working within a just society and striving to capture the essence of nature, produce noble arts and crafts, while debased and despondent individuals working within an unjust society…produce inferior art,” Fry and Bell distinguished between the moral character of their
preferred artists and the quality of his or her work.\textsuperscript{116} In \textit{The Two Paths}, Ruskin noted that “in order to be a good natural painter there must be strong elements of good in the mind,” as the “perception of nature” is “never given but under certain moral conditions.”\textsuperscript{117} As a stated direct rebuke to Ruskin, Fry’s “An Essay in Aesthetics” defined art as an “expression and stimulus of [the] imaginative life” that is removed from moral responsibility, as, contrary to “moralists like Ruskin,” art “presents a life freed from the binding necessities of our everyday existence.”\textsuperscript{118} Bell in \textit{Art} declared similarly, determining that quality art was independent of the moral character of the individual who created it, as art is “above morals, or, rather, all art is moral because…works of art are immediate means to good.”\textsuperscript{119}

Beyond points of specific philosophical disagreement between the Bloomsbury critics and Ruskin, however, denigration of Ruskin synecdochally denigrated the past. Ruskin represented the cobwebs of the nineteenth century, out of which Fry and Bell hoped to position their new take on Modern work. Though much secondary literature has addressed the connections among Fry, Bell, and Ruskin, the vehemence with which Fry and Bell attacked Ruskin and his writings should also be interpreted symbolically, and in the context of Fry and Bell’s attempt to secure their position as critics for a new, Modern era.\textsuperscript{120} Fry and Bell’s use of Byzantine art prominently implied the proximity and divide between the two generations of British avant-garde intelligentsia, a fact that has been overlooked in literature on the critics. Indeed, while Frances Spalding points out in her Fry biography that it was after Fry’s “first visit to Italy in 1891” when Fry began to become disillusioned with Ruskin, realizing he “disagreed with much that Ruskin had written,” Spalding neglects to note the significance of this chronology: it was the influence of Byzantium, specifically Fry’s differing perspective on the
Venetian Byzantine monuments Ruskin championed in his 1853 *Stones of Venice*, that marked Fry’s critical divergence from nineteenth-century intellectual models.  

Through Fry and Bell’s ahistorical emphasis on Italianate over Eastern Byzantine sites, specifically as employed in Fry and Bell’s counter-position of Italianate Byzantine against the Germanic Gothic, Fry and Bell’s Byzantium challenged Ruskinian precedent. The divide in Fry and Bell’s writings between an Italianate Byzantium and a Germanic Gothic recapitulated the long, pronounced art historical divide between Germanic and Italian art dating back to the writings of Giorgio Vasari.  

More importantly, beyond referencing a well-known art historiographic bias, in Fry’s and Bell’s works this Italian Byzantium/Germanic Gothic division signified the critics’ intellectual territory as contrary to Ruskin’s aesthetics, specifically his hybrid “Byzantine-Gothic” ideal.

In texts such as his 1849 *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* and his 1853 *The Stones of Venice*, John Ruskin sought to revitalize a “Gothic” architectural style, often in relation to Byzantine art, and in *The Stones of Venice*, Ruskin discussed Byzantine art as a hybrid Byzantine-Gothic. In praise of Venetian architecture, Ruskin attributed the best architecture of the city to a stylistic merger of “Roman, Lombard, and Arab” aesthetic influences. Ruskin defined “Roman” as a “Christian Romanesque,” that adapted Roman architectural styles to a Greek and Byzantine aesthetic, identified the “Arab” aesthetic as a derivation of Byzantine style, and defined the “Lombard” aesthetic as, ultimately, the Gothic style. The most praiseworthy of the periods of Venetian architecture Ruskin defined as a distinct “intermediate step” between the “Byzantine and Gothic forms,” an iteration of Byzantine architecture that led into “Gothic architecture.” This idea, which Ruskin laid out in chapter four of the second part of *The Stones of Venice*, entitled “The Nature of Gothic,” served as a love letter and rallying cry for support of
“Gothic” architecture both in Venice and elsewhere, and underpinned much of his praise of Gothic style and craftsmanship. Ruskin described the “Gothic builders,” as that “central class which unites fact with design” who developed their “power of artistical invention or arrangement” under the tutelage of “Romanesque and Byzantine workmen,” and “from them received their models of design,” adding to the “ornamental feeling and rich fancy of the Byzantine” a “love of fact…” Describing the styles of Venetian architecture, Ruskin praised the Romanesque as “Round-arch architecture” that “falls into two great branches, Eastern and Western, or Byzantine and Lombardic.” These “two great branches” then developed into forms of Gothic, “Arabian Gothic, and Teutonic Gothic.” This form’s “highest glory is, that it has no corruption. It perishes in giving birth to another architecture as noble as itself.” For Ruskin’s ultimate, praiseworthy Gothic architecture, the “Architecture of the Gable,” Ruskin defined it as the “daughter of the Romanesque,” the evolution of Romanesque into “Pure Gothic and Arabian Gothic,” the latter of which remained in spirit Byzantine with “many Gothic forms.” Therefore, in one of Ruskin’s best-known defenses of the “Gothic” architectural mode, Byzantine and Gothic architecture were inextricably linked. Whether as a direct hybrid, the “in-between” Byzantine and Gothic of Venetian architecture, or with Gothic architecture the legacy and development of the Byzantine, retaining elements of Byzantine architectural and design qualities, in Ruskin’s aesthetic schema, Byzantine and Gothic were co-dependent terms and architectural references.

Ruskin’s argument for a hybrid Byzantine-Gothic aesthetic was not unprecedented in art historiography, and the interchangeability and elision of “Byzantine” and “Gothic” was not uncommon in the Modernist return to Byzantium, despite the general historical incongruity of the two periods, and of the styles we today think of under each label. Paul Frankl explains part of
the root of this confusion in his seminal text on Gothic art, *Gothic Architecture*, when he notes that “Gothic” has, confusingly, come to be applied to all works produced between 410 and 1419 as a result of declaring any work from the Fall of Rome to the Renaissance (including Byzantine art) a product of the barbarian “Goths.” Further explanation can be found in J. B. Bullen’s *Byzantium Rediscovered*, as Bullen attributes nationalistic motivations to the semantic elision, with countries such as Germany and France enveloping a “Byzantine” origin into a native Gothic style. The link between “Byzantine” and “Gothic” has continued to play an essential role in Western art history: art historian Erwin Panofsky defined the birth of “modern space,” Renaissance perspectival space, as a trecento hybrid of Gothic and Byzantine principles in his 1960 *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art*.133

Yet, for Fry and Bell, Ruskin’s equation between Byzantium and Gothic was antithetical to their overall distaste for German art—German “Gothic” art specifically—in favor of Italianate examples. Some of Fry’s most potent anti-Gothic screeds occurred in his denunciation of German Northern Renaissance works. In Fry’s “Dürer and His Contemporaries,” for example, Fry declared that Albrecht Dürer couldn’t take rank in the highest class of creative geniuses because of his relation “to the Gothic tradition of his country” and his imperfect knowledge of the “newly perceived splendors of the Italian Renaissance.” More importantly, however, Fry and Bell articulated this distaste for “Gothic” through their writings’ counter positioning of Italianate Byzantium against a Germanic Gothic. Fry and Bell defined the “Gothic” as instigating an artistic downward spiral from Byzantium’s aesthetic heights until Giotto’s inauguration of the Italian Renaissance. Bell in *Art* claimed that, historically, from the Byzantine, “we watch art sinking, by slow degrees…while the grand proportion of Romanesque and Norman architecture becomes Gothic juggling in stone and glass.”138 Bell stated that with
“Gothic architecture the descent began.” In his “Six Lectures on Monumental Painting” from 1911, Fry used the “art which was growing up in the north and which under the fostering care of the Empire of Charlemagne” as a contrast “so striking” in comparison to the “art of Italy impregnated with ideas of Byzantine hieratic solemnity,” that “by itself it will prove that the art of this period [Byzantine] was not a dead thing.” By opposing their Italianate Byzantium to a Germanic Gothic, Fry and Bell subsequently defined their Byzantium as contrary to Ruskin’s aesthetics, which aligned the two as a Byzantine-Gothic hybrid. As a consequence, the value of Fry and Bell’s Italianate Bloomsbury Byzantium in their writings lay less with the degree to which their Byzantium conformed to a historically accurate record of the geographic spread of the Byzantine Empire, and more to the extent which Bloomsbury’s Italianate Byzantium could act as a tool, that, in this case, helped signify Fry and Bell’s work as progressive, current, and therefore counter to Ruskin’s ideas.

In conclusion, Bloomsbury’s Byzantium largely existed independent of an identifiable take on actual, historical Byzantine periods and art moments. Instead, Bloomsbury’s Byzantium primarily constituted Fry and Bell’s idea of what Byzantine art represented. As a result, as will be discussed in chapters 3, 4, and 5, for Fry and Bell, the designation “Byzantine” could then predominantly function symbolically, as a malleable signifier of the values and ideologies Fry and Bell wished to promote, rather than a historically accurate call to Byzantium and Byzantine art.

That Fry and Bell constructed their idea of Byzantium as a tool or a symbol has significant implications not only for interpretations of Fry’s and Bell’s writings on Modern art, but also for analysis of all art historical contributions. In his 2001 text *The Practice of Persuasion*, Keith Moxey argues for the art historical benefits of acknowledging “motivated
history writing.” Recognizing the integral role of “the writer’s location in the present” as it relates to “his or her account of the past” allows discussions of “the cultural values and ideological commitments with which the authors invested their texts” and “the social function of those texts at the time of their composition” to enter into consideration. The recognition of the art historical author’s subject position permits readers “to conceive of knowledge as something other than universal and absolute,” and to subsequently ground a text as a discursive object. If art historical writing is viewed less as a testament to authoritative fact and more as a conversation between the authors and the ideas and circumstances that informed a text’s creation, then art history and criticism can more authentically connect to the complexity of the world in which it was created and received, and therefore can more thoroughly understand its subjects.141 Fry and Bell’s ever-changing definition of Byzantium suggests that just as Fry and Bell’s Byzantium should now be viewed as a highly subjective, contextually determined idea rather than a reliable reference to the specifics of a known, discrete historical period, so, too, should the subjective factors determining Fry and Bell’s seminal ideas on Modern art—and those ideas of their predecessors and successors—be interrogated largely as subjective fictions. What Bloomsbury’s Byzantium as a construction implies is that a full and complete assessment of Fry and Bell’s writings on Modern art—and the writings of all art historians and critics—can only occur if the authors’ terms, ideas, and even supposedly authoritative citations of historical moments are questioned and closely examined to determine the subjective motivations underlying a text’s claims.

2. Roger Fry, [Syllabus for Twelve Lectures on 14th–16th century Venetian art,] 1898, REF1/71, Roger Elliot Fry Papers, King’s College Archive Centre, Cambridge, UK (hereafter, Fry Papers).

3. Fry to Bryson Burroughs, April 17, 1908, Roger Fry Letters, Department Files, European Paintings, Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York.


5. As Haarer’s article notes, however, not all early scholarship on Byzantium was negative. She cites the work of French Jesuit scholar Philippe Labbé, for example, who published a collection of Byzantine primary source documents entitled De Byzantinae historiae scriptoribvs in 1648. F. K. Haarer, “Writing Histories of Byzantium: The Historiography of Byzantine History,” in A Companion to Byzantium, 10..


7. In a note that Fry includes “due to Vasari R.E.F.” in parenthesis after the above sentence. Fry, undated notebook, [ca. 1898], REF4/1/2, Fry Papers.


9. Ibid., 17, 19, 23–24.

10. Ibid., 33.


15. Runciman, “Gibbon and Byzantium,” 59. Runciman (53–54) explains Gibbon’s distaste of Byzantium as partly due to lack of knowledge of the period, as Gibbon’s limited comprehension of Greek as opposed to Latin cut him off from a large swath of Byzantine literature.


17. Ibid.


19. Ibid., 1:xvii.

20. Ibid.

21. Bell cites George Finlay’s History of the Byzantine Empire (1906) as a source. Bell, Art, 109. He also cites Emile Male’s L’art religieux du XIIème siècle and books by Charles Diehl and Josef Strzygowski. Clive Bell, Introduction to Twelfth Century Paintings at Hardham and Clayton, ed. Frances Byng-Stamper and Caroline Lucas (Lewes, Sussex, UK: Miller’s Press, 1947), 12. Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant’s Charleston Farmhouse today retains most of the original objects, design, decorations, furniture, and other testaments to the home’s inhabitants and visitors, as they were seen and used during the lifetimes of those inhabitants and visitors. Bell’s study at Charleston has been preserved, and still contains many of his books and personal belongings. When I visited Charleston on July 24, 2016, I found many texts on Byzantine art, including two copies of Charles Diehl’s Manuel d’art byzantin (1925), O. M. Dalton’s Byzantine Art and Archeology (1911), Gabriel Millet and D. Talbot Rice’s Byzantine Painting at Trebizond (1936), a book on the horses of San Marco in Venice, D. Talbot Rice’s Byzantine Art (1935), and A Picture Book of Byzantine Art (1926), published by the Victoria and Albert Museum.

22. While it is difficult to ascertain whether the lists were of books to be purchased or books he had already read, several items are crossed out, suggesting Fry already owned or had read the text. Crossed out items included Charles Oman’s The Story of the Byzantine Empire (1892), Ronald M. Burrows’s The Discoveries in Crete and their Bearing on the History of Ancient Civilization (1907), and Charles Diehl’s Figures byzantins (1909). Whatever the
meaning of the cross-out, that the texts were on Fry’s list in the first place implies that Fry was at least aware of these sources, even if he had not had an opportunity to read them. Other texts connected to Byzantine scholarship found in Fry’s lists include Salomon Reinach’s *Chronique d’Orient* (1883) and “Inedited terracottas from Myrina, in the Museum at Constantinople (1888);” Franz Friedrich Leitschuh’s *Geschichte der karolingischen Malerei* (1894); W. P. Ker’s *The Dark Ages* (1904); Charles Eliot’s *Turkey in Europe* (1908); Paul Adam’s *Basile et sophie* (1908); Alfred Joshua Butler’s *The Arab Conquest of Egypt and the Last Thirty Years of the Roman Dominion* (1902); Guglielmo Ferrero’s *Grandeur et décadences de Rome* (1904–8); Gustave Léon Schlumberger’s *L’épopée byzantine à la fin du dixième siècle* (1890–1905); and Arthur L. Frothingham’s *Monuments of Christian Rome from Constantine to the Renaissance* (1908).

23. Roger Fry, undated notebook, REF4/1/2, Fry Papers. The full text recorded is: “But this won’t do because v. Calenclario the Byzantines already did it.” However, it is unknown what “Calenclario” refers to, whether or not this is a typo of Cavalcaselle or whether Fry is referring to another, currently unidentified author. Another journal includes a note that Fry was in Venice looking at Tintorettos and a chronology of the history of Venice taken from the 1907 Studies in History of Venice by Horatio F. Brown. The text from this notebook identifies the Brown text as “Venetian History notes for Brawn.” I presume that this is a copying error and misspelling on Fry’s part, as the Horatio F. Brown 1907 text seems to fit Fry’s timeframe and interest. Among the chronological high points Fry listed in his Venice notes were the “1416 First brush with the Turks,” the “1453 Taking of Constantinople,” and various connections among Venice, the Islamic world, and Constantinople. These notes imply Fry’s desire to investigate Venice’s Byzantine past, even as his trip focused on Renaissance works. Fry, undated notebook, [ca. 1898], REF4/1/22, Fry Papers.

24. Fry, undated notebook, REF4/1/21, Fry Papers. In addition to Kondakov’s *Histoire de l’art byzantin*, Fry also mentions the same author’s *Histoire et monuments des emaux Byzantines* (1892) on his notebook book list.

25. Maria Taroutina discusses Kondakov’s contributions to Byzantine scholarship in Russia and in Europe, claiming that Kondakov “laid the foundations of the modern study of Byzantine Art both in Russia and abroad.” Maria Taroutina, “From the Tessera to the Square: Russian Modernism and the Russo-Byzantine Revival,” PhD diss., Yale University, 2013, 32).


28. Roger Fry, undated notebooks, REF4/1, Fry Papers.


30. *Manuel d’art byzantin* was included among the books currently found Bell’s study at Charleston, during the author’s visit there on July 24, 2016.


34. Roger Fry, “The Rucellai Madonna,” 1895–1900, REF1/59, Fry Papers; Roger Fry, “The Last Phase of Impressionism” (1908), in *A Roger Fry Reader*, ed. Christopher Reed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 72–75. Other texts on Byzantium that were also


36. Ibid., 13, 418.

37. Additionally, Fry noted on his lantern slides that images of Ss. Rene and Irene in Constantinople were taken from John Arnott Hamilton’s 1933 text *Byzantine Architecture and Decoration*. Fry, Lantern Slide Boxes, REF2/1/Box 11, Fry Papers. This comment implies that even in the year before his death in 1934, Fry was interested in recent literature and developments in Byzantine scholarship.

38. Fry wrote letters introducing Grant and Bell to Prichard when each was travelling in Paris. Mary Ann Caws and Sarah Bird Wright, *Bloomsbury and France: Art and Friends* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000), 76, 153. Fry wrote to Bell that he was enclosing “two letters. One to miss Stein and one to Mat Prichard. I don’t know if you know him. He will be able to show you a good many things. . . . Anyhow it might amuse you to look him up.” Fry to Bell, January 26, 1911, in *Letters of Roger Fry*, 1:339).


41. Ibid., 233.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid., 237.

44. Ibid., 238.

45. Ibid.


51. This was a reference to the residual Graeco-Roman Classicism that prevented a pure engagement with the mosaic work.

52. Bell, *Art*, 93.

53. Ibid., 97.

54. Ibid., 105n1.

55. Bell, “Byzantine Art and the Christian Slope.”

56. Ibid.


61. Again, it should be noted that Bell changed his opinion on the relative superiority of Eastern vs. Western Byzantine sites by about 1939, as Bell praised Macedonian Byzantine examples in “Byzantine Art and the Christian Slope.”


63. Byzantinists today use the designation of “East” and “West” to geographically demarcate which works originated in the Eastern or Western areas of the Byzantine Empire. For contemporary Byzantinists, the use of either “Eastern” or “Western” to describe a Byzantine site or work does not connote different types of artistic production in an Eastern or Western Byzantine context; it is merely a way to identify the site or source of the Byzantine material. The distinction I am arguing here, between Fry and Bell’s mentions of an “Eastern” source vs. a “Western” source for Byzantium is a commentary on the extent to which geographically “Eastern” sites, as per the 1054 Schism, in the Byzantine Empire were neglected in Fry and Bell’s work, as opposed to the “Western” Byzantine examples, as per the geographic demarcation of the 1054 Schism, despite the fact that Fry and Bell frequently referred to Byzantium as “Eastern.” Fry and Bell may have been using the designation “Eastern” to denote “Eastern Orthodox” sites, but, given the examples mentioned in this dissertation in which Byzantine art was coded in relationship to an “East vs. West” dichotomy, I believe the authors were more focused on the stereotypical connotations of the exotic “East” as opposed to the Roman-legacy “West,” that supports my use of “Eastern” vs. “Western” Byzantine as a geographic demarcation in relation to Fry and Bell’s writings.

64. In Art, Bell discussed SS. Sergius and Bacchus at Constantinople and the Hagia Sophia, and declared Byzantine art itself to be derived from Constantinople. Bell’s introduction to Twelfth-Century Painting mentioned the Hagia Sophia, and the ninth-century Macedonian dynasty as a Byzantine descendent. Bell, Art, 93, 105n1. Bell’s later unpublished manuscript “Byzantine Art and the Christian Slope” contains by far the most diverse and broad understanding of Byzantine art and its origins, citing Syrian influences, Thessaloniki, Athens, Russia, Macedonia, and Russia as integral Byzantine sources and site locations. Here, Bell also added in mention of the fifteenth-century Constantinople “Kilisse-jami” or the Church-Mosque of Vefa.


66. Ibid.

68. Roger Fry to Helen Anrep, May 1, 1932, in Letters of Roger Fry, 2:668–70; Roger Fry, undated notebook, REF4/1/17, Fry Papers.

69. Of Monreale, for example, Fry stated, "In the great mosaics of Monreale and Cefalu of the 12th century we see how grandiose was the idea of monumental design as it was faintly elaborated by the artists of the Eastern Empire." Fry, “Six Lectures on Monumental Painting.” In “Six Lectures on Monumental Painting,” Fry referred to Torcello as emblematic of the decay of Byzantine and said of San Marco in Rome, that here one could see that the 'great ideas of monumental design established in the time of Justinian are still being carried out." Speaking of the Capella Paletina, Fry stated that "the chief characteristics of Byzantine art are evident.” Roger Fry, “Untitled Memoire of Italy” (1907), Fry Papers.

70. In “Six Lectures on Monumental Painting,” Fry discussed S. Maria Maggiore, S. Pudanziana, and SS. Cosimo and Damiano as “Early Christian,” and called Saint Agnese a "First reaction of Byzantine ideas on Roman art.” In this same lecture, Fry spoke of S. Clemente as "full of strange dramatic power new Byzantine, especially Western.” Fry, “Six Lectures on Monumental Painting.”

71. However, though Turkish and non-Italianate Byzantium notations are fewer in comparison to Italianate Byzantium in Bell’s major aesthetic writings, it should be noted that Bell eventually became more aware of non-Italianate Byzantine art at least by the 1930s, as evidenced by the inclusion of the 1936 book Byzantine Painting at Trebizond, by Gabriel Millet and D. Talbot Rice, in the study of Charleston (author visit, July 24, 2016). This proof can also be found through the diversity of locations mentioned in his c. 1939 “Byzantine Art and the Christian Slope” unpublished manuscript.

72. In a review of W. R. Lethaby’s Mediaeval Art for The Athenaeum, Fry cited Lethaby’s comment that the “late Byzantine style acted on the West by many channels,” implying an Eastern source. Roger Fry, Review of Mediaeval Art, from the Peace of the Church to the Eve of the Renaissance, 312–1350, by W. R. Lethaby, Athenaeum, no. 4051 (June 17, 1905): 758–59, ProQuest, British Periodicals (9102585). In a 1923 article on Toledo, Fry claimed that both “Moorish” and “Christian” architecture had a “common Byzantine tradition which underlay them,” suggesting an Eastern origin for Byzantine art as independent of either the birth of Christianity or Islam. Roger Fry, “Toledo,” New Statesman 22, no. 552 (November 10, 1923): 142, ProQuest (1306856494).
73. There is an argument to be made for Fry’s emphasis on “Eastern” influence while discussing “Western” Byzantine examples as an honest mistake. As Deborah Howard has detailed, the Italian city of Venice was one defined by its “hybrid identity” between Eastern and Western cultures due to its status as an integral port and trade city between Eastern and Western lands. Deborah Howard, “Venice as an ‘Eastern City,’” in *Venice and the Islamic World, 828–1797*, ed. Stefano Carboni (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2006), 59. Venice, then, as one of the main Italianate Byzantine sites described by Fry and Bell, manifested a historical elision between East and West that may have subsequently permeated Fry and Bell’s assessments of Byzantium as a whole, and other examples of Italianate Byzantium. Elizabeth Jeffreys, John Haldon, and Robin Cormack note that Byzantine scholarship from the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century to the present day tends to take a position regarding the perception of Byzantium as either a predominantly “Eastern” or a predominantly “Western” empire and sensibility. Authors debate whether Byzantium had a purely Eastern origin, as “the most popular definition of Byzantine art has been Constantinople” and as a means to historiographically distance Byzantium from a Graeco-Roman past, while others today prefer instead to adopt the view of Byzantium as an extension of the Graeco-Roman era, identifying Byzantium as an extension of the West that developed into Eastern strongholds. Elizabeth Jeffreys, John Haldon, Robin Cormack, “Byzantine Studies as an Academic Discipline,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies*, ed. Elizabeth Jeffreys, John Haldon, and Robin Cormack (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), 11. The Byzantinist Averil Cameron has published several texts that have addressed the interpretative consequences of historiographic leanings towards an “Eastern” or “Western” Byzantium, and the fluctuating definitions of the period and its geographic boundaries. For instance, see Averil Cameron, “Thinking with Byzantium,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 21 (2011): 39–57.

74. Bell, *Art*, 92, 137.

75. Fry, “Untitled Memoire of Italy.”

76. Ibid.

77. Fry, “Six Lectures on Monumental Painting.” At times, Fry appeared to acknowledge the disconnect between the number of Western as opposed to Eastern Byzantine sites Fry and Bell emphasized and the praise they lavished on these Western sites due to an “Eastern” sensibility and influence. Seemingly by way of explanation for this disconnect, several of Fry’s texts constructed his narrative of Early Christian and Byzantine art as one in which Western artists ultimately succeeded to realize the potential of Eastern Byzantine art. As a consequence, Fry could logically claim an “Eastern” presence in predominantly “Western” work because the latter simply created “better Byzantine” than their Eastern counterparts. In a section of his 1911 lecture, Fry praised the “great mosaics of Monreale and Cefalu of the twelfth century,” and Fry claimed that here “we see how grandiose was the idea of monumental design as it was faintly
elaborated by the artists of the Eastern Empire,” and identified in the decorations of St. Clemente in Rome a “strange dramatic power,” a “new Byzantine,” one that was “essentially Western.” In other words, in this text, and in others to follow, Fry began with an Eastern source for the Byzantine aesthetic, but then argued for a shift in which the East should be considered more the instigator of a new style that could then develop into a powerful “new” Byzantium, one coming to fruition only in the West.


80. Fry, “Review of Coliseum Entertainment, Including the Ballet Russes and American Folk Songs.”


82. Bell cited “Byzantium” or the “Byzantines” as generic identifiers on pages 167, 198, and 210, for example. Bell, Since Cézanne, 167, 198, 210.


91. Writing to Helen Fry in January 1905 while in New York, Fry mentioned that a society lady, “Mrs. Laffan,” stated that Berenson was “the first person of whom she understood what people felt when they talked about the feeling of mistrust inspired by Jews.” Fry wrote that he responded saying, “I was very careful and said much that was nice and some criticism.” (Letters of Roger Fry, 1:22–28). In a letter to Helen Fry written from Perugia May 30, 1907, Fry described a friendly dinner with Berenson in Italy (Letters of Roger Fry, 1: 287–88). In a letter to Mary Berenson on May 10, 1903, Fry hinted at a disagreement with Berenson, and tried to placate Bernard Berenson via Mary. Fry claimed that while he “know[s] quite well that B. B. really thinks well of my writing and that he knows I don’t set myself up as a connoisseur of Italian art at all in the same category as himself.” For that reason, Fry didn’t think that he was “bound always to agree with him; whoever would take an intelligent and appreciative interest in his work must occasionally differ.” Fry continued by stating that because there was “such a lot of interest in Italian art and so few people who knew even as much as I do” he was always being asked to give a connoisseur’s opinion, even if Fry didn’t think himself qualified, and even if that judgment, which was his own, differed from Berenson’s (Letters of Roger Fry, 1:208–9). Writing to Bernard Berenson on January 11, 1908, Fry acknowledged differences between his and Berenson’s approach and stated that “For the moment I find myself thinking of art more psychologically and less physiologically than you do” though he found that Berenson in his book North Italian Painters of the Renaissance “surpassed [himself] this time in the condensation of stimulating ideas” (Letters of Roger Fry, 1:293).


94. Ibid., 41.

95. Ibid., 42.

96. In another example, Berenson described a Madonna by Gentile Bellini as “hieratic, almost Byzantine.” Bernard Berenson, The Study And Criticism of Italian Art (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1903), 119.

97. Correspondence between Berenson and Fry from late 1901 imply that both Berenson and Fry consulted on Butler’s collection. These letters suggest that Fry and Berenson were known entities to Butler and were asked to do attributions for Butler’s collection as early as 1901. Further, they indicate that, because they were already acquainted with Butler, Berenson and Fry would have been aware of Butler’s 1893 purchase at the Fitzwilliam, even though their involvement is not documented in the files of the Fitzwilliam Museum until around 1909 at the earliest. Berenson to Fry, October 17, 1901; Berenson to Fry, November 21, 1901; Berenson to Fry, December 30, 1901, REF3/13, Fry Papers. On October 17, 1901, Berenson mused to Fry, “I
wish I knew who did Butler’s Madonna,” and asked Fry to “have this picture photographed” with “six copies, of which I would beg you to keep one and I would distribute the others to the few people who might be able to” shed “light on the subject.”

98. Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, UK, Museum Object Files, acc. no. 564. In 1909, Berenson confirmed this crucifixion to be Sienese. When Fry viewed the work in 1912, and contributed to the Fitzwilliam catalogue item on the object, he stated that it was more Pisan than Sienese. In 1923, Berenson then sided with Fry, correcting his own Sienese attribution to a Pisan origin.

99. The impact of the attributions for the Fitzwilliam Butler purchase and Berenson’s role on Fry’s connection between early Italian Renaissance art and Byzantine art can be found in Fry’s notes from his Cambridge University Extension lectures, which date between 1894 and 1910. In these notes, Fry explicitly called Sienese art a form of Byzantine art, claiming that “the art of Siena was influenced more profoundly by the best art of Byzantium than any other place in Italy” and this influence did not “wear off lightly” such that Sienese art kept “something of the sumptuous hieratic calligraphy which its earliest artists learned from Byzantine masters.” If the lecture notes date to the 1890s, this possibly suggests that as early as one year after the Butler purchase at the Fitzwilliam, a purchase that contained several Sienese Early Italian masterworks, Fry was definitively linking Sienese Early Italian work to and as a Byzantine style. Roger Fry, “Lecture I: ‘Transition from Classical to Modern Art,’” Fry Papers.

100. Early examples of Fry’s connection between the work of Cimabue, Duccio, and Giotto with Byzantine art can be found in the King’s College Archives and in Fry’s publications. In an undated notebook, Fry took notes on the thirteenth-century Cimabue and Giotto frescoes at the Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi in Assisi, listing “Types to recognize at Assisi” in relationship to what Fry identified (though didn’t define) as Byzantine, including the notations that “The Archangels behind...transept seem to be by yet another convinced Byzantinist” with “The Madonna and angles...must be put down to yet another but by no means so pure a Byzantinist as the last” and “The convinced and academic Byzantine of the Creation of Noah’s ark and the Isaac.” Roger Fry, undated notebook, REF4/1/17, Fry Papers. Writing about Duccio’s Rucellai Madonna in an undated manuscript from about 1895–1900, Fry claimed that Duccio had a “close connection with the Byzantine” though there are “new elements to be found in his work.” Fry, “The Rucellai Madonna,” [1895–1900], REF1/59, Fry Papers. Fry then conducted a visual analysis of the Rucellai Madonna, noting that Duccio’s angels keep “an essentially Byzantine type”, and made a telling slip in his terminology. Describing the face of Duccio’s Madonna, Fry originally wrote “Bridge of nose triangular as all Byzantine works,” and subsequently crossed out the words “Byzantine works,” turning the sentence into “Bridge of nose triangular as all Byzantine works who were influenced by Byzantines made it.” (Ibid.). Here, Fry indicated his own personal ambiguity regarding whether Duccio’s Early Italian work constituted
a form of Byzantine art, or was merely inspired by it; either way, the link between Duccio and a Byzantine model is clear.


102. Roger Fry, “Vitality,” in Last Lectures, intro. Kenneth Clark (London: Cambridge University Press, 1939; repr., Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), 43. Fry also wrote about Paolo di Veneziano in relationship to Byzantine art. Discussing the artist’s 1333 Dormition of the Virgin at the Civic Museum of Vicenza, Fry wrote in his notes that it was “almost purely Byz. quite accomplished”, “designed on quite Byz. Lines . . . foreshadowing neoGothic.” On the “Semiticolos” in the library of the University of Padua, he commented specifically on a Madonna and child on “an elaborately incised gold ground” that in many respects he regarded as “purely Byzantine in technique” and “Byz. no Giottoesque” overall. Roger Fry, “1902. Vicenza. Correr Padua Bologna,” notebook, REF4/1/12, Fry Papers. In a lecture about 1915, Fry referred again to the connection between Byzantine and Sienese art, claiming that the Sienese “held more closely to Byz.” Roger Fry, “Principles of Pictorial Design,” 1910–19, REF1/91, Fry Papers. Later, Fry described a “1298 Byzantine Veneziano after Bellini Pieta” in Venice. Roger Fry, undated notebook, [c. 1928], REF4/1/24, Fry Papers. He described works at the Accademia in Venice in relation to Byzantine art. Fry stated, for example, that the 1394 Niccolo di Maestro Pietro was a “feeble Lorenzo Venezianesque but less Byz. than Catarino.” He described a 1358 “Lorenzo” “Madonna and child mandorla of angels” (possibly referring to the c. 1360 Marriage of Saint Catherine by Lorenzo Veneziano at the Galleria dell Accademia in Venice) as “Byz. brown turned a too primitive red” and, what Fry referred to as the “Lor. Ven. Great altarpiece” with an Annunciation (likely the 1371 Annunciation with Saints by Lorenzo Veneziano at the Galleria dell’Accademia in Venice) Fry identified as “still Byz. in contour of skulls” (Ibid.). In 1911, Fry described Pietro Lorenzetti’s Crucifixion (possibly the c. 1320 fresco in Assisi) as recalling “some of the early Christian and Byzantine schemes.” Fry, “Six Lectures on Monumental Painting: Lecture III.”

103. Bell, Since Cézanne, 78.

104. Denys Sutton noted that “R. F.’s journey to Turkey enabled him and Vanessa Bell to see Byzantine mosaics. However, it has to be emphasized that the only ones which were then visible were those in the Kariye Djami in Istanbul, which although in poor condition, were perfectly legible.” (Letters of Roger Fry, 347n1). Christopher Reed, however, claims that Fry and the Bells did see both the Hagia Sophia, and Chora Cathedral (Kariye Djami). Christopher Reed, Bloomsbury Rooms: Modernism, Subculture, and Domesticity (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 69).

105. However, by the time he wrote his “Byzantine Art and the Christian Slope” manuscript, about 1939, Bell singled out “Kilisse-jami,” or the Church-Mosque of Vefa in
Constantinople, suggesting that by that time his understanding of non-Italianate Byzantine sites was more nuanced than in his earlier writings.


107. Reed, Bloomsbury Rooms, 36.


115. Bell, Art, 130, 187.

116. Christine Roth, introduction to The Two Paths, by John Ruskin, xiii.


119. Bell, Art, 24.

120. The connection between Fry and Bell’s aesthetic philosophy and the legacy of Ruskin is a source for strong opinion and debate within Bloomsbury secondary literature. A prominent example of the argument against aligning Bloomsbury critics with Ruskin occurs in Michael T. Saler’s The Avant-Garde in Interwar England: Medieval Modernism and the London Underground. Saler’s argument traces the industrialized production of Arts and Crafts-inspired works to a hybrid “Medieval Modernism,” one that juxtaposed the “formalism” of Fry and Bell to the idealized, socialistic Medievalism of Ruskin and William Morris. In so doing, Saler distinctly isolates Bloomsbury from Ruskin and Morris as antithetical tendencies. Christopher
Reed, in his collection of Fry writings, attributes such critical distaste for aligning Fry and Bell with Ruskin and William Morris to an attempt to “distance Ruskin and Morris’s socialist legacy from a bourgeois hegemony they see as embodied in modernism and therefore personified by Fry.” On the other side, much of the Bloomsbury secondary literature relates Fry and Bell as ideological successors to Ruskin. In her 2004 dissertation, Rachel Kerri Teukolsky argues that Fry and Bell’s aesthetics, as well as much of the early twentieth-century Modern art writing, were more indebted to and were continuations of nineteenth-century aesthetic and theoretical paradigms than has currently been acknowledged. In both Bloomsbury Rooms and A Roger Fry Reader, Christopher Reed characterizes Fry as a continuation and descendent of rather than deviant from the nineteenth-century values of Ruskin and Morris, specifically Morris’ decorative arts imperatives. Reed cites Fry’s beloved Durbins home, a study in “functional simplicity,” as a testament to Fry’s continued engagement with the ideals of the nineteenth-century aesthetic currents, as Reed describes Durbins as an elision between the values of the Arts and Crafts style and the tenets of the Aesthetic movement. Bloomsbury’s Byzantium is also invoked as a testament to the influence of Ruskinian aesthetics. Reed points out that the 1911 Borough Polytechnic murals, which contained one of Duncan Grant’s most direct artistic evocations of Byzantine art and mosaics (see chapter 3), was a “modernist variation on a Victorian idea,” like “other Bloomsbury initiatives,” linked back to both the Arts and Crafts “legacy of murals in schools” and Ruskin’s argument that collaborative public art projects was “ideal training for young artists.” Michael T. Saler, The Avant-Garde in Interwar England: Medieval Modernism and the London Underground (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 84-88; Rachel Teukolsky, “The Literate Eye: Victorian Art Writing and the Prose of Modern Aesthetics” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2004), 2; Reed, Bloomsbury Rooms, 4, 3, 38-40, 68, 112; Christopher Reed, “Architecture and the Decorative Arts,” in A Roger Fry Reader, 169.

121. Spalding, Roger Fry, 20.

122. In Lives of the Artists, Vasari labored under a common Renaissance misperception that Germanic “Goths,” as well as the Byzantines, were responsible for the fall of Rome.

123. Ruskin also strongly supported the Pre-Raphaelite artists, such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and, after famously declaring that Aesthetic artist J. A. M. Whistler’s circa 1875 Nocturne in Black and Gold “threw a pot of paint in the public’s face,” found himself embroiled in a defamation suit by Whistler. The suit resulted in the 1878 Ruskin v. Whistler trial, in which the questions of whose right it was to call a work of art “art,” the artist or critic, and can almost-abstract or non-naturalistic art still be considered art, were put on the stand. That such questions were raised in a public forum and litigated on both sides supports the trial’s historiographic prominence as a turning point in the defense of Modern art.


125. Ibid., 17–18, 20, 22.

126. Ibid., 157.
127. Ibid., 169–70.

128. Ibid., 182.

129. Ibid.


134. A topic for future study involves the degree to which the German versus Italian art cadences shaped Fry and Bell’s idea of Byzantium and Gothic, and subsequently the impact of this distinction on their valuation of German Expressionist art.

135. Roger Fry, “Dürer and his Contemporaries,” shortened form of Fry’s introduction to *Records of Journeys to Venice and the Low Countries by Albrecht Dürer* (Boston 1913), in *Vision and Design*, 136. Bell similarly chided Dürer in *Art*, claiming that while the artist “managed to convert a mass of detail into tolerably significant form,” in the “greater part of his work . . . fine conception is hopelessly ruined by a mass of undigested symbolism.” Bell, *Art*, 152.

136. The association between the designation “Gothic” and a Germanic style is one that dates back to the 1842 work on the Cologne Cathedral, where “Gothic” came to be embraced as a German national style, and that instigated the “cathedral debate” with France regarding which country could claim national origins for the Gothic. Hans Belting, *The Germans and Their Art: A Troublesome Relationship*, trans. Scott Kleager (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 27–29, 48. For more on the role of the “Gothic” in the formation of German nationalism has been explored, see also Michaela Passini, *La fabrique de l’art national: Le nationalisme et les origines de l’histoire de l’art en France et en Allemagne, 1870–1933* (Paris: Éditions de la maison des sciences de l’homme, 2012), and Paul Fechter, Excerpt from *Der Expressionismus* (1914), in *German Expressionism: Documents from the End of the Wilhelmine Empire to the Rise of National Socialism*, ed. Rose-Carol Washton Long (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 81–84.


139. Ibid., 102.

140. Fry, “Six Lectures on Monumental Painting: Lecture I.”

Chapter Three: Bloomsbury’s Byzantium and the Writing of Modern Art

As suggested by the title of this dissertation, Bloomsbury’s Byzantium played its most conspicuous role in Fry’s and Bell’s writings on Modern art. That Bloomsbury’s interest in Byzantium was related to the critics’ understanding of Modern art, specifically Post-Impressionist art, is an argument universally agreed upon by those authors whose texts emphasize Bloomsbury’s connection to Byzantium, such as J. B. Bullen, Christopher Reed, Christopher Green, and David Lewis. In this chapter, I expand on the statements of these scholars. While Bullen, Reed, Green, and Lewis connected Fry and Bell to Byzantium as one part of their Modern art advocacy, this chapter foregrounds Bloomsbury’s Byzantium as a hub, not merely one spoke, in Fry’s and Bell’s writings’ concerns with Post-Impressionism, Primitivism, art historiography, and advocacy for new or difficult art.

In certain respects, it was logical for Fry and Bell to link Byzantine to Post-Impressionist art. Post-Impressionist art’s visual effects and techniques appeared to parallel the effects and techniques typical of Byzantine works. Paul Cézanne’s art, for instance, with its cubic paint units, modelled the tesserae compositions of Byzantine mosaics. Fry, in a 1908 letter to the editor of Burlington Magazine, noted that, like the Byzantines before them, Paul Cézanne and Paul Gauguin used thick contour lines filled in with “willfully simplified and un-modulated masses.” Such compositional choices subsequently defined the artists as “not really Impressionists at all. They [were] proto-Byzantines rather than NeoImpressionists.” The suggestion of depth created by the progression from light to dark rectilinear tesserae in the Byzantine San Vitale mosaics (Fig. 3.1) aligned with Paul Gauguin, Paul Cézanne, and Henri Matisse’s use of geometric fields of unmodulated color. For these Modern artists, as in
Byzantine mosaic, geometric, often rectilinear fields of color built up a painting’s surface, and, in lieu of traditional chiaroscuro modelling, the juxtaposition of dark against light planes indicated contour and depth. In Henri Matisse’s 1905 *Portrait of Madame Matisse* (Fig. 3.2), for instance, Matisse’s wife’s face was composed of an assemblage of thickly outlined green and peach unmodulated color planes, just as in the “Cloisonnism” of Gauguin’s 1894 *Mahana no Atua*, Gauguin composed the river of abstracted curvilinear shapes, each carefully delineated through dark against light solid masses of color (Fig. 3.3). Like the compositional effect of mosaics, in which rectilinear glass planes combined to create the suggestion of a person, a landscape, or any other object or decoration, in Cézanne’s work, such as his 1904-1906 *Mont Saint-Victoire* (Fig. 3.4), a mountain, sky, and surrounding valley emerged from overlapping layers of rectilinear blocks of color. In addition, Byzantine art’s non-naturalistic figuration appeared analogous with Modern works’ deviations from mimesis. In *Art*, Bell identified Byzantine art with “absence of representation, absence of technical swagger, sublimely impressive form,” and later in his introductory essay to *Twelfth Century Paintings at Hardham & Clayton*, Bell specifically pointed out elongation and distortion as characteristic of Byzantine art. Comparing Bell’s assessments of Byzantium to the elongated, distorted, or non-naturalistic figural proportions of Matisse’s 1907 *Blue Nude* or 1907-1908 *La Luxe II*, Byzantine art easily appeared to be Modern art’s precedent. Byzantine art’s appearance and mosaic technique then made Fry and Bell’s connection between Byzantine and a visually similar Post-Impressionist approach and technique natural, and apparent.

In addition, two of the most influential sources for Fry and Bell’s knowledge of Post-Impressionism, Julius Meier-Graefe’s 1908 English translation of his *Modern Art: Being a Contribution to a New System of Aesthetics*, and Fry’s knowledge of and friendship with Nabis
Symbolist Maurice Denis, specifically Denis’ 1907 article “Cézanne—I” (which Fry translated to English for *The Burlington Magazine* in 1910), explained Modern work using Byzantine precedent. While the language, artists, and ideologies behind Meier-Graefe’s and Denis’ writings didn’t always align with the semantics, preferred artists, and motivations shaping Fry and Bell’s aesthetics, Meier-Graefe and Denis provided templates through which Fry and Bell could productively link Byzantine forms with Modern ones. Ultimately, Fry, and later Bell, took from both Meier-Graefe and Denis the structure, characterization, and terminology these predecessors used to connect a Byzantine aesthetic with Modern work, but then reshaped such elements in accordance with Fry and Bell’s own ideological and aesthetic agendas.

Meier-Graefe was a critical early source for Fry and Bell’s knowledge of Modern art. According to Richard Cork, in “From ‘Art-Quake’ to ‘Pure Visual Music,’” Fry formed his nascent understanding of Modern art in 1908 through the English translation of Meier-Graefe’s 1904 *Modern Art*. As evidenced by citations of Meier-Graefe in Bell’s writings, Bell was also aware of Meier-Graefe’s work. Yet, Meier-Graefe’s *Modern Art* emphasized not only the values of Modern work, but also did so in relation to Byzantium. In Meier-Graefe’s *Modern Art* chapter, “The Rise of Painting,” Meier-Graefe identified the origin of the “highest expressive power” found in Modern art as the rise of the Christian Church at the “moment when the Roman Empire lay in its last throes.” In other words, Meier-Graefe located the archaic precedent for Modern art with the works of the Byzantine Empire. Meier-Graefe subsequently discussed Byzantine mosaics as pure expressive power, and as the work of “primitive” artisans, and claimed that with Byzantine mosaics, there “was no art, but there was certainly an instinct for interior-effects, the vastness, loftiness, and grace of which fills us with amazement,” sentiments both Fry and Bell would later echo in their connection between Byzantium and “primitive” art. According to
Meier-Graefe, the “Byzantines were the first to bring mosaic decoration to perfection,” and he criticized historians or art historians who were “inclined to neglect their work all together…treating the Byzantine more or less as barbaric aberration.”¹² Later, as Fry and Bell would similarly attest, Meier-Graefe declared that Paul Cézanne, in accordance with an ancestral link to Byzantine art and Byzantine spirit, demonstrated a “mosaic-like technique.”¹³

Meier-Graefe also set the stage for Fry and Bell to interpret Byzantine art abstractly and symbolically. Meier-Graefe claimed that to “the Byzantine conception, persons and things, and all that was represented, were merely vehicles for decorative line…and are more essential for the comprehension of the picture than the subject matter itself.”¹⁴ Byzantine mosaics and Byzantine architecture were “covered with signs” that were “unmeaning, if we examine them in detail as we should examine a picture,” and Byzantine mosaics, as they caught the light, seemingly became animate, as they “change[d] with every step, with every gleam of light, and [were] absolutely inexhaustible.”¹⁵ Meier-Graefe’s *Modern Art* then provided Fry and Bell with an interpretation of Byzantine art that perceived it to be mystical and transformative; focused on the properties of mosaic to model what art could and should be in more traditional, painterly mediums; and positioned Byzantium as the ancestor of Modern art and Modern painting. These elements were each crucial to the development of Fry and Bell’s idea of Byzantine art, and its relationship to Modern aesthetics.

Maurice Denis, a founding member of the Symbolist artistic collective the Nabis (c. 1888) alongside Paul Sérusier, Pierre Bonnard, and others, connected an understanding of Modern art to Byzantine inspiration in his writings, and was another early source for Fry’s knowledge of Modern work.¹⁶ Scholars such as Elizabeth Prettejohn, Richard Shiff, Christopher Reed, and J. B. Bullen have pointed to the impact of Denis’ writings on Fry’s aesthetics,
particularly Denis’ writings on Cézanne. Fry’s admiration for Denis is apparent in Fry’s writings and exhibitions. When Fry wrote his 1908 “The Last Phase of Impressionism,” he did so after viewing an exhibition that contained Denis’ works, and the 1910 *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* exhibition contained Denis’ works as well. In Fry’s 1933 “The Double Nature of Painting,” printed in *Apollo* in May of 1969, Fry directly credited Denis with the foundation of Fry’s aesthetic theories.

It was through Denis’ writings on Cézanne that Denis most directly shaped Fry’s connection between Modern art and Byzantium. In 1910, *The Burlington Magazine* published Fry’s translation of a 1907 article Denis wrote on Cézanne for *L’Occident*, accompanied by Fry’s “Introductory Note.” In Fry’s note, Fry highlighted Denis’ connection between El Greco’s work and Cézanne’s, but Fry queried: “Was it not rather El Greco’s earliest training in the lingering Byzantine tradition that suggested to him his mode of escape into an art of direct decorative expression?” Fry indicated here that Denis missed an association among Cézanne, El Greco, and Byzantium, but, in making this connection himself, Fry implied that Denis’ article all but implicitly stated such a link. Fry was, in fact, correct: Denis’ “Cézanne—I,” though not mentioning “Byzantine” or “Byzantium” by name, coded his discussions of Cézanne’s work and the historical precedents for Cézanne’s work according to terms and characteristics that he similarly used to describe and discuss Byzantine or Byzantine-Gothic art in his earlier, previous texts. For example, in “Cézanne—I,” Denis stated that “through El Greco” Cézanne “touches Venice,” “bringing before us an ideal akin to that of the Venetian decadence.” Cézanne “transcribed his sensibility in bold and reasoned syntheses out of reaction against expiring naturalism and romanticism,” and was “guided by his Latin instinct.” Denis’ reference to Venice, site of the Byzantine San Marco, anti-naturalism, and a “Latin instinct” all align with
Denis’ previous characterizations of Byzantine or what Denis defined as a Byzantine-Gothic art. Fry, knowledgeable of Denis’ oeuvre, would have been familiar with Denis’ writings, and, therefore, in his introduction to “Cézanne—I” either consciously or unconsciously identified the Byzantine style referred to in all but name in the main body of the article.

However, while Fry may have relied on Denis’ writings to link Modern with Byzantine art, Fry’s understanding of Byzantium differed from Denis’, as Denis’ vocal support of Modern art and Byzantium occurred in the context of his search for a Modern, Catholic art and in relation to his support for French anti-Semitism at the turn of the twentieth century. Denis, a devoted Catholic and part of the neo-Catholic movement in France in the late nineteenth century, was one of the Symbolists who, in Laura Morowitz’s terms in her 1996 dissertation, *Consuming the Past*, embraced a “mystical Catholicism, adopting the zealous and uncompromising orthodoxy of the newly converted.” In part, Denis used his connection between faith and art to advocate for Modern works, and Denis specifically used Byzantine and Medieval precedents to illustrate the spiritual, religious qualities he aspired to for Modern art. Indeed, for Denis, Byzantine art instigated both Modern and Christian art.

Yet, Denis used Byzantine art as well to further his involvement in and support of proto-fascist and anti-Semitic ideas. In 1899, the Symbolist publication *La Revue Blanche* publicized support for Captain Alfred Dreyfus in relation to the 1894-1906 “Dreyfus Affair,” the anti-Semitic government resistance to re-trying falsely convicted Jewish artillery officer Captain Alfred Dreyfus. *La Revue Blanche*’s public support for Dreyfus marked a definitive break among the Nabis Symbolist artists, who were subsequently divided into “Dreyfusards” and “anti-Dreyfusards.” Denis was an “anti-Dreyfusard,” and shortly after the Dreyfus Affair began, Denis joined the Royalist, anti-Semitic group and later publication *Action Française*, that,
several decades later, became a mouthpiece for the Vichy government under the Nazi occupation of Paris. Denis’ approach to Byzantine art and its relationship to Modern work illustrated such anti-Semitic views. In a March 1899 journal entry, describing an exhibition of Symbolist artists at the Durand-Ruel gallery, Denis stated that there were now two different characters defining Symbolist artists. The first group Denis described as “goût sémite,” a linkage between these artists’ art and their status as the pro-Dreyfusard Symbolist faction. The second group Denis described as “goût latin.” Denis described the “Semite” Symbolists as following nature with less importance on human figures, as opposed to the “Latins,” whose work was symbolic and centralized the human figure, among other listed distinctions. Such descriptions of the “Latins’” work corresponded to characteristics Denis identified as praiseworthy in Byzantine art, while those qualities Denis identified in “Semite” Symbolist work paralleled qualities Denis found condemnable in Renaissance and Roman Classical art. “Semitic” art, which Denis aligned with Classicism, symbolized both a faith and a working method not appropriate for his artistic aims, and was an essential counterpart to Denis’ praised Byzantine style, the ancestor of the “Latins” work. Denis’ connection between Byzantine and Modern art then helped further his anti-Semitic beliefs.

Based on Fry’s writings, Fry, unlike Denis, was a “pro-Dreyfusard.” This implies that Fry’s and later Bell’s interpretation of Denis’ writings that linked Byzantine to Modern art shied away from the more controversial political and anti-Semitic undertones of Denis’ characterization. In evaluating the influence of Denis’ link between Byzantium and Modern art on Fry and Bell, then, one should conclude that Fry took from Denis less the social characteristics Denis associated with Byzantine art, and more the potential evidenced in Denis’ writings to connect Byzantine precedent and Modern work.
In their own writings, Fry and Bell used the connection between Byzantine and Modern art in a variety of ways that pointed to their predecessors’ examples, but also diverged from them in more progressive ways. At times, Fry’s connection between Modern art and Byzantium took the form of direct analogy. Fry, for example, often used the same terms to describe both Byzantine art and Paul Cézanne’s paintings. In Fry’s “Giotto” essays, Fry noted Byzantine art’s “hieratic solemnity” given by “rigid delineation,” language paralleled in his declaration that Cézanne gave to his compositions a “monumentality” of elementary forms and a “hieratic austerity of line” from Cézanne: A Study of his Development. Fry also directly used Byzantine form to explain Cézanne’s work. Describing Cézanne’s early painting, the 1867-1868 Achille l’Emperaire (Fig. 3.5), Fry noted that the “composition [was] almost as elementary as that of a Byzantine icon.” In a 1927 lecture delivered at the University College, Bangor on the development of Modern art, Fry claimed that Henri Matisse made an “oil painting in almost the same terms as a Byzantine artist executed a mosaic or an enamel.” To Fry, Matisse forwent all “the possibilities that oil painting possesses to express gradations” in a “complete” analogy with Byzantine art.

Such visual sympathies between Byzantine and Modern art allowed Fry and Bell to educate the public about Modern art, particularly in the wake of the 1910 and 1912 Post-Impressionist exhibitions’ vitriolic critical backlash. Following the 1910 Manet and the Post-Impressionists, J. B. Bullen notes that critics expressed their outrage at the exhibition’s avant-garde art in a variety of surprising modes, with responses ranging from a connection between abstracted form and psychological degeneracy, to xenophobic resistance to the exhibition’s emphasis on French over British art. In an illustration from The Sketch from November 16, 1910, the headline above a sampling of images from the show was titled “Giving Amusement to
All London: Paintings by Post-Impressionists,” and the *Illustrated London News* from November 26, 1910, displayed the paintings beneath the headline “By Men who Think the Impressionists Too Naturalistic.”

The critical response to the Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition in 1912, while calmer than the uproar that greeted *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* two years prior, was no less charged.

Negative reactions to both exhibitions were not wholly unanticipated by Fry, but he was, however, surprised by the extent of public outrage. Fry, ever the educator, reacted to the degree of critical backlash to both exhibitions by attempting to teach the disapproving public, writing defenses and explanations of Post-Impressionist art. For example, in his article “Post Impressionism,” derived from a lecture delivered at the Grafton Gallery at the close of *Manet and the Post-Impressionists*, Fry put in “a plea for tolerance” and proceeded to break down critics’ objections to the Post-Impressionist work and explain the artists’ compositional decisions. To the criticism that the Post-Impressionists engaged in “charlatanism,” with the artists wishing “to flout and irritate the public” by passing off distorted compositions as skilled artistic creations, Fry noted that the Post-Impressionists were guilty merely of exercising the artistic license to idealize. In “The Post-Impressionists,” from the 1910 catalogue *Manet and the Post-Impressionists*, Fry explained deviations from naturalistic form characteristic of Cézanne and Gauguin’s works as attempts to “express emotions which the objects themselves evoked” rather than to directly replicate the objects’ physical forms. Fry claimed that the perceived “retrogressive[ness]” of Post-Impressionist simplification was a not-insurmountable consequence of public predisposition, as the public had become “accustomed to extremely plausible imitations of nature.”
For the *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition*, Fry adopted an offensive position in his catalogue entry to preemptively explain Post-Impressionist art to the public. In “The French Post-Impressionists,” Fry’s essay for the 1912 *Catalogue of the Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition*, Fry claimed that public resistance to Post-Impressionist work was a product of a “deep-rooted conviction...that the aim of painting is the descriptive imitation of natural forms.” Fry proceeded to explain to doubting readers and viewers how, unlike works by more realistic painters, the Post-Impressionist artists only gave a “pale reflex of actual appearance” in the service of finding an “equivalent for life” in a “purely abstract language of form” akin to “visual music.” Following the inevitable criticism of the *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition*, Fry provided a defense, and explanation. In “The Grafton Gallery: An Apologia,” Fry reminded critics that “every new work of creative design is ugly until it becomes beautiful,” a plea to his dissenters to look beyond their initial confusion and instead take the forms on their own terms.

Byzantine art became a critical tool Fry and Bell used in their quests to teach readers to appreciate Modern works, with Byzantine art often addressed as proof that Post-Impressionist anti-naturalism was actually part of long-standing artistic impulse dating back to early Christian times. In his 1911 “Post-Impressionism,” Fry listed specific examples of what he called “primitive” sources, “Cimabue and the Byzantines, and to the French sculptors of the twelfth century,” as a means to argue that Post-Impressionism, a relative of these styles, was not so different in its distortions. In his 1935 article on Henri Matisse, Fry situated both Cézanne and Matisse as inheritors of a progression begun and exemplified by all manifestations of Byzantine art, from the fifth through the thirteenth century. Bell, in his 1913 article “Post-Impressionism and Aesthetics,” sought to answer to those who said the “silliest things...about the pictures at the Grafton Gallery,” and attempted to naturalize the powerful emotions Post-Impressionist art
elicited by defining Post-Impressionism as “the first upward stroke in a new curve to which it will stand in the same relation as 6th century Byzantine art stands to the old.” In other words, Fry and Bell used the visual analogies between Byzantine and Modern art to establish an art historical chain of influence. Byzantine precedent familiarized the jarring aspects of Post-Impressionist art experienced by viewers at both Post-Impressionist exhibitions. If Fry and Bell defined Post-Impressionism as part of an aesthetic paradigm that had always been a part—even a denigrated part—of Western artistic legacy, then Post-Impressionism could be perceived as unthreatening, despite viewers having never previously seen or appreciated works of this kind.

Such a use of praised archaic works to make “new” and “shocking” artworks appear non-threatening, accessible, and comprehensible was a strategy shared by Fry and Bell’s avant-garde contemporaries. Prior to the First World War, the artists, dealers, and critics championing Cubism and Expressionism, for example, utilized art historical precedent to contend with the problem of “newness”—how to legitimize and normalize shockingly new forms and artistic approaches. Exhibition reviews, catalogues, and explanatory manifestos were key to note artistic lineage, contextualizing the unfamiliar forms within the visual known, and often displayed nationalistic undertones. Contextualizing Cubism, for example, Jean Metzinger, in his 1910 article “Note sur la peinture,” situated Picasso, Braque, Delaunay, and Le Fauconnier within a subconscious artistic lineage, inheriting the “rhythm” of the Hellenistic past and the formal freedom of the primitives through Cézanne, but “reinventing” its forms on a metaphysical level. To Metzinger, Picasso improved on Cézanne’s realism by reporting on the forms’ “real life in the mind.” In a similar vein, Albert Gleizes and Metzinger’s 1912 “Du ‘Cubisme’” legitimized Cubist painting through a “realist” lineage derived from Courbet, to Manet, then to the “profound realism” of Cézanne, privileging the ability for Cubist forms to more truthfully
represent the immateriality of visual experience. The twentieth-century avant-gardes, however, did not invent the argumentative model that justified and validated progressive art through recourse to an archaic ancestral model. Such art historical methodologies can be found in the sixteenth century, where Giorgio Vasari advocated for the glories of Renaissance art as a rebirth of Roman triumphs, and in the eighteenth, with Johan Joachim Winkelmann’s “Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture,” arguing that the only way for contemporary painters to “become great” was through the imitation of the “ancients,” the masters of ancient Greece. Fry and Bell were therefore in good company in their educational strategy of using Byzantium as an archaic precedent to familiarize Post-Impressionist art to new viewers. The commonality of their rhetorical model within the discipline consequently ensured that Fry’s and Bell’s argumentative structures as well as their uses of Byzantine and other archaic precedents naturalized Post-Impressionist art and its analysis for their public.

In most other instances, however, Byzantium assumed a symbolic role in Fry and Bell’s writings. Fry and Bell defined Byzantium as Post-Impressionism’s archaic ancestor in contrast to a denigrated Rome as Impressionism’s archaic model. Used in this manner, Byzantium signaled that Fry and Bell’s lineage of art history was distinct from past conceptions. As early as 1908, in “The Last Phase of Impressionism,” Fry claimed that Impressionism “has existed before” in “the Roman art of the Empire.” Like Roman art, Impressionist art accepted “the totality of appearances” as the tangible aspects of composition, “line, mass, colour,” were “lost in the flux of appearance” and could “cease to deliver any intelligible message.” Yet, like Post-Impressionism arriving on the heels of Impressionism, Byzantine art served as a positive, and “necessary outcome” of the Impressionism of the Roman Empire, just as Post-Impressionism was a necessary outcome of Impressionism. In 1913, Fry adopted a variation on this position,
claiming that Byzantine art, as a “potent and life-giving inspiration,” once “liberated us form the age of tyranny of Alexandrianism.” In his 1930 manuscript on Matisse, Fry paralleled Byzantine art’s “overthrow of the age-long tyranny of the standards of Graeco-Roman sculpture” to the “new direction of effort” on the part of the “younger generation” to advance through Post-Impressionism and other Modern movements. In Art, Bell placed Post-Impressionism and Byzantine art directly on a continuum, fighting together against the forces of Impressionism and Classical art, respectively. Bell characterized both Cézanne and “the [Byzantine] masters of S. Vitale” as equally powerful artistic saviors after Impressionism marked a period of decline akin to “Graeco Roman realism.”

By juxtaposing Byzantium and Post-Impressionism to a Roman and Impressionistic decadence, the authors inverted the art historiographic denigration of Byzantine art in favor of Roman Classical idealism (as discussed in chapter 2). Though radical, such counter positioning of now-praised Byzantine work against Roman art was an easy conceptual leap. As Fry and Bell more often cited Italian Byzantine examples (see chapter 2), calls to Byzantium could easily fill the valorized position Italian, Roman Classical works previously occupied in art historical lineages. Yet, that such an inversion constituted the starting point for Fry’s and Bell’s contextualization and defense of Post-Impressionism ensured the novelty of Fry’s and Bell’s narratives of Modern art. Post-Impressionism as Byzantium’s legacy defined Fry’s and Bell’s stories of aesthetic Modernism as new and different, setting their aesthetic theories as intellectual models completely independent from and outside of the established, and Classically predominant art historical trajectory.

Fry and Bell’s citation of Byzantine art’s value and supremacy over art of the Classical past was also a rejection of official, authoritative taste as much as it was an art historical
statement. The art historical reverence for a Classical past rearticulated, through the equally revered styles of the Renaissance and Neoclassicism, political as well as artistic power. Roman, Renaissance, and therefore Neoclassical styles were the aesthetics of official Salon and official Academy culture. To denigrate Roman Classicism in favor of previously maligned Byzantine art should be viewed as a political, anti-authoritarian and anti-establishment gesture as much as it enabled Fry and Bell to promote the innovativeness of their art historical lineage. Such an interpretation is not out of character for Fry’s and Bell’s political inclinations overall. Ironically, for a group that, as discussed in the Introductory chapter, has come down through history as emblematic of the upper-class elite, Fry and Bell’s direct politicized engagements often took the form of class-related ire. For example, in a 1926 lecture to female students at Cambridge, “Cultural Philistinism and Snobism,” Fry called snobbism an “insidious and dangerous ally” to “spiritual values” because “its real reason for maintaining spiritual values is that they are for it symbolic of social values and not really of value in and for themselves.”64 With a call to Byzantine precedent, Fry and Bell dismissed the authoritarian structures of taste that pigeon-holed cultural production, and subsequently defined Post-Impressionism as an art form of resistance, and therefore symbolic of a progressive, anti-hierarchical modernity.

Beyond explaining Post-Impressionist art and symbolizing the progressiveness of their new, expanded narrative of art history, Fry and Bell’s definition of Byzantine art as a “primitive” art form helped validate artistic sources previously excluded from the Western artistic canon. Fry and Bell advocated for non-Western and “primitive” art in texts on African, Bushmen, South American, and children’s art, as well as in Modern art writings that argued that Modern artists should emulate “primitive” art’s forms and compositional methods.65 Bell in his 1914 Art claimed that as “a rule primitive art is good” because “it is...free from descriptive qualities,” and
possesses “only significant form.”66 In his 1910 “The Grafton Gallery—I,” originally published in *The Nation*, Fry identified a turn to “primitive” art as the antidote to the ills of Modern painting, and noted that Modern art must, of necessity, “if art is to regain its power to express emotional ideas,” “willfully return to primitive” art.67 In a 1927 lecture on Modern art, delivered at the University College, Bangor, Fry described Henri Matisse’s practice as a “desire to recapture a primitive eloquence and persuasiveness of statement.”68

Fry and Bell’s celebration of so-called “primitive” art works was of a piece with the interests of their time. Art historical Primitivism, the appropriation of non-Western forms for European artistic inspiration, was critical to the development of a Modern art aesthetic. At the height of Fry and Bell’s critical influence, Modern European artists turned to non-Western or “primitive” art not only as examples of radical, non-naturalistic forms, but also as works emblematic of an aesthetic purity, authentic acts of creation freed from the stifling cultural apparatus of academic art and civilized society’s restrictive social mores. Artists such as Paul Gauguin, Henri Matisse, Max Pechstein, and Pablo Picasso, for instance, looked to sources outside of the Classical and European artistic canon as the antitheses of European Classical idealism, and attempted to live and be “primitive” through the creation of art that displayed fractured planes, crude brushstrokes, and non-naturalistic spaces.69

Yet, what distinguished Fry and Bell’s advocacy for “primitive” art from that of their peers was the degree to which Fry and Bell’s status as prominent critics and tastemakers brought discussions of non-Western or “primitive” art works into mainstream intellectual discourse. By writing on non-Western or “primitive” art at the same time as the authors composed groundbreaking texts on Post-Impressionism and other Modern artists, Fry and Bell validated the aesthetic consideration of “primitive” works as on par with the European artists they
championed. Given that many future scholars who subsequently promoted and wrote on “primitive” and non-Western art, such as Alfred H. Barr, Jr., depended upon and adopted Fry and Bell’s valuation systems as cornerstones of their own writings, Fry and Bell’s contributions to the Modernist dialogue on “primitive” art and art historical Primitivism possessed a particular gravity.

Notably, Byzantine art was a prominent, often-cited “primitive” source in Fry’s and Bell’s works. In Art, Bell claimed Post-Impressionism shook hands “across the ages with the byzantine primitives,” described sixth-century Byzantine art as “primitive” that inspired “primitive developments amongst the Western barbarians,” and referred to the “Byzantine primitives” creating the mosaics at Ravenna. In a 1914 article “Persian Miniatures,” Bell described Byzantine art as having “primitive developments in the West.” In his 1911 “Post Impressionism,” Fry described “the Byzantines,” alongside Cimabue and the “French sculptors of the twelfth century” as the “real primitives.” In his 1927 text Cézanne: A study of his Development, Fry located the foundation of Paul Cézanne’s practice with Byzantine art as a “primitive” source, claiming that “Cézanne’s native attitude was essentially that of the [Byzantine] Primitives,” and defined Byzantine art as a “primitive approach to the subject” commensurate with Cézanne’s compositions.

Byzantine art was, however, unique among the “primitive” sources Fry and Bell discussed, a fact that allowed Fry and Bell to successfully advocate for non-Western art. As an art form that elided the two art historical connotations of “primitive” art, Byzantine art served a pedagogical function in Fry and Bell’s writings, its citation instructing and easing Fry and Bell’s readers into accepting and understanding less commonly known “primitive” art examples. In art historiography, “primitive” art initially designated earlier iterations of a more “mature” artistic
style (i.e., “Early Italian” art versus “Renaissance” art). Following the publication of Charles Darwin’s 1871 *The Descent of Man* and the popularization of his theory of human evolution, the art historical use of “primitive” shifted to connote instead the cultural productions of less advanced societies and peoples, often decidedly non-European in origin. Byzantine art bridged these two art historical associations with “primitive.” Historiographically, Byzantine art was both designated “primitive” in the sense of an early stylistic iteration; a comment on its pre-Renaissance, non-naturalistic figuration; and, at the same time, Byzantine art’s “Eastern” sites and inspirations (see chapter 2) defined Byzantine art as exotic and non-European, akin to the post-Darwinian associations between the term “primitive” and art. Straddling the line dividing familiar European artistic traditions from exotic non-Western works, Byzantine art therefore could function as a transitional art form in Fry and Bell’s defenses of non-Western art, its inclusion in writings discussing non-Western or “primitive” art helping readers to embrace, understand, and adapt to the seemingly new art Fry and Bell praised.

“Primitive” Byzantine art’s edificatory role is evidenced in Fry’s 1917 remarks on children’s drawings. Here, Fry identified a conceptual progression to develop the “kind of attitude that is necessary to an understanding” of “what children’s art amounts to.” This path he suggested as beginning with accepting and appreciating Gothic art, “then the painting of the primitives and the early miniaturists, then the Byzantines, then early Oriental art, and finally Aztec and Negro art.” In this hierarchy, Byzantine art represented a transitional mode between the purely European primitive models (the Gothic and early miniaturists) and non-Western forms (Oriental art). The more “complicated” primitive art—“Aztec,” “Negro,” and, finally, children’s art—was reserved for the end of Fry’s trajectory. Non-Western art sources, to Fry, were therefore incomprehensible unless one first accepted the value of other “primitive” art forms,
with embrace of the hybridity of exotic and familiar suggested by Byzantine sources denoting the intellectual capacity to move beyond European models to more challenging, foreign, “primitive” examples.

Beyond its pedagogical function in Fry and Bell’s writings on “primitive” art, Byzantine art, as one “primitive” art form among many in Fry and Bell’s writings, valorized non-Western art. What Fry and Bell identified as “primitive” shifted over the years. In Fry’s early writings, for example, he categorized “primitive” as the pre-Raphael, early Italian artists, and in his 1905 introduction to a new publication of Sir Joshua Reynolds’ eighteenth-century Discourses, Fry praised Reynolds for being ahead of his time by claiming he was “on the verge of making the discovery of primitive art,” coded as the early Italian and Northern Renaissance art of Hans Holbein, Mantegna, Hans Memling, and Pieter Bruegel. By 1910 or 1911, Fry’s definition of “primitive” expanded to include non-Western forms, referencing the Tahitian images of Gauguin, children’s art, as well as the “real primitives,” Cimabue, the Byzantines, and the “French sculptors of the twelfth century.” By 1917, Fry had amended his definition of “primitive” to refer to the psychological state characteristic of those periods labeled “primitive,” that enabled artists to produce works as statements of direct expression. Under this classification, Fry discussed children’s art, Northern Renaissance artists such as Jan Van Eyck, and the “modern negro” (and therefore his art) as “primitive.” In his 1920 Vision and Design, Fry described Bushman art and early Italian art as “primitive,” and described African art according to the post-Darwinian association with “primitive,” as derived from a less advanced civilization, despite not using the term “primitive” directly. In articles, Fry referred to Coptic, Byzantine, and Merovingian art, the works of Bramantino, fourteenth-century French sculptures, and Flemish and Belgian art, as “primitive,” among other examples. By the 1930s, in Fry’s Last
Lectures, the association “primitive” was linked to various works, such as a “negro mask” and a terra-cotta pig from New Guinea. Bell, in Art, identified “Sumerian sculptures,” “pre-dynastic Egyptian art,” “archaic Greek,” “Wei and T’ang masterpieces,” “early Japanese works” including “two wooden Bodhisattvas,” Bushmen art, “primitive Byzantine art of the sixth century,” and Central and South American art “before the coming of the white men” as “primitive” art forms. Bell’s list constituted an amalgam of styles, cultures, and time periods, all linked under the umbrella of “primitive art” defined as affective, without representation, and possessed of “sublimely impressive form.”

Fry and Bell’s blanket and mercurial use of the term “primitive” to describe objects from a variety of cultures and time periods manifested a false equivalency among these art works and cultures, and seemingly diluted the impact of any one promotion of a newly discovered “primitive” art. Some scholars have therefore cited Fry and Bell’s overuse of the designation as a weakness of Bloomsbury’s address of “primitive” art. However, seen through the lens of Byzantium, Fry’s and Bell’s varied applications of the label “primitive” made the most denigrated, less well-known of Fry’s and Bell’s citations of “primitive” art integral, prominent art forms within the authors’ schemas of Modern art. If Fry and Bell’s overarching label of “primitive” equated Byzantine art with African, South American, children’s art, and Early Italian art, among others, it subsequently attributed to all of Byzantine art’s “primitive” peers the importance, prestige, and veneration accorded to Byzantine art itself by Fry and Bell. As a consequence, Byzantine art as a “primitive” art enabled the insertion of non-Western art as a similarly valorized aesthetic example in Fry’s and Bell’s narrative of Modernism.

In addition, the collective importance Fry and Bell bestowed on non-Western and other “primitive” arts by association with “primitive” Byzantine work ensured the participation of non-
Western art in Fry’s and Bell’s writing of European Modernism. Byzantine art, as a positive or negative artistic period, remained a part of the Western art historical dialogue. In contrast, the non-Western sources Fry and Bell discussed typically remained outside of the purview of European-centric art historiography. By identifying their much-praised and idealized Byzantine art as one among many “primitive” inspirational sources for Modern artists, Fry and Bell gave the less well-known non-Western art works a seat at the art historical table, so to speak, ensuring that previously silent non-Western works could now be subject to discussion and praise.

Byzantine art defined as “primitive” therefore functioned as an important strategic tool Fry and Bell used to assert the progressiveness of their narrative of Modern art. Whether as a teaching strategy, the citation of Byzantine art a transitional strategy to familiarize readers with non-Western or new “primitive” examples, or as a signifier of aesthetic value, collectively elevating Fry and Bell’s other “primitive” works to Byzantine art’s degree of importance, “primitive” Byzantine art set the positive, laudatory tone of Fry and Bell’s embrace of non-European or non-traditional art forms.

Ultimately, however, Byzantine art’s most prominent function in Fry’s and Bell’s writings was as a decontextualized, shorthand signifier of artistic quality. Fry’s and Bell’s uses of Byzantium evolved such that even a tangential, historically inaccurate, or unexplored Byzantine link became sufficient proof of an art work’s value. Fry, in a 1908 article, signaled selective praise for certain English illuminated manuscripts by noting which ones he determined were influenced by Byzantine examples—even if the historical connection couldn’t be proved. He stated:

We are evidently here, in tenth-century England, far from anything like barbaric ignorance. One must suppose, to account for such an advanced and perfect style. . .that its civilizing influence was helped by the existence of Byzantine manuscripts. The English copies of the Utrecht Psalter and the Anglo-Saxon copy of a Byzantine miniature seen in
but from whatever sources they derived their art [italics mine], these Anglo-Saxon draughtsman developed a very characteristic style, in which the regular and symmetrical lines of Byzantine design are rendered with a peculiar angular and staccato touch.\(^{88}\)

In his 1910 review of Islamic art in Munich, Fry’s description of Islamic art occurred primarily through notations of which aspects Islamic artists took from Byzantine craftsmen, and Fry used connections he drew between Islamic and Byzantine art as proof of Islamic art’s skill and value. Fry claimed there was a “constant exchange with Byzantium” in “early Mohammedan styles,” with the “Mohammedan craftsmen” learning the technique of cloisonné from Byzantine artisans.\(^{89}\) In a 1912 discussion of Early Venetian paintings, Fry’s understanding of the works came from Byzantine connections, with the “extremely rare in Italian art of the period,” “spontaneity” and “vivacity” of Venetian art considered a development, a loosening of their “Byzantine formula.”\(^{90}\) In describing one of the Venetian pictures, Fry, in lieu of a concrete formal analysis, simply noted which aspects of the painting were reminiscent of or derived from Byzantine models: “The other, which has a pointed top, is still further from showing his masterly qualities, and must be by some artist educated in the expiring Byzantine tradition, for it has the sharply hatched high lights on draperies and features which was characteristic of the latest Byzantine manner.”\(^{91}\) In his 1920 “Modern Paintings in a Collection of Ancient Art,” Fry praised the taste of a collector specifically because he “had begun to amass Byzantine enamels and Coptic textiles,” and who “had the sense to put modern French artists beside…Byzantine miniatures and to feel how illuminating to both the confrontation was.”\(^{92}\) In his 1932 review of Georges Duthuit’s *La Sculpture copte*, Fry defended Coptic art against the historical charge that the “Coptic artist appeared to be nothing but childish incompetence and barbarous crudity” by noting a Coptic connection to Byzantine art.\(^{93}\) He claimed that “nearly all the designs can be matched in Byzantine examples” and most likely “Coptic workmen were employed in the great...
Byzantine constructions in various parts of the Empire.”94 The superiority of Byzantine art in
general—and therefore the implication that a connection to Byzantine art inherently suggested a
positive value for Coptic art—was underscored when Fry noted that the employment of Coptic
workers for Byzantine constructions “would appear to be more probable than that Byzantine
craftsmen should have been called in for the relatively unimportant buildings of Coptic Egypt.”95

Bell made similar connections, and he praised work relative to his claims of Byzantine
influence. In his 1932 Account of French Painting, Bell lauded the mural paintings at Saint-
Savin and Montmorillon as a “noble manifestation of a new spirit expressing itself through the
Byzantine tradition,” despite a disconnect between the paintings’ location and the geographic
reach of the Byzantine Empire.96 In his 1947 introductory essay to Twelfth Century Paintings at
Hardham and Clayton, Bell created a (theoretical) historical proof to validate connecting
Byzantine art to the historically independent twelfth-century British paintings. Bell claimed that
Byzantine art was of course a predominant influence on British mural painting because
“Byzantine influence in the twelfth century, it seems to me, was pretty much what French
influence was in the nineteenth and early twentieth: it was inescapable.”97 Bell justified his
praise for the paintings due to what he perceived to be their relationship to Byzantine art by, in a
footnote, claiming that “Mr. Whittemore [Byzantine scholar, founder of the Byzantine institute
of America, sponsored restoration of Chora Monastery in Istanbul and preservation of Hagia
Sophia mosaics] has shown that the masters who set the mosaics in Sta. Sophia adopted similar
methods” as did the twelfth-century painters, who draw on the plaster the design idea and then
deviated from it in final execution.98

The lack of work-specificity accorded the Byzantine art Fry and Bell praised, as
discussed in chapter 2, eventually assumed its logical end course almost as a self-quotation in
Fry’s and Bell’s criticism. There was no need for Fry and Bell to define which Byzantine art, or from where. After Fry and Bell had established the value of Byzantium in their myriad writings, a statement of an art work’s connection to “Byzantine art,” generally, became an understood synonym for quality. Calls to Byzantine art began to take on almost mythic proportions or importance in Fry’s and Bell’s writings. In his 1927 lecture on the development of Modern art at the University College of Bangor, Fry ascribed excellence to a “Mohammedan Plate” simply by its supposed proximity to a Byzantine style. Fry stated: “this early Mohammedan plate in a style which is clearly akin to Byzantine and see how nearly allied it is in the directness, the brevity of its evocation of life!”

In an article discussing Persian miniatures, Bell set the stage to discuss Persian miniatures by playing “six-degrees-of-Byzantium”: Persian miniatures were different from the “recognized Mongol type” that was derived from a decorative tradition of Byzantine art, but the Persians were knowledgeable of “the work of Cimabue, Giotto and Duccio,” who were influenced by Byzantine art even if the Persian artists knew “very little of Byzantine art” directly. Byzantine art became a marker of good artistic production in Fry and Bell’s writings, even against works that were chronologically and culturally far removed from what we think of today as the Byzantine artistic tradition.

In conclusion, whether as a critical reference point to explain Post-Impressionist and non-Western art, a mode through which Fry and Bell could easily stake their territory against the establishment art historical narratives, or ultimately as a generic signifier of “quality” art, Bloomsbury’s Byzantium made Fry’s and Bell’s writings on art work as progressive defenders of aesthetic modernity. To effectively support Modern art, Fry’s and Bell’s analogies between Byzantine and Modern form necessitated that the authors couch such descriptions in broader projects of Modern art advocacy. For instance, the valorizing connection between Cézanne’s
paintings and Byzantine mosaic was only possible if Byzantine art was accorded a degree of authority and power in Fry and Bell’s writings, such that the visual connection between past and present could serve a meaningful purpose. Byzantine art’s symbolic role as placeholder for an anti-Classical, progressive, and new historical lineage for Modern art, provided such weight.

Similarly, Byzantine art enabled the degree to which Fry and Bell’s support for non-Western and “primitive” art shaped the dialogues of Western Modernism by virtue of Byzantine art’s status as representative of the peak of aesthetic value in Fry’s and Bell’s writings. The complete decontextualization of Fry and Bell’s Byzantium, their use of “Byzantine” as a descriptive adjective for art works synonymous with artistic quality, merely exemplified the primary function of Byzantine art in Fry and Bell’s writings as carrier of value, rather than actual, historically specific object. What this suggests, ultimately, is that for Fry and Bell, Byzantium was essential to their narrative of aesthetic Modernism, but it was a Byzantium defined retroactively by the uses to which the designation was put. Byzantium could only work as a supportive and validating comparison for Modern and non-Western art if Byzantium was defined as valuable, and praiseworthy. In a circular logic, for Fry and Bell, Byzantine art both defined their art writings, and was defined by them.

1. According to Fry’s daughter, Pamela Diamand, it was Fry’s 1911 trip to Constantinople and his and the Bells’ encounters with Turkish Byzantine mosaics that enabled their further embrace and deeper understanding of Post-Impressionist art, with Bloomsbury’s understanding of both Byzantine and Modern art forever intertwined. Pamela Diamand, “Recollections of Roger Fry and the Omega Workshops,” 1970s, REF13/22, Roger Elliot Fry Papers, King’s College Archive Centre, Cambridge, UK (hereafter, Fry Papers).

3. Indeed, the catalogue for the 2009 Courtauld Gallery Omega exhibition links the mosaic-like technique adopted by Bloomsbury artists to the direct influence of mosaic works and also to the block-like patches of paint application favored by Cézanne. Alexandra Gerstein, ed., *Beyond Bloomsbury: Designs of the Omega Workshops, 1913–1919* (London: Fontanka, 2009), 90.


5. As Byzantinist Jennifer Ball points out, Byzantine mosaicists created their works by modulating the color of each individual tesserae. Ball notes that the Bloomsbury alignment of Post-Impressionist, unmodulated rectilinear forms with Byzantine mosaic practice demonstrates, perhaps, a lack of complete understanding regarding how these mosaics were actually made.

6. Gauguin described this technique as “Cloisonnism,” referring to the ancient metalworking technique of inserting precious stones into tiny *cloisons*, or compartments.


11. Ibid., 15. The Orthodox Baptistery at Ravenna, the Chapel of Galla Placidia at Ravenna, and the Church of San Vitale in Ravenna filled Meier-Graefe with an “absolutely divine emotion that thrills the quiet tourist,” the viewer left without “words in our copious art-dictionaries” to describe the experience. Meier-Graefe also mentioned Sant’ Apollinaire in Classe, Torcello, and San Donato in Murano as examples of Byzantine mosaics. Ibid., 19–20, 30. Meier-Graefe’s interest in Byzantium and Byzantine mosaics continued throughout his career. In 1927 he published *Pyramide und Tempel: Notizen während einer Reise nach Ägypten, Palästina, Griechenland, und Stambul* (published in English as *Pyramid and Temple* in 1930), that indicates his interest in and knowledge of Byzantine sites in Greece and Turkey, as well as in Italy. Further discussion of Fry and Bell’s support for Byzantine art as a “primitive” art form can be found later in chapter 3.


13. Ibid., 272.


15. Ibid., 17–18.


20. Ibid.


25. Denis’s turn to Byzantium was not out of place with general Symbolist interests. Morowitz describes a 1894 article by Paul Radiot, entitled “Nôtre byzantisme,” in the Symbolist journal *La Revue Blanche*, in which Radiot distinguished the Symbolist call to Byzantium as the antithesis of the decadence and superficiality of other artistic groups’ modern-day Byzantine aesthetic. Ibid., 48–49. J. B. Bullen notes that Denis’s 1896 “Notes sur la peinture religiuse” addressed “how Byzantine art had transcended the trompe l’oeil effects of late classical art” and manifested an aesthetic approach that could best “express the dogmas of Christianity.” In Bullen’s assessment, Denis claimed that Byzantine artists created “modes of expressing sacred history which they communicated to Cimabue, Giotto, Raphael, and Ingres” and also “imprinted” “Byzantine symbolist ideas” on the Modern art of Cézanne and Gauguin. J. B. Bullen, *Continental Crosscurrents: British Criticism and European Art, 1810–1910* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005), 227–28.


27. The Symbolist community was directly involved in the public dialogue regarding the Dreyfus Affair, with Symbolist writer Émile Zola publishing an open letter “J’Accuse…!” in the publication *L’Aurore* in 1898.


29. The connection between anti-Dreyfusard views and anti-Semitism was endemic to some later, post-Nabi Symbolist engagement with a Byzantine or Medieval past. Mark Antliff
notes that the art writings and intellectual circles of right-wing French political theorist and anti-Semitic Georges Sorel were key to linking Gothic art and Modernist French Medievalism with a spiritual, religious revival, specifically a neo-Catholic revival, that used as its aesthetic antithesis the figure of the Jew. Denis supported Sorel’s ideas, as well as the right-wing neo-Catholic, anti-Semitic Medievalism that accompanied Sorel and his fellow thinkers. In particular, Denis was attracted to Sorel’s condemnation of the Symbolist artists in the pro-Dreyfusard *La Revue Blanche*, a publication that Sorel classified, in Antliff’s paraphrasing, as “nothing short of a cabal of anarcho-individualists and their Jewish patrons” who “served the Jewish desire to merge classes under the umbrella of an homogenizing ideology, devoid of class consciousness and productivist vitality” embodied by and in the Dreyfus affair. Ibid., 54-58.


31. Ibid.

32. Denis decried “Classicism” as agnosticism in painting, an aesthetic approach that privileged fidelity to nature and accurate pictorial representation, and a mode that had its equivalent in looking to the Classical architectural past as emulation. Denis counterbalanced this notion to the more symbolic mode, in which deformation from naturalistic representation presented a more authentic, and more nuanced reaction to the world embodied by the art of Cézanne, and with its art historical corollary in a preference for Gothic art and architecture. Denis, September 9, 1915, *Journal*, 2:181–83.

33. In a *Burlington Magazine* review of Ambroise Vollard’s book on Paul Cézanne, Fry described Cézanne’s friendship with Émile Zola, who wrote an open letter, “J’Accuse…!,” in support of Dreyfus in the publication *L’Aurore* in 1898, as one of the “tragi-comedies of Cézanne’s life,” that led to an eventual estrangement. According to Fry, “Cézanne could not tolerate Zola’s gradual acquiescence in worldly ideals and ways of life, and when the Drefusard question came up not only did his natural reactionary bias make him a vehement anti-Dreyfusard but he had no comprehension whatever of the heroism of Zola’s actions.” In describing Zola’s “J’Accuse…!” as “heroism,” Fry made his allegiance known to be on the pro-Dreyfusard side, and therefore against Denis’s views. Fry, “Paul Cézanne” (1917), in Roger Fry, *Vision and Design*, ed. J. B. Bullen (London: Chatto and Windus, 1920; repr., New York: Dover Publications, 1998), 183.

34. Bloomsbury’s social connections with the Russian avant-garde also provided a natural link between Byzantium and Modern work. Fry and Bell viewed the Russian avant-garde artists as direct descendants of Byzantium. Fry, for instance, had a personal relationship with the Russian mosaist Boris Anrep. Anrep later executed mosaic commissions for houses of worship, such as the neo-Byzantine Westminster Cathedral, and the National Gallery. These works included *Awakening of the Muses* (1933), *The Labours of Life* and *The Pleasures of Life* (1928–1933), and *The Modern Virtues* (1952). In his *Burlington Magazine* article “Modern Mosaic and Mr. Boris Anrep” (1923), Fry supported Anrep as, in a sense, a Modern Byzantine. Fry implied
that Anrep possessed an innate Byzantine sensibility and predilection for mosaic decoration and, further, that he was an artist who “recovered a more or less abandoned technique” and “used it with the freedom and care which usually results only form inherited tradition.” What made Anrep’s contribution so extraordinary to Fry was that Anrep’s “triumph” was to treat modern subjects in mosaic with “exactly the same sense of the monumental and resistant qualities of the medium as the Byzantine mosaics displayed.” Roger Fry, ”Modern Mosaic and Mr. Boris Anrep,” Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs 42, no. 243 (June 1923): 272–73, 276–78. Taken in conjunction with a Anrep’s contribution to the catalogue of the 1912 Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition, which directly made the link between “Russian spiritual culture” and a “Byzantine culture,” and Fry’s 1921 New Statesmen article, which stated that works of Russian avant-garde artists “L Goncharova” (Natalia Goncharova) and Mikhail Larionov were not “so very remote from the mosaic-workers and enamellers of Byzantium,” it is a reasonable conclusion that Bloomsbury’s exposure to the Russian avant-garde fostered Fry and Bell’s association between Byzantium and Modern art. Anrep, quoted in Reed, Bloomsbury Rooms, 100; Roger Fry, “The Russians at Whitechapel,” New Statesman 17, no. 431 (July 16, 1921): 415, ProQuest (1306849046). It should be noted, however, that while Anrep was an important source for Fry regarding the potential for mosaics to become a Modern art form, Anrep’s mosaic designs, particularly for the National Gallery, could be seen as visually “traditional.” In lieu of experimentations with abstraction or non-naturalistic perspective or fractured planes, Anrep’s mosaic work at the National Gallery (and at Westminster) were allegorical and narrative scenes, made with clearly identifiable figures and, at the National Gallery, referencing Greek mythology. In other words, it could be said that Anrep was a “Modern mosaicist” quite literally—as in, a mosaicist working in the Modern era—rather than a “Modern mosaicist” in the sense of an avant-garde or formally progressive artist who chose mosaic as his medium.


40. Explaining the degree of confusion and heated negativity in response to the 1910 exhibition, Frances Spalding ascribes the intensity of reactions to the fact that in challenging established aesthetic taste, Fry similarly challenged social mores. “At a time when formality in
dress and behavior sustained a man’s or woman’s position in life, the informality of these paintings looked shockingly subversive, their lack of finish impolite. In their expressive vigour, they hit an English audience like a rude unwelcome shock.” Frances Spalding, Vanessa Bell (London: George Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1979), 91. Christopher Reed points out that much of the uproar surrounding the two Post-Impressionist exhibitions involved nationalistic motivations, with xenophobic critics attacking the French and German Post-Impressionist artists as invaders trampling on fine British taste. Reed, “Refining and Defining,” 118.

41. Writing to Goldsworthy Lowes (“G. L.”) Dickinson in 1910, just prior to the opening of Manet and the Post-Impressionists, Fry acknowledged bracing himself for a “huge campaign of outraged British Philistinism.” Letters of Roger Fry, ed. Denys Sutton (London: Chatto and Windus, 1972), 1:337. Fry subsequently wrote to his father, Sir Edward Fry, that he had “been the centre of a wild hurricane of newspaper abuse.” Letters of Roger Fry, 1:33. In the 1920s, reflecting back on the furor surrounding his display of Modern art to the British public in a Cambridge lecture on Modern art, Fry described the situation as “the artists were roundly accused of sexual perversion and moral depravity: This of course was only the Englishman’s way of saying that he disliked the pictures.” Fry, “Modern Art,” Lecture I, Cambridge University, delivered between 1920-1929, REF1/92, Fry Papers.

42. Roger Fry, “Post Impressionism” (1911), in A Roger Fry Reader, 99.

43. Ibid., 99, 101.

44. Roger Fry, “The Post-Impressionists” (1910), in A Roger Fry Reader, 82.

45. Ibid., 84.


48. Reed notes that recourse to historical precedent was a hallmark of Bloomsbury political and literary criticism as well as art writings. Reed, “Refining and Defining,” 117. Christopher Green also makes this point. Christopher Green, “Expanding the Canon: Roger Fry’s Evaluations of the ‘Civilized’ and the ‘Savage,’” in Art Made Modern, 125.

49. Fry, “Post Impressionism,” 102. Further discussion of Fry and Bell’s reference to “primitive” art can be found starting on page 99.


51. This text later became part of Bell’s 1913 Art, nearly verbatim. Clive Bell, “Post-Impressionism and Aesthetics,” Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs 22, no. 118 (January 1913): 229.
52. Interestingly enough, Fry’s use of Byzantine art as a familiarizing model to support Post-Impressionism was a similar line of argument mounted by critics who wished to denigrate Post-Impressionism. Robert Ross, in his Morning Post review of Manet and the Post-Impressionists, critiqued Gauguin by claiming he was “Byzantinism vindicated.” Robert Ross, “The Post-Impressionists at the Grafton: The Twilight of the Idols” (1910), in Post-Impressionists in England, 103. This approach that was equally used by Sir William Blake Richmond, who wrote in the Morning Post that the Post-Impressionists, “incompetents” who could not “draw, paint, or design,” were akin to that of the Byzantine masters “at its worst,” that “bears a kind of reminiscence of greater things.” Richmond, however, conceded that he wouldn’t even give the Post-Impressionist work the dignity of such an analogy with Byzantine art, preferring instead an analogous relationship between the French Moderns and “the criminal lunatic asylum at Broadmoor.” Sir William Blake Richmond, “Post-Impressionists” (1910), in Post-Impressionists in England, 116.


54. Ibid., 76.


57. Fry, “Last Phase of Impressionism,” 73. Earlier in his career, when Fry’s knowledge of Byzantine art was in nascent form, Fry equated the art of Giotto with the beginning of the Modern movement in art, in contrast to Roman decadence. However, he cited Giotto as the end of a process that began with and through Byzantine art, in which Byzantine art, under the restrictions and requirements of a Christian art form, began to adopt the fully Modern sensibilities Fry identifies in Giotto’s work, namely “the process of going from a naturalistic to an abstract and symbolic art, a gradual undoing of those processes through which Greek art had once passed and which were again to be repeated by Modern art.” Roger Fry, “Lecture I: ‘Transition from Classical to Modern Art,’” Cambridge University Extension Lecture Series on Florentine Painting, 1894–1910, REF1/65/1, Fry Papers.


62. Ibid., 40, 132.

63. Similar to Fry’s and Bell’s embrace of the Italo-Byzantine over the Italo-Roman and Italo-Renaissance privileging of art history, in which the choice to focus on Byzantine art represented a rebellious decision but still one remaining within the dominant historiographic paradigm of artistic progression critically located in ancient or archaic Italy, Dimitra Kotoula points out that late nineteenth-century interest in Greek Byzantine art served as a counterpoint to the Victorian era interest in Classical Greek art. Dimitra Kotoula, “Arts and Crafts and the ‘Byzantine’: The Greek Connection,” in *Byzantium/Modernism*, 82. In both instances, the decision to adopt Byzantine art—whether Italian or Greek Byzantine examples—was one made in conjunction with the art historical value system that privileged either Italian or Greek Classical artistic modes. By focusing on Byzantine art, Fry, Bell, and their Arts and Crafts predecessors made claims for originality that did not carry the burden of breaking from a familiar art historical paradigm.

64. Roger Fry, “Cultural Philistinism and Snobbism,” ca. 1926, REF1/152, Fry Papers.

65. Roger Fry, “Children’s Drawings” (1917), in *A Roger Fry Reader*, 266–70; Roger Fry, “The Art of the Bushmen” (1910), in *Vision and Design*, 60-73; Roger Fry, “Negro Sculpture” (1920), in *Vision and Design*, 70-73. Bloomsbury scholars, such as Christopher Reed and Christopher Green, have emphasized Bloomsbury’s key role in disseminating ideas of the “primitive.” See, for example, Christopher Reed, “Art and Its Institutions: Exhibition and Education” in *A Roger Fry Reader*, 243; Green, “Expanding the Canon,” in *A Roger Fry Reader*, 125–26; and Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms*. Other authors, including Rachel Teukolsky and Marianna Torgovnick, have equally criticized Fry and Bell for reverting to patronizing tropes and colonialist traps when addressing non-Western art objects. Rachel Teukolsky, *The Literate Eye*, PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2004, 272–74; Marianna Torgovnick, “Making Primitive Art High Art,” *Poetics Today* 10, no. 2 (Summer 1989): 299–328, 304–8, 312–13.


68. Fry, “The Development of Modern Art.”

70. Bell, *Art*, 25, 38, 94.


74. Rhodes, *Primitivism and Modern Art*, 14–15, 21–23. It is important to note that this chapter refers both to works Fry and Bell directly identified as “primitive” and non-Western works that Fry coded as the post-Darwinian art historical “primitive” in everything but name, identifying non-Western works as from inferior or undeveloped civilizations.

75. Ibid., 21.

76. Fry, “Children’s Drawings,” 266.

77. Ibid. In an article on “Negro Sculpture” in *Since Cézanne*, Bell adopted a similar strategy, noting that he judged African sculpture in comparison to the “art of the supreme Chinese periods (from Han to Sung), with archaic Greek, with Byzantine, with Mahomedan . . . with Romanesque and early Italian” art. Bell, *Since Cézanne*, 114.

78. In terms of the relationship between Bloomsbury and non-Western art, it is important to note that Bloomsbury had a close connection to Asian art from Japan and China, and Vanessa and Clive Bell’s son Julian worked in China as an educator. However, unless otherwise noted in Fry and Bell’s writings, artefacts from China and Japan were not considered “primitive,” just “other” to Western models. The distinction to be made is between Japonisme and Chinoiserie, and Primitivism. Japonisme and Chinoiserie identify, to a certain degree, a Western exploration of Asian art forms as equals. Japanese and Chinese art had art historical valuation systems akin to the Western models, with detailed histories of artistic production, and a master-apprentice system of artistic instruction that was familiar to Western scholars. Japanese and Chinese art had a type of documented history recognizable to Western eyes, and so when the West engaged with either non-Western art form from Asia, it was with respect, and within an unfamiliar yet familiar system of knowledge. Art historical Primitivism, in contrast, by and large arises from the perception that the art works examined were history-less, that the creators were untrained, unskilled, and worked instinctively, and that the non-Western works were thus ripe to be appropriated by Western audiences who could then project a Western value system onto a supposedly blank canvas. Therefore, with this distinction in mind, unless Fry or Bell specifically referred to particular eras of Chinese or Japanese art as a “primitive” artistic stage, their and their peers’ engagement with Asian art does not constitute a focus of this chapter.


86. Ibid.

87. Jacqueline Falkenheim cites Fry’s shifts in defining his terms as a weakness of Fry’s defense of both Post-Impressionist and “primitive” art. Falkenheim argues that by neither definitively nor narrowly determining what is “Post-Impressionist” art and what is “primitive” art—the terms variously understood and applied to multiple, distinct categories of art—Fry undermined the strength of his aesthetic models, leaving his theoretical paradigm without a solid or supportive foundation and failing to adequately praise the works he designated either “primitive” or “Post-Impressionist.” Jacqueline Victoria Falkenheim, “Roger Fry and the Beginnings of Formalist Art Criticism,” PhD diss., Yale University, 1972, 47.


91. Ibid.


94. Ibid.

95. Ibid.


97. Ibid., 15.

98. Ibid., 16n1.


100. Bell, “Persian Miniatures,” 112.
Chapter Four: Bloomsbury’s Byzantium in Art

Beyond its critical role in Bloomsbury writings, Byzantium provided a unifying aesthetic model through which Bloomsbury artists Fry, Vanessa Bell, and Duncan Grant, and the Omega artists could develop the techniques they admired in Post-Impressionist, Cubist, and Fauvist art. As detailed in the introduction, Bloomsbury art has been marginalized in critical literature, and Bloomsbury artistic contributions have been dismissed in part due to innovations primarily occurring in what many critics considered to be the feminized realm of domestic design.¹ Yet, examination of Byzantium’s role in Bloomsbury art helps to counter critical dismissals of Bloomsbury art. For example, Byzantine mosaics as Bloomsbury and Omega inspiration seemingly made Post-Impressionist and Cubist fractured planes concrete and three-dimensional.² Byzantine mosaic therefore provided a tangible example of the extension of a Modern aesthetic from canvas to lived space. As a consequence, in emulating Byzantine mosaic in their oil paintings and decorative art objects, Bloomsbury and Omega artists aligned their ideology with the concerns of better-respected European avant-garde projects that aspired to dissolve the boundaries between “high” art and the lived environment, such as Sonia Delaunay’s “simultaneity” expressed through clothing, furniture design, and painting, or the Bauhaus ethos. Whether through the creation of objects and décor at Charleston and in the Omega Workshops that evoked a Byzantine church, the suggestion of Byzantine mosaic light effects in Omega lampstands, or the use of Byzantine mosaic as a visual language to process Paul Cézanne’s innovations, this chapter argues that Byzantium set the path for Bloomsbury’s innovative artistic examples.
This chapter’s discussion of Bloomsbury’s Byzantium in art identifies sources of Byzantine inspiration in Bloomsbury and Omega work. In so doing, this chapter directs attention less to the significance of representing Byzantium through Bloomsbury art, which has previously been explored by Christopher Reed in *Bloomsbury Rooms*, and more to the processes by and through which Byzantine art and architecture established a groundwork for Bloomsbury artistic productions. The link between Bloomsbury and Omega products and Byzantine inspiration was noted in Fry and Bell’s time. Yet, even with the acknowledgement of a visual connection, many of Bloomsbury’s artistic evocations of Byzantium have gone unnoticed, or remained hidden in plain sight. In one instance, a tray cloth designed in 1918 by Fry to benefit the Friends War Victims Relief Committee, and made by Belgian refugees in France (Fig. 4.1) was specifically created to mimic the floor tile in front of the Basilica di San Marco in Venice. Fry transformed San Marco’s tile and pavement design into an abstract, geometric embroidered textile of blue, purple, orange, and yellow tones, banded together by an alternating two-layered cubic border of purple and blue squares. Painted rectilinear borders were, as in Fry’s 1911 painting *Still Life Jug and Eggs* (Fig. 4.2), one of the many ways Fry incorporated Byzantine mosaic tiles into his work. Yet, while the 2009 Courtauld Gallery Omega exhibition catalogue notes the connection between the tiled frame of Fry’s painted work and the tiled frame found on Fry’s 1918 Tray Cloth, the catalogue neglects to state the common influence of Byzantine mosaic. This chapter directs attention to both the overt and the less-apparent iterations of Byzantine inspiration in Bloomsbury and Omega art and design.

Certain iconic images from Byzantine art were touchstone works, that Bloomsbury artists referenced and depicted time and again. In particular, the Empress Theodora in a San Vitale mosaic panel (547) (Fig. 4.3) was an integral model for Bloomsbury artists, and Reed notes that
the Theodora mosaic was “something of a paradigm in Bloomsbury’s vision of a Byzantine-inflected modernism.”6 Both Vanessa Bell and Grant executed portraits directly copying the dress and accessories of Empress Theodora in Vanessa Bell’s *Byzantine Lady* (1912) (Fig. 4.4) and Grant’s *The Countess* (1912) (Fig. 4.5). Grant also used the iconography of the Theodora mosaic at Charleston. In 1968, a few years after Vanessa’s 1961 death, Grant painted a memorial tribute to her above her bath. Grant’s tribute panel included a central, burnt-orange rectangle containing a goblet-like fountain from which flowed two stylized archways of water (Fig. 4.6). Grant’s 1968 fountain replicated the fountain depicted in the San Vitale Theodora mosaic (Fig. 4.7), suggesting the vital role of Byzantine art as an inspiration and biographical marker in Bloomsbury lives (as detailed in the Introduction). In the San Vitale Theodora scene, an attendant pushes aside a curtain to reveal the fountain, and a dark abyss beyond. Irina Andreescu-Treadgold and Warren Treadgold in “Procopius and the Imperial Panels of S. Vitale,” cite Sabine MacCormack’s identification of the fountain as a testament to life, juxtaposed with impending death and Heavenly unknowns beyond the dark doorway. The Treadgolds’ and MacCormack’s opinions align with my interpretation of Grant’s version.7 As a tribute to Vanessa, Grant’s panel referenced the fountain as a transitional marker. Just as in San Vitale the Theodora fountain separated Theodora and her attendants from the dark beyond, in Grant’s tribute panel, his fountain symbolically paralleled the boundary between life and the otherworldly realm that divided himself from Vanessa. Grant used the Theodora mosaic fountain as a shorthand signifier for both Vanessa Bell and Grant’s artistic as well as personal history.

Beyond Byzantine iconography, Byzantine architectural forms circumscribed Bloomsbury artistic work, most strikingly with Duncan Grant’s 1913 Omega signboard (Fig. 4.8). This signboard, an oil on panel, was actually a replacement for a previous signboard panel
with designs by Vanessa Bell and Grant. The original Omega signboard’s design has been erased by weather damage, but it contained a central figure flanked on either side by panels of dancing couples. According to Reed, critics condemned the original signboard’s central figure by describing him as an “emaciated Byzantine youth.” Grant’s replacement signboard, on the other hand, was, according to the Courtauld Gallery’s 2009 Omega exhibition, “difficult to decipher for those not already in the know.” However, close inspection of Grant’s signboard suggests that, more so than the “emaciated Byzantine youth” identified in the original signboard design, Grant’s replacement Omega board demonstrated a stronger Byzantine inspiration.

At first glance, the signboard reads as if an abstracted play on traditional shopkeeper’s signs. A large Omega symbol (the last letter in the Greek alphabet (Ω) and also, when presented together with the first letter of the Greek alphabet, Alpha (Α), a Christian symbol signifying both the Divine and Christ) illustrates the workshop’s name and dominates the first, upper half of the painting. Grant created the semi-circular portion of the Omega symbol as a thick, nested band of burnt-red, orange, pink, white, and yellow lines, with the horizontal end-pieces composed of a thick band of burnt-orange, burnt-red, and pink lines. A light brown and red linear border surrounds the Omega symbol, set against the background of greenish-blue, red, and yellowed diagonal lines overlaid with burnt-orange and burnt-red squiggles. Pins or thumbtacks form an eye-less smiling face in the center of the Omega, with hair-like rays extending from the top of the face outside the border of the symbol.

Beyond simply abstracting the Omega letter, however, the circular portion of Grant’s Omega symbol and its neck, leading to the horizontal bands, supports an analogy with centrally planned architectural modes, an orientation predominant in Byzantine churches. The plan for the Byzantine San Vitale, for example, has a horizontal narthex, leading to an octagonal, central-
planned structure, with two radiating chapels at its ends (Fig. 4.9). San Vitale’s geometric structure is akin to the geometry of Grant’s Omega symbol, with the signboard’s radiating nails or thumbtacks surrogates for a centrally planned church’s radiating chapels. Viewed as an architectural analogy, and perhaps one with Ravenna’s San Vitale as a model, the neck of the Omega symbol directs the viewer into the center of the centrally planned space, while the semi-circular “smile” denotes the progression from the aisles into the central area of worship containing the altar.

Interpreting the top portion of Grant’s Omega signboard in light of a centrally planned architectural parallel explains the signboard’s bottom design as an homage to opus sectile. Opus sectile is a decorative strategy for architectural spaces dating back to ancient times, in which varying textures, shapes, and colors of marble or other materials were juxtaposed to make a visually arresting pattern. Opus sectile in situ is in many ways akin to both mosaic in stone, or “painting” with marble. Indeed, the shapes and different textures of the opus sectile materials are sometimes offset from a building’s walls or columns through a frame-like border. With thick black lines creating winding shapes breaking through the swirls of grey and orange squiggles, and enclosed and offset by borders of red circles and colored stripes, the bottom half of the Omega signboard represents a trompe l’oeil of architectural opus sectile, the curved lines marble veins juxtaposed against and supporting the Omega symbol. Such design choices are not unique to Byzantine church design; the floor of the second-century Roman Pantheon, for example, also utilizes differently textured and colored marble panels for design effect. However, while it is not a unique strategy to Byzantine churches, many Byzantine or Byzantine-inspired churches, including Venice’s San Marco and the more local, early twentieth-century British homage to Byzantine design, Westminster Church (Fig. 4.10), prominently displayed
examples of *opus sectile*, including sections of wall or column composed of differently colored and textured marble, or marble with veining dramatically distinct from the rest of the wall or column.¹³ Taken in conjunction with the architectural references hinted at by Grant’s Omega symbol, the *tromp l’oeil* marbling panel at the bottom of the Omega signboard suggests that Grant, via his signboard, recast the Omega Workshops in architectural terms, and possibly through Byzantine architectural models. A traditional shop signboard is a pictogram that summarizes the shop’s goods and contents for passerby. If the top of Grant’s Omega signboard referenced a Byzantine centrally planned church, while the bottom portion was a *trompe l’oeil opus sectile*, often found in Byzantine architectural contexts, then Grant’s advertisement for the Omega Workshops, in shorthand, coded the workshop as a Byzantine-inspired, divine-like sanctuary for art and design.

Bloomsbury artists also more subtly evoked models from Byzantine art, typically through allusions to Byzantine mosaics. Following their trip to Constantinople, Vanessa Bell wrote to Fry in 1912, indicating that her painting approach would now be dictated by the translation of tesserae to paint. She told Fry that she was “trying to paint as if I were mosaicking, not by painting in spots, but by considering the picture as patches, each of which has to be filled by one definite space of colour…”¹⁴ Byzantine mosaic compositions were the predominant source for Bloomsbury’s Byzantine inspirations, and mosaic overall was a hallmark of Bloomsbury creative activity. In his Durbins home in 1914, for example, Fry, along with Grant, embarked on what ultimately became an unfinished mosaic of a badminton game (Fig. 4.11), and mosaic work was such an integral part of Bloomsbury artistic practice, that Vanessa Bell and Grant’s daughter Angelica (Bell) Garnett later wrote an explanatory guide on how to make mosaics and on the history of mosaic practice.¹⁵
The most prominent painterly illustrations of Byzantine mosaic in Bloomsbury art are the 1911 Borough Polytechnic Murals, that Reed describes as “the first public demonstration” of the ethos that “Bloomsbury imagined modernism as a form of Byzantinism.” The murals were a commission to execute wall paintings at the South London vocational school, Borough Polytechnic, completed under the direction of Fry and his assembled team of artists, including Duncan Grant. Fry entitled the mural program “The Amusements of London” and it included images of a zoo and swimming scenes. The artistic style, as recounted by some of the artists working on the murals, was a “technique of graduating the color tones to a dark contour to increase the rhythm of the design—as in Byzantine mosaics,” and the various murals in the schema were united by a decorative tile border, stylized curvilinear design, and abstracted faces akin to those necessitated by the mosaic medium. Reed describes Grant’s *Swimmers in the Serpentine* (Fig. 4.12) (what the Tate Collection entitles *Bathing*) as the most Byzantine of the Borough Polytechnic murals, as the water in the panel’s “undulating ribbons of color quoted from mosaics Grant had seen at Monreale at the Baptistery in Florence.” The mosaic figures at the Byzantine Chora Monastery in Istanbul, which Grant visited with Keynes in 1910, provide another parallel between Grant’s figures and Byzantine inspiration. The elongated, sinuous mosaic bodies depicted at Chora, as in the elongated, stylized musculature and limbs in the mosaic of Herod ordering the Massacre of the Innocents (Fig. 4.13), are echoed in Grant’s sinewy, elongated swimmers.

Less prominent examples of Bloomsbury artists’ attention to Byzantine mosaics occurred in the artists’ attempts to recreate the tesserae of mosaics through paint, oftentimes at the borders or edges of compositions rather than as the central subjects. According to Reed, Fry merged “Cézanne’s technique with evocations of the tesserae of ancient mosaics” in Fry’s 1911 *Turkish*
*Landscape,* (Fig. 4.14) a view of Bursa, where Fry combined “tiny rectilinear chips of color” to create “passages of flat pattern” with “images of three-dimensional space.”19 Such a modern Byzantinism was only heightened by Fry’s frame decoration for *Turkish Landscape,* in which he imitated the decorative borders from the fourteenth-century Chora Monastery mosaics through a frame composed of squares of brown and gold.20 Fry’s interest in creating mosaic-like patterns of rectilinear shapes and his interest in geometricized interpretations of architectural plans or spaces applied as well to his design work for the Omega Workshops. In a 1913 carpet design (Fig. 4.15), Fry used a gridded paper to create a design of evenly spaced square forms composed of four rectilinear shapes (two black, two orange). The effect of the carpet designs’ layers of rectilinear form composed in a striking orange against black color palette is that of mosaic tesserae groups, with each tesserae unit given space to breathe.

Another example of Bloomsbury’s mosaic inspiration occurred in a far less literal form, and educed the effect of light bouncing off the surface of Byzantine gold mosaic tiles. The Byzantine concern for light in relation to mosaic tiles was more than an aesthetic idea; illuminated tesserae served a devotional function. Dating from the time of the Old Testament, and attaining new life in New Testament religious objects, such as rock-crystal reliquaries, there was a belief in Judeo-Christian circles that the incandescent properties of gold, crystal, and glass symbolically linked the viewer with a divine space.21 According to Bissera V. Pentcheva, in “Hagia Sophia and Multisensory Aesthetics,” Byzantine mosaic in the devotional context of a church was “performative,” with divine meaning created through the trigger of “light and shadow” creating a “polymorphy of [Byzantine] surfaces,” one that resulted in the spectator perceiving these physical changes as “animation.”22 In Liz James’ *Light and Colour in Byzantine Art,* James describes Byzantine techniques for enhancing these light effects in a devotional
space, as each mosaic tile became a “dynamic force, a force which ha[d] to be carefully and deliberately employed by the mosaicist to create the desired effect.”23 The light-effects of Byzantine gold mosaic were only heightened by a technique described by James as a “chequerboard” or “neo-impressionistic” approach, that “alternate[d] light and dark cubes with no attempt at continuity…to achieve a rapid transition from light to dark: the viewer’s eye automatically fill[ed] in the intervening shades.”24 Indeed, the mosaic’s “chequerboard” effect combined with the proliferation of gold tesserae in Byzantine interiors, the gold a nod to the Byzantine and Medieval linkage between a golden ground and the otherworldly sphere of Heaven, transformed the Byzantine church space into a shimmering, glowing, and radiant interior, one that couldn’t help, in the vacillation of light upon its shimmering surfaces, to evoke and invoke a divine space. The goal for the Byzantine worshipper thereby became the perception of the divine in the material.25

In Bloomsbury’s artistic interpretation of Byzantine art, the light effects of Byzantine mosaics were repurposed for a secular setting, with Bloomsbury and Omega artists referencing the effect of Byzantine shimmering light for the benefit of painted, decorative arts objects. In Omega textile fragments, for example, the “chequerboard” light effects of Byzantine mosaics appeared through a lighter or golden-faceted plane juxtaposed with a more matte, and darker-colored faceted plane. In Vanessa Bell’s 1913 “Maud” furnishing fabric, bright orange, sea foam green, and cobalt blue jagged faceted planes were juxtaposed against one another in a seemingly random pattern, with bright white empty, jagged linear and planar sections preventing direct overlap of many of the colors (Fig. 4.16). The connection between Vanessa Bell’s textile color juxtapositions and light effects has been noted by scholars, but has not been connected to an evocation of the experience of a Byzantine mosaic. In the 2009 Courtauld Gallery Omega
exhibition catalogue, the authors use Vanessa Bell’s words to describe this technique of solid color blocks interspersed with black outlines and deliberate white spaces as an attempt to give “brilliance” to the standard colors and lines. In other words, what the Courtauld publication describes as the “prevalent compositional device in Omega designs” of “white space left around blocks of colour,” was an attempt to bring light into the designs, what I argue was in a manner consistent with the glittering, divine-like illuminated effect of dark against golden tesserae in Byzantine mosaics. In Vanessa Bell’s textile work, Byzantium’s presence was subtle, but definitive; to create light effects through matte planes, Vanessa Bell’s work relied on a technique for enhancing luminosity characteristic of Byzantine mosaic practice.

The degree to which both overt iconographic and architectural, and subtle, effect-related references to Byzantium and Byzantine artistic effects enabled the creation of Bloomsbury artistic works is exemplified by a case study of lampstands produced for the Omega Workshops. Intended to bring a Modernist sensibility to a home interior, the lampstands’ design defined its Modernism as much a consequence of contemporary avant-garde compositional strategies as of Byzantine aesthetic principles. The inspiration of Byzantine art and architecture can be found in the lampstands’ construction, decoration, as well as visual effect. Yet, the lampstands’ subtle elision between what could be Modern and what Byzantine signified Omega’s artistic progressiveness as an interrelationship of Byzantine models and Modern work.

Aesthetic references in the Omega lampstands can be attributed to Modernist examples, such as Cubist fracturing or Post-Impressionist and Fauve jarring color combinations, as well as general Medieval, ancient, or other architectural models, rather than purely Byzantine sources. All of the five Omega lampstands examined in the Victoria and Albert Museum’s collection are
composed of a stacked series of geometric forms, three of which include a faceted star-shaped top and all of which include a prominent octagonal wooden piece, typically close to the base of the stand (Fig. 4.17, 1-5). The “stacked shapes” effect of the Omega lampstands, however, is not an uncommon design for candlesticks or lampstands, a demonstrated by one of the many standing lamp bases in the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s collection (Fig. 4.18). The fractured planes composing several of the lampstands’ star-shaped segment also echo the fractured planes of Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque’s early Cubist paintings, some of which would have been seen in the 1912 Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition, or Jacques Lipchitz’s Cubist sculptures, rendering Cubist planes in three-dimensions. Similarly, architectural references suggested by the lampshades are not always specifically Byzantine. In W18-2012 (Fig. 4.17, 1), for example, the yellow-gold rectangular box connecting the octagonal base to the shaft is decorated on all four sides with a rectilinear-and-dot design strongly echoing an architectural floor plan. W18-2012’s design includes an outer, black rectangle, closely followed by a black, dotted rectangle, with two, central, black-outlined rectangles with a single dotted-rectangle layer. W18-2012’s design evokes the linear outlines of architectural space on the most bare-bones of many church architectural plans, with the dotted layers signaling a church’s inner colonnade or arcade. The painted designs and stacked geometric forms of the Omega lampstands equally suggest decorated Islamic minarets (as in the seventeenth-century Shah Mosque decorated minarets in Iran [Fig. 4.19]), as much as they do the architectural hallmarks of notable Byzantine sites, such as the columns from the underground cisterns in Istanbul (Fig. 4.20). However, while design elements of the lampstands signify inspiration as much from Byzantium as from Modern, Medieval, or Islamic sources, what points to the Omega lampstands as specifically evocative of Byzantium is the choice to create the lampstands with an octagonal base shape, and the paint schemas that
align both with Byzantine and Romanesque motifs, the latter of which, as discussed in chapter 2, have been associated with or as Byzantine motifs, particularly in England in Fry and Bell’s time.

Octagonal-shaped buildings and objects have long been associated with Byzantine architecture, and their prominence in the lampstands points to the Byzantine inspiration for their construction. In Annabel Jane Wharton’s “Ritual and Reconstructed Meaning: The Neonian Baptistery in Ravenna,” Wharton notes that Northern Italian baptisteries were typically octagonal in shape, due both to ancient Roman precedents, and to an association between the number eight, the death and rebirth of Christ, and the symbolic death and rebirth of the baptized. With the stacked verticality of lampstands W18-2012, MISC2:16-1934, W19-2012, and MISC2:18-1934 (Fig. 4.17, 1, 2, 4, 5), in which the base is composed of a wide half-dome with a smaller octagon in its center, the lampstands highlight the octagonal shape. In so doing, the lampstands subsequently evoke the nested-octagonal effect of a Byzantine centrally planned church, as in Ravenna’s San Vitale, with a larger octagonal base leading up to a smaller, central octagonal unit. The lampstands’ painting merely underscores this architectural reference, as the uniform golden yellow paint on lampstand W19-2012 (Fig. 4.17, 4), for example, links the wider semi-circular base to the octagonal shape as if a nested, tiered octagonal building.

The painted decorations of the lampstands similarly suggest Byzantine or Romanesque architectural forms, specifically references to a rounded Byzantine or Romanesque arch. Rounded arches appear throughout Bloomsbury interior designs, as in Vanessa Bell’s mantle decorations at Charleston (Fig. 4.21), and her 1925-1930 colonnade designs for the window embrasure in Duncan Grant’s Charleston bedroom. With the Omega lampstands, in W18-2012 (Fig. 4.17, 1), the base piece connects to the octagon layer through a painted rounded arch extending from the octagon layer down to the top of the base. For MISC2:16-1934 (Fig. 4.17, 2),
tiered, painted archways adorn the surfaces of both the base semicircle and the octagon, and MISC2:16-1934’s (Fig. 4.17, 2) bottom semicircle is decorated with Romanesque rounded arches, both right-side-up and inverted, that parallel the squared-off colonnade comprising each facet of the octagon.

Beyond incorporating Byzantine architectural forms into the lampstands’ construction and decoration, the lampstands’ painted star facets and generous use of a gold-yellow color suggest the Byzantine mosaic effect of dark tones adjacent to light enhancing the shimmer and glitter of golden tesserae. The lampstands’ concern with light effects has been previously noted, though without mentioning Byzantium as a source of inspiration. The 2009 Courtauld Gallery Omega exhibition catalogue suggests that these “faceted motif[s] in the form of a Cubist pineapple” indicate “an intention to create a refracting effect of shiny chrome-yellow planes”—in other words, the faceting and its bright, yellow triangular forms, were intended to imitate light effects playing off a surface.\textsuperscript{33} The lampstands’ combination of faceted planes and interspersed triangular panels of golden-yellow mimics the variable brighter, sparkling golden sections of a Byzantine mosaic, as opposed to more matte darker-colored adjacent tesserae, and creates the mosaic “chequerboard” contrast between shimmer and matte detailed in James’ text. For the faceted top of MISC2:16-1934 (Fig. 4.17, 2), for instance, lighter golden-yellow diamonds are juxtaposed with slightly darker golden-yellow diamonds, and interspersed overall with darker and lighter diamonds of burnt-red, while W19-2012 (Fig. 4.17, 4) intermingles golden-yellow diamonds with blue, green, and red-orange diamonds. Such a reference to Byzantine light effects would only be heightened by the function of the lampstand itself: completed, with a lightbulb and lampshade, the golden-faceted planes would literally glow under the lamplight, only enhancing the luminescent effect of the painted planes alone. For MISC2:16-1934 (Fig. 4.17, 2)
in particular this analogy between lampshade base decoration and mosaic effect would be underscored in use, as the faceted top of MISC2:16-1934 juxtaposes lighter golden-yellow diamonds with slightly darker golden-yellow diamonds, creating subtle gradations between the adjacent lighter golden-yellow and darker golden-yellow diamonds. The result of the lampstand when illuminated would be a flickering effect of increasingly lighter golden facets against darker golden tones.

Whether as a literal replication of Byzantine architectural monuments or mosaic works, or as a more subtle evocation of experience of a Byzantine interior, Byzantium’s artefacts were determinants of Bloomsbury’s artistic productions. Most notably, this Byzantine inspiration enabled Bloomsbury’s integration of art with lived space. Whether in the design effects of Vanessa Bell and Grant’s textiles, the conception of the Omega lampstands, or the decoration of Charleston, the segmented, geometricized forms inherent to mosaic works and vibrant color and light of Byzantium’s aesthetic provided tangible, three-dimensional compositional examples to help Fry, Vanessa Bell, Grant, and the Omega artists crystalize and unify the fractured planes of Cubism, the jarring color juxtapositions of the Fauves, and the short, choppy brushwork of Cézanne into formats suitable for a home interior. Byzantium was a reference that permeated Bloomsbury’s artistic productions and, simultaneous with their exposure to Modern works, set the compositional coordinates that instigated Bloomsbury’s art.


2. Discussions of Byzantine or Post-Impressionist artistic inspiration for Bloomsbury are, however, necessarily mired in a chicken-and-egg problem: did Fry and the Bloomsbury artists develop their compositional strategy based on Paul Cézanne’s work, which they viewed as derived from the effect of Byzantine mosaics, or did they develop this strategy from the model of
Byzantine mosaics directly, later praising Cézanne’s work for accomplishing the same? The view of this chapter is that we should understand Bloomsbury art to have found parallel rather than hierarchical inspiration in Post-Impressionist as well as in Byzantine art. As this dissertation contends overall that Bloomsbury’s Byzantium was more a critical fiction than a historical reality, a compendium of qualities that Fry and Bell were inspired by in Byzantine works, in tandem with qualities in Byzantine art that confirmed aesthetic values and ideas they already held (such as, a predilection for techniques and styles reminiscent of Cézanne and Post-Impressionist art), the qualities this chapter identifies in Bloomsbury art could and should be perceived to suggest at once models from Modern art as they at the same time, and, perhaps more poignantly, reference Byzantium.

3. Christopher Reed contends that Bloomsbury’s groundbreaking achievements in domestic design were “expressed in relation to the precedent of Byzantium,” and emphasizes how visual evocations of Byzantium spoke to “the primitive, sensual freedom associated with the Near East,” Vanessa Bell’s feminist interventions in art, or the sexual freedom associated at the time with references to Byzantium as a Mediterranean culture. Reed, Bloomsbury Rooms, 67, 106.

4. A December 14, 1913, review in the Observer described the Omega Workshops’ products as “Primeval, Byzantine or Barbaric, as you may command,” using Omega’s connection with Byzantium as merely a descriptive adjective to denote Omega products’ seemingly exotic lack of finish. Review quoted in Alexandra Gerstein, ed., Beyond Bloomsbury: Designs of the Omega Workshops, 1913–19 (London: Fontanka, 2009), 79.

5. Ibid., 162.

6. Reed, Bloomsbury Rooms, 84.


8. Reed, Bloomsbury Rooms, 129.

9. Ibid., 83.

10. A similar pattern can also be found on one of the remaining Omega lampshades in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, in which a painted geometric design on the silk shade ends in a subtle smiling face.
11. Grant was not the only Bloomsbury artist who had an interest in trompe l’oeil marbling effects. Referring to an abstracted circular design that she had painted on the doors to Grant’s room in Charleston in 1917, Vanessa Bell wrote to Fry on February 22, 1917, that she was painting “marbled circles” on the door. Quoted in Quentin Bell and Virginia Nicholson, *Charleston: A Bloomsbury House and Garden*, 7th ed. (London: Frances Lincoln, 2004), 112.

12. The Pantheon also is a centrally planned structure with a pronounced “neck,” and could equally be used as analogous to Grant’s Omega signboard. However, given Bloomsbury’s overall antipathy to Rome and its artistic contributions, Grant’s turn to the aesthetics and architectural layout of the centrally planned Byzantine (as opposed to basilica-planned Gothic and Western Medieval) church models appears more logical.


17. B. Adney to the Tate Gallery, December 31, 1953, quoted in Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms*, 72.


19. Ibid., 69.

20. Ibid.

21. Rosemarie Haag Bletter, “The Interpretation of Glass Dream-Expressionist Architecture and the History of the Crystal Metaphor,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 40, no.1 (March 1981): 20–25. Herbert Kessler makes a similar point about the link between access to a divine space and material reflectiveness. Citing Abbot Suger’s defense of or explanation for the use of gemstones and gemlike glass as holy artifact decoration, in which Suger suggested an analogical relationship between the materials and the divine through the destabilizing loveliness and beauty of translucent gemstones as ever-shifting visual objects, Kessler links the visual encounter in an Early Medieval or Medieval holy space to such an attempt to access the divine through light- and space-related visual instability. Herbert L.


24. Ibid., 4, 7.


27. Ibid.

28. The catalogue for the 2009 Courtauld Gallery exhibition on the Omega Workshops notes that these lampstands were painted by “[Winnifred] Gill and the other women at the Workshops,” “apparently…[at] their discretion.” However, as Gill notes, popular designs had to be repeated, and a design by Vanessa needed to be copied exactly, suggesting that Vanessa Bell and possibly Fry also had a hand in these lampstand designs. Ibid., 147.

29. The use of geometricized or abstracted architectural references, both generally and specifically calling to mind Byzantine sources, in Omega and Fry’s designs, was an interest that outlasted both the Omega and the prime period of Bloomsbury intellectual influence prior to and immediately after the World War I. From 1934 to 1936, Grant designed textiles for the Allan Walton Textile firm. One of his designs in the Victoria and Albert Museum, a furnishing fabric entitled “Butterfly” (CIRC.344-1938), consists of a repeating motif of large square forms, internally subdivided into a golden-yellow butterfly design and a red-orange rose design. Key, however, is the border decoration for each of the large square forms. Each side of the square is outlined by a Romanesque colonnade, “naturalized” by Grant inserting a vegetal design inside each Romanesque arch. In the center of each colonnade, Grant added a riff on a church rose window—here, a circle with a stylized floral design in the center. At the joins of each side, Grant included a gridded box design that, in conjunction with Fry’s earlier work in which a grid was intended to echo mosaic tiles, could similarly serve as a mosaic architectural reference.

30. Vanessa Bell certainly encountered examples of Islamic stacked and decorated minarets and columns on her travels to Turkey. In her diary from her family’s 1906 trip to Turkey, Virginia Woolf described “the most beautiful mosque in Constantinople [unnamed]” which had “round pillars. . .laid with white tiles upon which are painted rich patterns in blue, & there are panels of green & other colours, so that the whole place, based upon glowing carpets of many hues gives forth a radiant tide of light.” Virginia Woolf, Turkey 1906, in *A Passionate Apprentice: The Early Journals 1897-1909*, ed. Mitchell A. Leaska (London: Hogarth Press, 1990), 352-353.

32. The golden yellow paint on the lampstand bases was referred to as the Omega “chrome yellow.” Gerstein, *Beyond Bloomsbury*, 147.

33. Ibid., 147.
Chapter Five: Bloomsbury’s Byzantium and a Secular Spiritualism

Religion and religious feeling were integral to Fry and Bell’s definition and understanding of their Bloomsbury Byzantium. Ultimately, how Fry and Bell characterized Bloomsbury’s Byzantium in relation to religion and religious practice redefined both their ideal aesthetic emotion and their affect-centric Formalism as manifestations of secular spiritual devotion. This argument challenges previous scholarship. Most scholars explain the transformative emotional response Fry desired from art through an interest in psychoanalysis rather than a connection to religion or spirituality. For instance, Adrianne Rubin, in Roger Fry’s ‘Difficult and Uncertain Science’: The Interpretation of Aesthetic Perception, frames what I term Fry’s affect-centric Formalism as predominantly a response to Fry’s interest in psychology, psychoanalysis, and the psychological reactions to form. Interest in psychoanalysis was, in fact, a critical component of Bloomsbury intellectual contributions, making the link between Fry and Bell’s aesthetic emotion and psychoanalysis a logical, though incomplete address of the language and methodology of the Bloomsbury critics’ idea of affective art. A few scholars have aligned Fry and Bell’s aesthetic emotion with devotional expression, such as Maud Lavin, in her article “Roger Fry, Cézanne, and Mysticism,” and Benjamin Harvey, in his article “The Rest is Silence.” However, these prior attempts to address spirituality and Fry and Bell either neglected to connect the spiritual characteristics of aesthetic emotion to the critics’ thoughts on organized religion, or too narrowly interpreted calls to spirituality as direct reflections of Fry’s personal, Quaker belief system. As this chapter will demonstrate, for Fry and Bell, the experience of aesthetic emotion represented an alternative belief system to all organized religious practice, and was defined as otherworldly, and, perhaps, divine.
In Fry’s and Bell’s writings, religion—specifically its disavowal—was a predominant theme. Bell and Fry declared an antipathy to organized religion which, for both authors, was often called into play to defend good art, pacifist sentiment, or intellectual independence. In his 1911 “Post-Impressionism,” for instance, Fry used critiques of religious sects (including his own Quaker faith) to parallel critiques of artist Walter Sickert’s contradictory views on artistic distortion. Fry noted that Sickert both said that distortion was “unconscious,” an inevitable failure of the artist’s inability to mimetically reproduce the world, and a unique, positive feature of art, what distinguished art from “any machine-made object.” Fry declared this to be “something of Jesuitical casuistry,” much like “the Quaker’s advice to his son: Thee must not marry money. But thee had better marry where money is.” Here, both the Jesuits and the Quakers were referenced to critique Sickert, with “Jesuitical casuistry” an assumed stand-in for “meaningless, irrational, and circular contradictory arguments,” and the hypocrisy of wealthy Quakers’ calls to anti-materialism suggesting the incompatibility of Sickert’s claims that pictorial distortion was both a negative and a positive aspect of painting. In his 1928 Civilization, Bell cited religious hypocrisy as one cause of the First World War. Bell condemned both the state and clergy who justified going to war with Germany by tying “our declaration of war to...a religious motive,” recasting the war as a battle between “The Cross versus Krupps” with Kaiser Wilhelm II reimagined as the Antichrist.

One of Fry’s more poignant denunciations of organized religion ironically occurred in a “sermon” Fry contributed to a 1934 text Sermons by Artists. Fry’s sermon developed a quote from Proverbs xvi, 18, “Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall,” and used this religious citation to undermine the validity and worth of organized religion in the first place. Fry credited a religious belief in “souls” which “thereby laid claim to a share in a world
more vast than that of the visible and material universe” as a cause for extreme arrogance and prejudice, resulting in moving “upright and honest men to behave with savage ferocity towards their victims” under the auspices of belief in one’s “supra-terrestrial nature.” Religion “lured mankind” and resulted in men becoming infatuated with “this strange assumption of their own importance in the scheme of things.” This inflated sense of importance subsequently created a societal hubris which led to the First World War. Fry concluded his sermon, crafted around a religious text, with a complete disavowal of the virtues of organized religion, and claimed that only science, not religion could deliver “those pleasures of the sense and understanding which are positive and absolute.”

Fry and Bell also criticized religious devotion as a signifier of anti-intellectualism and anti-individualism. In Bell’s 1934 Enjoying Pictures, Bell expressed his displeasure with the “herd mentality” of religious devotion through an artistic analogy, characterizing both obligatory churchgoers and the idea of looking at art because one was “supposed to” as aspects of the same sin. Fry’s distaste for religion as cause for sheep-like devotion was called in as a mark against even his beloved Paul Cézanne. In his review of Ambroise Vollard’s 1915 Paul Cézanne, Fry claimed that Cézanne “had almost no intellectual independence,” a point Fry proved by stating that, for example, Cézanne “continued to believe in the Catholic Church.” In his 1927 text Cézanne, Fry similarly indicated Cézanne’s ignorance or “innocence” through Cézanne’s reliance on organized religion for guidance, and described Cézanne, despairingly, as a man who “trusted always to the Pope for direction.” In his 1925 article in The Dial, “The Religion of Culture,” Fry equated blind devotion to the unthinking followers of cultural leaders, such as the art critic and author Sir Claude Phillips, and made unquestioning acceptance of cultural value akin to parishioners listening to a priest intone during mass.
Fry’s argument that organized religion represented an anti-individualistic and anti-intellectual institution also assumed a more personal cadence. Fry’s relation was the famous early-nineteenth-century prison reformer Elizabeth Fry. Elizabeth Fry was noted for her overt demonstrations of her Quaker faith, including insisting on a daily ritual of collective Bible recitation among all members of the household—family and staff—even when she was a guest in another’s home. Indeed, as argued by Timothy Larsen in *A People of One Book*, Elizabeth Fry’s dedication to the repeated recitation of the Bible itself—rather than study of its meaning or any analysis—as a source of religious connection and prayer was the “magic ingredient in her internationally acclaimed recipe for prison reform,” with “devotional Bible readings” a key aspect of her changes to prison life. Fry, seemingly deliberately, challenged his relation’s famous reform methodology in his posthumous *Last Lectures*. Here, Fry paralleled the unquestioning acceptance of Greek Art as a model of “the greatest art in the world” with the unquestioning acceptance of the text of the Bible itself as edificatory. He recounted an anecdote about his “early youth” reading the Bible, when it was “an age when we could understand scarcely any of it” but we “became so familiar with the words, we learned to take them so much for granted, that whenever we tried to read them the too familiar words refused to bite the imagination.” Fry then claimed the public perception of Greek art was akin to this rote view of the Bible, as Greek art was “supposed to have mysterious education value, and the young were taken periodically to be exposed to the influence of Greek sculpture in the dingy rooms of the British Museum.” Like the unquestioning, superficial relationship with the Bible, the value of engagement with it assumed, unexplored, and mandatory, unquestioning exposure to Greek art resulted in a “too early and unintelligent familiarity” which “deadened the receptive facilities,” preventing people from questioning or probing into the nature of Greek art beyond the
For Roger Fry, unlike for his kin Elizabeth Fry, texts and life needed to be equally examined to affect one another, rather than assuming that unexamined, though recited, words could be sufficient carriers of importance. Critique of organized religion also appeared in Fry’s and Bell’s writings as a non-sequitur, one which, while seemingly out of place with the context and content of the writings, was undoubtedly intended as a familiar, charged cultural and societal association for their readers. In his 1905 article “Watts and Whistler,” Fry defined Whistler’s practice as “artistic Calvinism” without elaboration—by implication, the connotations of “Calvinism” should have sufficed as a derogatory description. In a more extended out-of-context diatribe on religion, Fry included a passage in the third lecture of a Slade lecture series, dating from between 1910-1919, in which he paralleled what he termed “Rembrandt’s paradox” with the “no less audacious…paradox of Christianity.” Fry then proceeded to rail against the fallacy of Christianity and religion which “says that every single individual is an immortal spirit of infinite consequence” and the “super-natural and miraculous paraphernalia of religion all its hierarchies and distinctions were superfluous [sic]” before returning to a discussion of Rembrandt’s work.

In his 1928 Civilization, Bell used a characterization of a “neo-Catholic” to illustrate the ignorant masses who were content with the world as it was. He stated: “it is all very well for some obese and esurient neo-Catholic, swelling with beef and beer and hate, to gurgle that he is as happy as he is credulous.” The equation of “neo-Catholic,” obesity, esurience, preference for beef, beer, and hate, with ignorant acceptance of the world as it was would appear opaque to the average contemporary reader, and Bell offered no further development of this presumed stereotype. Such religion-related non-sequiturs in both Fry’s and Bell’s writings merely highlighted the degree both were opposed to organized religion and its expression in their current society, and the extent
to which both harnessed their distaste and critique of organized religion to underscore their views on unrelated aesthetic and non-religious subjects.

Such distaste for organized religion can partially be attributed to the critics’ personal backgrounds. Fry was born into a prominent Quaker family, and, from Fry’s closest friends down through to the present-day scholars, Fry’s relationship to Quakerism has been accorded a centralized place in the retelling of Fry’s life and work, even long after Fry divorced himself from his faith. Sir Kenneth Clark’s introduction to Fry’s posthumous *Last Lectures* began by identifying Fry with his Quaker roots. Clark cited Fry’s “austerity” as inherited from “his Quaker ancestors,” which “made him quick, sometimes almost too quick, to resist superficial charm.” Denys Sutton, in his introduction to his *Letters of Roger Fry*, began with Fry’s “strict” Quaker background because “when he was engaged in the delicate matter of art expertise, the strict precepts of his father must have acted as a sound foundation of conduct for Fry.” Frances Spalding, in *The Bloomsbury Group*, credits Fry’s Quakerism for Fry’s ability to promote Post-Impressionism, claiming that Fry’s Quaker background provided him with the “strength of character,” “distrust of display,” “inclination for hard work,” and “disregard for the establishment and a willingness to stand apart from mass opinion and to trust in one’s own experiences” which thereby enabled him to become a “vital spokesperson for Post-Impressionism and for modern art.” Spalding also points to Fry’s Quakerism as a reason for Fry’s removal from his Metropolitan Museum position, attributing the circumstances surrounding Fry’s dismissal to a consequence of Fry, “who came from a strict Quaker background,” making “his opinions known and immediately los[ing] his job.”

Fry’s religion played the strongest role, however, in the work of Fry’s most intimate biographer, Virginia Woolf. As Fry’s son Julian recounted in a 1977 interview, a hallmark of the
Bloomsbury circle ethos, which transformed Fry’s life and career, was its intolerance of religious devotion and the religiously devout, viewing the latter as suspect and disingenuous.33 No doubt the influence and model of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell’s father, the nineteenth-century Christian turned prominent agnostic Sir Leslie Stephen, contributed to Bloomsbury’s overall critique of religion, and such a perspective likely informed Woolf’s approach to writing Fry’s biography, published in 1940.

Woolf cited Fry’s increasing disillusionment with or rejection of organized religion as a critical impetus shaping each key moment of intellectual growth and passage to adulthood in Fry’s life. By way of introduction to Fry’s character, Woolf began her biography with a story from Fry’s autobiographical notes, in which Fry recalled one of his earliest memories growing up with parents who adhered to a strict and regimented Quaker lifestyle. Fry described a little patch of garden in the yard where he grew poppies. Woolf cited Fry claiming that “the poppy plant was the object of a much more sincere worship than I was at all able to give to ‘gentle Jesus’ and I almost think of a greater affection than I felt for anyone except my father.”34 The story continued with Fry picking the poppy, presumably to hold, possess, and admire the beautiful flower, and being subsequently “gravely reproved” by his mother.35 The consequence for Fry was “disillusionment,” his “creduous and passionate” nature stunted and curtailed by a strictness of living designed to instill “implicit obedience.”36 The narrative focus of Fry’s recollection, and Woolf’s re-framing, was that the strict doctrines of Quaker life prevented the development of Fry’s aesthetic appreciation, and that in such a religiously observant household, beauty, and the possession and experience of beauty, were frowned upon. It is quite pointed that this autobiographical anecdote presented a dichotomy between “the poppy plant” and “gentle Jesus.” In setting aesthetic appreciation and religious doctrine as equivalently worthy subjects for
worship, but mutually exclusive ones, Fry not only indicated the depth of his connection to art and beauty (subjects as worthy of reverence as “gentle Jesus”) but also reframed the poppy narrative as a moment of choice between two paths, with doctrinal religion and the religion of art coded as incompatible with one another.

That Fry’s early adherence to a doctrinal religion was at odds not only with the values of his ultimate career path, but also with the person he later became was a theme Woolf maintained throughout her biography. Stories Woolf selected from Fry’s childhood revealed Fry’s distaste for the hypocrisy of Quakerism, a belief system of philanthropy, charity, and humility, which was selectively followed, and often blatantly disregarded. Fry expressed disgust with what he saw as the Quaker belief that “all men not in regular employment and receipt of a fairly high salary were morally reprehensible.”37 On this, Fry stated: “It is impossible to exaggerate the want of simply humanity in which we were brought up or to explain how that was closely associated with the duty of philanthropy.”38 Similar examples of religious hypocrisy included Fry’s discomfort with the strength of his father’s doctrinaire “moral convictions” juxtaposed to their materialistic lifestyle: in Woolf’s words, “they lived a highly comfortable life in the small house at Highgate.”39

Given the prominence accorded Fry’s early Quakerism in both Fry and Woolf’s retelling, it is then not surprising that the points Woolf highlighted to mark the most substantial challenges and changes in Fry’s intellectual life were tied to instances in which Fry’s religious observance and beliefs were challenged, threatened, or diminished.40 For instance, Woolf detailed how Fry’s second prominent intellectual shift occurred at his second preparatory school, the Clifton school, where he became close friends with the future philosopher and outspoken atheist John Ellis McTaggart. Woolf claimed that “McTaggart’s friendship was by far the most important event of
Roger’s life at Clifton” and his influence extended “long after Clifton was over.” Fry’s deepening friendship with McTaggart caused a wedge with his religious parents, who were wary of McTaggart’s radical, atheist views. That Fry defended McTaggart—at first hesitatingly to his parents, and later defiantly—suggests the increasing gap between the life of questioning and intellectual inquiry and the unthinking, rote demonstrations of his childhood beliefs.

Cambridge, what Fry called “the great event of my life,” represented his most powerful break with his family’s faith, and a period in which Fry came into his own both as a critic, and as an artist. As Woolf recounted, at Cambridge some “of his new literary tastes were not to [his parents’] liking,” resulting in Fry’s increasing inability to “describe his Cambridge life to his parents.” Fry also shared rooms with McTaggart at Cambridge in 1885. Fry’s Cambridge friends forced him “to take stock of the vague religious and political beliefs which he had brought with him from home and from Clifton.” Though Fry initially tried to integrate his Cambridge life with his religious upbringing, at this moment of intellectual awakening, Fry ultimately had an inverse religious epiphany: at Cambridge, instead of turning to religion, Fry turned away from it. Fry’s creed, according to Woolf, “had dropped from him without any shock or pain so far as he was concerned,” and Fry’s diminished religious affiliation and concrete breaks with the world of his parents synecdochally stood in for the sharp break between Fry’s childhood and adulthood. After Cambridge, returning to his parents’ home briefly, Fry found the “‘Nomian atmosphere…positively suffocating…When every member of a family has a moral sense that makes them rigid as iron and tenacious as steel…you may imagine that the friction is not slight’” as he wrote to Goldsworthy Lowes (“G. L.”) Dickinson in 1888. The Quaker atmosphere now “made him ‘into a strange jelly like mass with about as much consciousness as chlorophormed amoeba.’”
In Woolf’s telling of his life, Fry regarded organized religion as a hotbed of hypocritical behavior, often at the expense of the poorest, most needy, or most vulnerable individuals of society; and as an empty morality, a symbol of unthinking, unquestioning, rote yet observed and fervently held beliefs and behaviors which stunted rather than enhanced intellectual growth. To Fry, religious affiliation became the equivalent of burying one’s head in the sand, and hiding behind a system proclaiming moral superiority without any self-awareness of whether or not such moral superiority was earned or enacted in everyday life. By 1920, Fry’s negativity towards organized religion was such that Fry wrote to his friend, author Marie Mauron, advocating that “all young girls” should read Denis Diderot’s eighteenth-century *La Religieuse*, a story of a nun attempting to renounce her religious vows, so as to, ominously, “teach them the consequences of religion.”

For Bell, his personal experience with organized religion was less fraught, but one which, in his family’s substance-less adherence to the façade of religious observance, cemented religion as truly Karl Marx’s “opiate of the people,” an unthinking, directionless balm. In *Enjoying Pictures*, Bell, when referring to S. Francis, said that “frankly I am too ignorant of religious experience to say a single word about it.” According to Frances Spalding, Bell’s father was not religious, but he viewed church as a “stabilizing social force.” It was Bell’s low regard for Christianity and organized religion which was, in fact, one of the similar beliefs which endeared him to Vanessa Bell, whose family, led by Sir Leslie Stephen’s newly embraced secularism, “laughed…freely at the absurdities of religious practice” and who, as a teenager, realized that religion was meaningless to her. Vanessa and Clive Bell dutifully reported to Bell’s parents’ estate for religious holidays, where they, out of respect for Clive’s parents, collectively attended church every day during “Holy Week,” but looked forward only to the freedom of a more “pagan
evening” dining with Bell’s former lover, her husband, and their friends and family.\textsuperscript{56} The only member of Bell’s family to whom Vanessa had a connection was his brother, Cory, whose affection from Vanessa he secured after blasphemously exclaiming that he “nearly dropped the fucking thing” while saying morning prayers from the family Bible.\textsuperscript{57}

However, despite Fry and Bell’s joint antipathy to organized religion, religious expression and the use of terms associated with religion were integral to their characterization of aesthetic feeling, and, ultimately, to their understanding of Byzantine art. In his catalogue essay for the 1912 \textit{Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition}, Fry claimed that the Post-Impressionist artists followed the “newly found religions of expressive form” derived from Cézanne.\textsuperscript{58} In his 1921 “Architectural Heresies of a Painter,” Fry defined his defense of “aesthetic pursuit” as his “quite absurd faith,” and in Fry’s 1927 \textit{Cézanne}, Cézanne’s “concordance” between “intellectual rigours…and a sensibility of extreme delicacy” could be described by Fry only as “something of a miracle,” while the “smallest product of his hand arouse[d] the impression of being a revelation of the highest importance.”\textsuperscript{59} Bell in his 1914 \textit{Art} paralleled the aesthetic encounter to a moment of religious ecstasy. Like S. Teresa pricked by angels and communing with the divine, Bell claimed that a “good work of visual art carry[ed] a person who is capable of experiencing it out of life into ecstasy,” and that the artist translated “into material form of something that he felt in a spasm of ecstasy.”\textsuperscript{60} In \textit{Art}, Bell also claimed that Cézanne’s “real business of his life was not to make pictures, but to work out his own salvation,” which he could do only “by painting”—linking painting to religious observance.\textsuperscript{61} This parallel was later made more explicit, when Bell noted that while “throughout the ages, men and women have gone to temples and churches in search of an ecstasy incompatible with and remote from the preoccupations and activities of laborious humanity, so they may go to the temples of art to experience, a little out of this world,
emotions that are of another.” In his 1932 An Account of French Painting, Bell used monotheism versus paganism as a parallel to indicate the respective superiority or inferiority of Post-Impressionist or Impressionist art, deriding the Impressionists by stating that “Impressionist art is essentially pagan.”

References to a “spirituality” and one’s “spiritual” inner life, clearly divorced from a religious context, were the most prominent examples of Fry and Bell’s characterization of art through religious models. Such calls to a secular “spirit” or the “spiritual” were typically associated with the rhetoric of the alternative, occult faiths of the nineteenth century, such as Theosophy or other mystical doctrines, some even falling under the label of “Spiritualism,” as well as the Modernist attempts to explain transcendence outside of organized religion. Yet, what marked Fry and Bell’s “spirit” as distinct from Spiritualist intellectuals of the nineteenth century and their Modernist peers was that the critics used citations of their secular “spirit” to define their ideal art works.

Fry and Bell described the effect of good form through the degree to which the experience with form reflected or accessed this world of “spirit.” In his 1902 article for the Quarterly Review, “Watts and Whistler,” Fry claimed that the “language of art, being formal, cannot hope to transcend the material by becoming formless, but only by the discovery of forms which symbolize the spiritual.” In his 1910 article for The Nation, “A Postscript on Post-Impressionism,” Fry noted that Cimabue’s works were deficient only in their lack of naturalistic representation; in every other regard, his works were synonymous with the “final and completely expressions of certain spiritual experiences.” Similarly, Fry’s article in the catalogue for the 1912 Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition defended his Post-Impressionists against accusations of artistic incompetence by claiming that, in lieu of demonstrating skill, the Post-Impressionists
aspired simply to “express by pictorial and plastic form certain spiritual experiences.” Fry even used references to “spirit” to argue for painting conservation in 1930, stating that conservation was necessary as long as the “picture continued to exercise is vital function as a source of spiritual life.” Towards the end of his life and career, in his 1932 Characteristics of French Art, Fry identified Cézanne’s genius as the “discovery in appearances of some underlying structural unity which answered a profound demand of the spirit.” In his posthumous Last Lectures, Fry noted that art principally enabled access to one’s otherworldly “spiritual life.” Conversely, condemned art was defined by the absence of ties to the “spirit.” In Art, Bell denigrated Renaissance art by claiming that “the outstanding fact is that with the Renaissance Europe definitely turns her back on the spiritual view of life.”

Aside from religiously derived phrasing and language, Fry also adopted a rhetorical structure derived from religious contexts, negative theology, to explain good art. Negative theology, the proposition that the divine’s transcendence of Earthly descriptions suggests that the divine can only be understood by an enumeration of what the divine is not, has a long lineage in Judeo-Christian-Islamic thought. It originated with Aristotle’s Metaphysics, assembled around the first century, and the c. 525 texts of the Pseudo-Dionysius connected Christian dogma to negative theology and Aristotelian ideals. In his Mystical Theology, the sixth-century Christian Neoplatonic theologian Pseudo-Dionysius explained that since the divine was the “Cause of all beings, we should posit and ascribe to it all the affirmations we make in regard to beings, and, more appropriately, we should negate all these affirmations, since it surpasses all being.” In what is known as his “Third Letter,” the Pseudo-Dionysius stated: “For this mystery of Jesus remains hidden and can be drawn out by no word or mind. What is to be said of it remains unsayable; what is to be understood of it remains unknowable.” Negative theology was later
adopted by many Medieval Christian, Jewish, and Islamic theologians, notably Maimonides, Avicenna, and the likely source for much of Fry and Bell’s knowledge of negative theology, Saint Thomas Aquinas.  

As highly educated Cambridge men, both Fry and Bell would have read the theological arguments which utilized negative theology, and Fry directly referred to his knowledge of negative theology in his 1927 text Cézanne. He stated: “To describe a masterpiece of the Salon d’Automne or of some equivalent English exhibition none would have to use positive terms; to describe Cézanne’s works, I find myself, like a mediaeval mystic before the divine reality reduced to negative terms. I have to say first what it is not.” Fry then paralleled negative theology frameworks when he claimed that Cézanne’s work “was an asymptote towards which he was forever approaching without ever quite reaching it; it was a reality, incapable of complete realization.” This was by no means an isolated instance. In Fry’s “Post Impressionism,” good art, as a “language that speaks directly to the spirit,” couldn’t be described. Why in Cézanne’s work a portrait “arouse[d] in [Fry’s] imagination the idea of reality, of solidity, mass and resistance,” was something, as if contemplating the divine, Fry couldn’t “pretend to explain.” Discussing aesthetic emotion in his 1914 article “Blake and British Art,” published in The Nation, Fry contended that one must “get at [the experience of aesthetic emotion], if at all, by wild shots, by similes and metaphors.” In a 1919 rebuke to the critic D. S. MacColl in Burlington Magazine, a critic who frequently contested Fry’s aesthetic approach, Fry attempted to clarify the nature of his work as a project to get at “some idea of the fundamental aesthetic reaction,” using “language to adumbrate certain states which are not exactly definable in language.” Though the aesthetic response was beyond words, Fry and his similarly minded authors desired to “make shots at a mark from different angles of approach in the hope that
others who have similar aesthetic experiences will find that I am able to assist them to realize more clearly the nature of these experiences.” \(^8^3\) In his 1920 “Retrospect” from *Vision and Design*, Fry defined aesthetic emotion as connected to a mystical belief beyond comprehension, and stated that any “attempt I might make to explain this would probably land me in the depths of mysticism. On the edge of that gulf I stop.” \(^8^4\)

Yet, Fry’s and Bell’s links between art, aesthetics, and religious expression weren’t confined to language or rhetoric alone. Fry, Bell, and the other Bloomsbury artists, Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, relied on either verbal or visual manifestations of the Christian iconography of the Orthodox icon, altar, or icon triptych to express their innovative aesthetic program as and through religious-like devotion. The Modernist embrace of the Orthodox icon in both form and idea was not unique to Bloomsbury. For instance, Andrew Spira, in *The Avant-Garde Icon*, makes the point that Constructivist Vladimir Tatlin implicitly referenced the Russian Orthodox icon corner in his corner-counter reliefs, first shown at the “0.10 Last Futurist Exhibition” in 1915 in Petrograd, even if Tatlin did not directly refer to this connection. \(^8^5\) The 2010 text *Alter Icons: The Russian Icon and Modernity* is also specifically dedicated to the intersections between traditional Russian icons and Modern aesthetics and thought. \(^8^6\) What makes Bloomsbury’s contribution to the Modern reimaging of the Orthodox icon unique is the degree to which references to the icon informed and directed not only literal, artistic evocations created by Fry, Bell, Vanessa Bell, and Duncan Grant, but also the characterization of artistic affect in Fry’s criticism.

In his writings, Fry referenced the function of the religious icon through his contention that one accessed the aesthetic ideal *through* form rather than *as* form, defining ideal form as a type of secular devotional icon. In Catholic and Orthodox Christianity, representational icons
served as intercessionaries: an image of a divine being through which a worshipper connected with the divine. According to Robin Milner-Gulland, in the forward to Oleg Tarasov’s *Icon and Devotion: Sacred Spaces in Imperial Russia*, the icon was “venerated as a two-way channel of communication with the supernatural world,” and Andrew Spira, in *The Avant-Garde Icon*, describes Orthodox Christians as engaging “in icon veneration as a form of direct communion with Christ and the saints.” Good, ideal form for Fry acted as a secularized religious icon: a visual conduit connecting the viewer with an aesthetic emotion, a spiritual presence, transcendent of compositional form. In his 1926 *Transformations*, for example, Fry rhapsodized about a Rembrandt work, claiming that it was “miraculous” that “matter” could take on “so exactly the impress of spirit as this pigment does.” As a result, the subject was of no consequence in deference to the “spiritual values” that could arrive through “spatial and plastic ones.” In 1928, reflecting on German art collections, Fry critiqued German art as failing to achieve “what [the work of art] should be,” namely “the medium of spiritual communication.” One of Fry’s most direct textual illustrations of the work-of-art-as-icon can be found in “Art-History as an Academic Study” from Fry’s 1939 posthumous *Last Lectures*. Here, Fry described the process of engaging with a work of art through a description of the work of art as “the liaison in a transaction which takes place between the artist and the spectator….the ideal transaction would be one in which the artist embodied his ‘experience’ completely in the work of art and met with a spectator capable of perfect responses to that experience.” The work of art, as a liaison, acted as a “transmitting medium between the artist’s subconscious nature and our own,” which gave it a “‘magic’ power over us…because the effect on our feelings often far transcends what we can explain by our conscious experience.” In other words, the work of art functioned as if a devotional icon, in which the object was an interlocutor between the viewer and the divine. Art,
if properly accessed by a viewer capable of sensing and responding to the artist’s depth of emotion contained within and through it, “magically” transported the viewer beyond the moment, resulting in the viewer having feelings which transcendent of “our conscious experience.” For Fry, like the religious icon, form was only praiseworthy in relation to and as a consequence of its ability to translate the spiritual directives of the artist into an equally spiritually resonant vessel.

Artistically, Fry, Grant, and Vanessa Bell evoked both the icon and the altar (the ledge or table holding the icon) in their decidedly secular works. Bloomsbury references to icons and altars were abstract, and took one of two forms: either a compositional reference to triptych panel icons, with an emphasis on gold ground and a central focal image flanked by two wings; or an architectural design that functioned as an altar displaying a central image for devotion. The pictorial convention for Christian devotional panel icons in the Byzantine and Medieval era, and in Eastern Orthodox practice, foregrounded a central holy figure or a central holy narrative against a shimmering, golden backdrop. This use of a gold ground is described by Herbert L. Kessler in *Spiritual Seeing: Picturing The Divine’s Invisibility in Medieval Art,* as evoking a non-naturalistic picture of Paradise, with a “flat, abstract composition against a golden ground…shift[ing] the mind to another level of consciousness.”93 In oil paintings such as *Abstract Composition* (1914) (Fig. 5.1) and *Abstract Painting* (c. 1914) (Fig. 5.2), Vanessa Bell paralleled the devotional icon format. Vanessa Bell positioned her darker-toned squares and circles against a heavenly gold ground, and anthropomorphized her geometric shapes. In her *Abstract Composition,* for instance, the eggplant-purple circle functions as if the head of an icon’s devotional figure resting on a rectilinear body. References to the form of a triptych icon can also be found in the circular motif Vanessa Bell used with frequency in Charleston.
decoration. In the 1917 decorations Vanessa Bell made in Duncan Grant’s Charleston bedroom, Vanessa painted stylized triptychs, central circles taking the place of a central icon flanked on either side by two, smaller circles as a triptych panel’s “wings.” Above the fireplace in Grant’s room, Vanessa Bell translated the gold ground of a central icon into a central golden circle, supported on either side by smaller circles, painted as if marbled *opus sectile* (Fig. 5.3).

Another abstract reference to the icon and devotional altar can be found in Omega work. In a 1916 carpet design Fry made for Omega, Fry created a collage of colored geometric shapes in black, burnt orange, gold, teal, and lavender (Fig. 5.4). On top of a large black circle with two concentric, burnt orange bands, Fry placed a large, central lavender square. Within this lavender square, Fry created a stylized geometric altar. Two rectilinear golden wings opened and flanked a central rectangle composed of a black base, thin bright orange line, and larger, central, burnt-orange rectangle. Grant created a similar form in his 1913 book cover, made for Clive Bell and currently at Charleston (Fig. 5.5). Here, Grant’s design suggested a double-door altar, the orange rectangles bordering the front of the book giving way to inner “doors” of black rectilinear forms on either side of a central rectangular panel. Above this, Grant, referencing Vanessa Bell’s abstracted icon circular design, included a golden circle, suggesting a golden central icon revealed between two panels and set upon an altar.

Architectural designs evoking the altar and icon appear throughout Charleston. Clive Bell’s Charleston bedroom had previously served as Vanessa Bell’s studio. Here, in 1917, she composed a geometric design on her wall using paint and wallpaper. Though the original appearance of this wall-altar when Vanessa used the room as her studio is unknown, one can assume that it functioned in 1917 much as it did under Clive Bell’s direction: as a framing device to showcase a central painting or portrait. Vanessa’s design consisted of two parallel lines of
mint green rectangles with a central rectangle made of star, rosette, and diamond-patterned wallpaper. In Clive Bell’s adaptation of Vanessa’s design, he hung a c. 1800 family heirloom portrait, presumed to depict two female ancestors in his family, in the center of the rectangular wallpaper panel. Two mint-green rectangles offset the portrait from the surrounding space. Clive Bell’s interpretation distinguished the central image from its surroundings, and isolated it, as if an icon presented for veneration on an altar (Fig. 5.6). A similar reference to icons and altars as a framing device is found in Grant’s studio. To the left of the studio entrance, red painted walls offset a dusky-grey painted doorway, distinguishing the doorway from the rest of the studio. In the center of the doorway, either Vanessa Bell or Grant affixed a Cézanne representation, marking the Cézanne, in the artists’ studio iteration, as the central icon to be worshipped.

An even more direct compositional parallel between the secular designs at Charleston and the design of religious icons, icon triptychs, and altars, can be found in Vanessa Bell’s and Grant’s paint box designs. With two vertical doors, or “wings,” opening to reveal the venerated paint tubes within, the paint boxes already assumed the form of a triptych panel altarpiece, and both Grant and Vanessa Bell embraced this evocation in their painted decorations. In 1913 Grant painted the inner panels of his paint storage box as “Adam” and “Eve,” one on each side. Grant’s paint box appears as if a smaller version of Jan van Eyck’s 1432 Ghent Altarpiece, with its Adam and Eve painted outer wings, though in Grant’s iteration paint tubes were substituted for van Eyck’s central Christ enthroned (Fig. 5.7). Similarly, in an archival photograph of Vanessa Bell’s Charleston attic studio, broken down after her death in 1961, it appears as though Vanessa, too, decorated the inner panels of her paint box like a religious altarpiece—though the subject matter for her paint box cannot be determined from the image (Fig. 5.8). In many examples of Bloomsbury artistic and aesthetic contributions, therefore, religious iconography of the icon and
the altar were repurposed for deliberately secular roles, with “art”—whether the materials of art-making, admired art-works, abstract design, or the aesthetic emotion from the artistic encounter—replacing Orthodox religious icons both literally, in the case of Fry, Grant, and Vanessa Bell’s artwork, and figuratively, in function, with the artwork a gateway to access a divine aesthetic emotion in Fry’s writings.

As partial explanation for Fry’s and Bell’s connections between religious expression and secular art, it should be noted that the critics’ formative years in the nineteenth century, and their later professional successes in the twentieth century, bridged an era in which religion occupied both an increased and decreased role in the public imagination. In their text, *Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature*, Mark Knight and Emma Mason state that religion pervaded all aspects of nineteenth-century public, private, intellectual, creative, and political life. However, as argued by Timothy Larsen in *Crisis of Doubt: Honest Faith in Nineteenth-Century England*, by the twentieth century, the degree of religion’s role in the British, secular, professional sphere was gradually downgraded. According to Larsen, whereas in the nineteenth century, membership in a faith outside of the Anglican Church or a lack of religious belief entirely would have denied an individual access to certain professions, in the twentieth century, what Larsen terms “the sense of the populace becoming more indifferent to religion,” resulted in the possibility for “freethinker[s]” to “live as a member of the social elite.” Fry in particular was a beneficiary of the changing attitudes towards religion in England in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries. While his Quaker father had not been allowed to pursue a scientific career at Oxford or Cambridge, due to their requirement that all students be members of the Church of England, this restriction was lifted in 1871. By 1882, the “Oxford and Cambridge Universities Act” abolished “religious tests,” and both Oxford and Cambridge Universities no longer required
students to affirm the Anglican “Thirty-Nine Articles” before obtaining a bachelor’s degree. Fry, as a Quaker, was then able to pursue the education at King’s College, Cambridge, his father had always wanted for himself.

Frances Spalding, in her 2005 *The Bloomsbury Group*, attributes the formation of the Bloomsbury group of intellectuals as a whole to these shifting societal ideas on religion. Spalding claims that when Bell, Leonard Woolf, and Thoby Stephen entered Cambridge, it was in the “aftermath of a religious crisis,” partly stimulated by Charles Darwin’s 1859 *Origin of Species*. With the notion of evolution, combined with universities now open to religious dissenters or faiths outside of the Church of England, intellectual inquiry needed to find a new point of origin; no longer would calls to the divine and the Bible be sufficient to link “ethics and behavior,” and the discussions had by this new generation of Cambridge students necessitated a reexamination of ethical and moral standards. Questions such as “What was the nature of good? How should you live? What philosophy could be found to support and justify the good life?” therefore dominated Cambridge intellectual conversation. One could therefore extrapolate that the wide-reaching and ambitious aims Fry and Bell applied to art were a product of this same line of thinking: a need to re-establish and re-ground aesthetic values within a system removed from organized religion’s authenticating, guiding frameworks.

Yet, despite the twentieth-century promise of increased religious tolerance, acceptance, and Darwin-inspired secularism, Fry and Bell wrote their anti-religious sentiments at the tail end of a period of religious revivalism in England. Larsen’s text argues that far from the “dominance of the theme of the loss of faith or crisis of faith” in much nineteenth-century scholarship, the nineteenth-century Victorians demonstrated instead *increased* religiosity, with a “remarkably high percentage of Secularist leaders” reconverting to Christianity. Similarly, according to
Mark Knight and Emma Mason in *Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature* and Alex Own in *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern*, the rise of what has been termed “Spiritualism” in nineteenth-century England merely transmuted religious ideology into occult beliefs.101

It is important to note that the era of Fry and Bell’s youth was then one in which secularism emerged in response to an ever-increasing religious culture, rather than one in which secularism was the dominant perspective. Common, however, in Larsen’s account of both the Victorian return to faith, and Victorian secularism, is the cultural prominence of intellectual inquiry into the interface between the Bible and religious thought, and contemporary politics.102 Seen through this lens, the vitriol with which Fry, Bell, and their circle critiqued organized religion as well as the degree to which the critics and their circle relied on religious analogy to discuss and create art, were residuals of the nineteenth-century intellectualism in which both Fry and Bell came of age. As a positive or a negative societal force, Fry and Bell’s Victorian predecessors primed them to think about religious practice as it related to a much bigger worldview.103

Similarly, it is important to note that Fry and Bell’s connection between art and religion was the latest in a long line of turn-of-the-century explorations of art’s potential to occupy, parallel, or connect with a devotional framework. As described by Pericles Lewis in his 2010 *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel*, Anglo-Modernist authors experimented with ways to adopt the “structure of faith,” religious language, and religious ideas for the purpose of providing insight not into supernatural miracles, but rather into transformative experiences “that originated in the ordinary world.”104 In art, nineteenth- and twentieth-century aesthetic movements occurring across England and the European Continent linked secular art and
religious expression. The nineteenth century rise of neo-Catholicism or conversion to Catholicism was prevalent in England, France, and Germany. Art groups such as the Catholic German Nazarene artists, for example, merged newfound belief with aesthetics, and in England, the Pre-Raphaelite artistic group embraced Catholicism and Tractarianism as one means of articulating their anti-establishment ideals. Later in the nineteenth century, the Aesthetic movement transformed the overt religiosity of the Pre-Raphaelites into a more immaterial worship of beauty, with Simeon Solomon’s different representations of religious figures, as in his 1870 *The Mystery of Faith* (Fig. 5.9), signaling not the practice of the specific faiths, but rather symbolic testaments to a divine-like altar of beauty. Though differently expressed from their predecessors, Fry’s and Bell’s connections between religious feeling and secular art were testaments to their nineteenth- and twentieth-century artistic and intellectual precedents.

Yet, what makes Fry, Bell, and Bloomsbury’s engagement with questions of spirituality and art unique among their peers and predecessors were the consequences of this conjunction for Fry’s and Bell’s aesthetic program. In Fry and Bell’s affect-centric Formalism, artistic quality was determined by form’s ability to inspire an aesthetic emotion. Coded through the language and model of religious devotion, the stakes for creating, encountering, and promoting art which inspired aesthetic emotion were then dramatically heightened. If a work of art carried one “out of life and into ecstasy,” an ecstasy which was equaled only by contemplation of a divine being, then the artistic encounter was not only elevated to an encounter of far greater importance and significance than merely the experience of paint on canvas, but the urgency with which one should and must support works which inspired such a reaction was heightened as well. To equate art with the divine was also an exercise, in part, of self-validation for Fry and Bell. As critics whose job it was to argue for the important place art held and should hold in public
consciousness, a characterization of the aesthetic experience as akin to divine revelation transformed Fry’s and Bell’s roles as critics into a divinely ordained mission.

However, if one considers Fry and Bell’s vocal antipathy for organized religion, despite co-opting models of religious expression, the implications of Fry and Bell’s religiously tinged aesthetic encounter shift. The vehemence of Fry’s and Bell’s critiqued organized religion combined with the extent to which Fry, Bell, Vanessa Bell, and Grant relied upon religious verbal, rhetorical, and visual models to define and defend Modern art re-characterized Fry’s and Bell’s aesthetic spirituality as an alternative belief system and devotional model to the doctrinal religions of their day. For example, Fry and Bell made concerted efforts to distinguish organized religion and organized religious emotion from art and aesthetic emotion. As early as 1885-1889, Fry made this division key to his aesthetic model. In “Aestheticism + Symbolism,” Fry noted a correlation, but not a causation, between religion and expression in art, as his ideal of a “purely aesthetic art” may have borrowed the trappings of religious iconography but divorced such iconography from religious meaning. In his review of Bell’s 1914 Art, published in The Nation, Fry claimed that Bell’s central thesis was that the “aesthetic emotion” had “a claim as absolute as the religious emotion has upon those who feel it,” resulting in aesthetic emotion of such an importance that it “intimately and conclusively” satisfied one’s “spiritual nature.” In this analogy, Fry was very clear to use religious emotion as a separate, merely comparative example to aesthetic emotion: “a claim as absolute as [italics mine] the religious emotion” but not directly as religious emotion. In Art, Bell devoted a subsection of his discussion of “Art and Life” to the topic of “Art and Religion,” where he ultimately argued that art was like religion, but separate from it. While artists and mystics could perhaps be considered twin poles, and art and religion “twin manifestations” of “the religious spirit,” Bell insisted “on the distinction between
‘religion,’ in the ordinary acceptation of the word, and ‘the religious spirit’ being stated beyond all possibility of cavil.”

One of the most common methods Fry and Bell used to distinguish spirituality in art from organized religion was the degree to which they outlined historical divisions between currents of art and currents of life. In his 1917 “Art and Life,” Fry noted that the “greatest revolution in life” was the change from “Paganism to Christianity,” a revolution which didn’t produce a corresponding momentous shift in artistic production: the Roman artistic subjects simply “changed and became mainly Christian, but the treatment was so exactly similar” to that of Pagan Roman artwork. Bell in Art claimed that the relationship between moments of religious fervor, “great religious ages,” and the production of art works possessing “the spiritual sense,” were correlative, not causal. Religion may have been “the whetstone [by] which men sharpen the spiritual sense,” but it was not the reason for the ecstasy produced by and through the experience of art. Such a point was made more forcefully when Bell dedicated section III of Art to the pinnacle of artistic production, the rise and fall of a period of art beginning with the glories of Byzantium, which he entitled the “Christian Slope.” Yet, again, the link between religion and art producing religious effects was correlative, at best. By way of clarification, Bell stated:

Let me insist once again that, when I speak of the Christian ferment or the Christian slope, I am not thinking of dogmatic religion. I am thinking of that religious spirit of which Christianity, with its dogmas and rituals, is one manifestation, Buddhism another…So, when I speak of Christian art, I mean that this art was one product of that state of enthusiasm of which the Christian Church is another.

Bell continued:

Christian art is not an expression of specific Christian emotions; but it was only when men had been roused by Christianity that they began to feel the emotions that express themselves in form. It was Christianity that put people into that state of emotional turmoil from which sprang Christian art.
“Christian art” heralded the emotional fervor necessary to create aesthetic emotion; yet, despite the name, what was “Christian” about “Christian art” had little to do with the Christian faith itself, or with Christian subject matter—it referred instead to the period of time in which the same sentiments behind the production of religious emotion enabled artistic excellence in the form of works which induced aesthetic emotion. These examples in which Fry and Bell underscored both the rightness of art and aesthetic emotion defined through devotional terms, and the distance between aesthetic spirituality and the devotions of organized religion, positioned the ecstasies of aesthetic emotion as the antithesis, and the alternative to organized religious feeling and practice.

In addition, Fry attempted to assert a divide between his use of the terms “spirit” and “spiritual” in a secular context, and the associations of the terms in a religious context. This divide took the form of Fry’s struggle to comfortably use the religiously derived words “spirit” or “spiritual” as representative of his ideal artistic encounter. From his earliest texts onwards, Fry variously attempted to define and distinguish his interpretation of these words from any connotations linked to organized religion. In drafts of his Cambridge extension lectures, dating from between 1894-1910, Fry crossed out the term “spiritual” to describe changing needs in art circumscribed by the birth of both Christianity and the cult of Isis around the fall of the Roman Empire, and replaced it with the word “mystic.” In a lecture on “Comedic” art from about 1905–7, Fry excised the word “spiritual” and replaced it with “emotional.” These substitutions suggest that Fry was conflicted about his use of the term “spiritual,” finding it an incorrect, and perhaps too culturally charged of a word to fully encapsulate the emotion he wanted to describe.116

In other examples, Fry qualified his use of “spirit” by including brief asides by way of definition. In a draft of one of four lectures from 1910-1919 on “Principles of Pictorial Design,”
Fry included a vague, but general definition of the “spirit,” claiming that the most important aspect of life, in addition to art, was the “moral or spiritual” relationship, which, in parenthesis, Fry noted he was “(using word in widest sense...).” In a 1920-1929 manuscript “The Universality of Rhythm,” Fry noted that he defined spirit “in the widest sense of our whole apparatus of apprehension and feeling.” By 1926, in an address to female students, Fry again qualified his use of “spirit” and “spiritual,” claiming that he used the term “Spiritual in rather an unusual sense,” to mean “the play of intellect as [sic] the wit and of the sensibilities to art in all its forms.” One of the Fry’s most lengthy direct attempts to define and therefore explain his use of the terms “spirit” or “spirituality” occurred in his Last Lectures. Here, Fry claimed:

I use ‘spiritual’ throughout in a rather special, but I think necessary, sense. I mean by it all those human faculties and activities which are over and above our mere existence as living organisms. Used in this sense it avoids any prejudgment of what particular faculties come into play, whether intellectual, affectional or what not. I say then that the ideal work of art is the outcome of a free spiritual activity and its reception implies a correspondingly free spiritual activity on the part of the appreciator.

In his attempts to describe the transcendent aesthetic encounter, Fry’s continued replacement of “spirit,” and his impulse to define and defend his use of the word within his writings implies Fry’s dissatisfaction with the organized religious associations with the term, and therefore the distinction between his own use of the word in a secular context.

Most directly, Fry and Bell defined the experience of art as a form of secular spiritualism through their frequent assertions that art was a religion in itself. In 1930, in notes on an Italian art exhibition, Fry expounded on the specifics of the “religion of art,” itemizing the ways in which “like other religions, [it] is liable to excesses of zeal, and when a masterpieces has become a holy object, laid, as it were, under a taboo.” In Art, Bell claimed that “Art and Religion are very much alike,” and repeated the ideas throughout Art that “art is a religion,” or “religion is art,”
or “art has existed as a religion concurrent with all other religions,” or “Art is the most universal and the most permeant of all forms of religious expression,” or “art is the one religion that is always shaping its form to fit the spirit,” or “Art remains an undogmatic religion.”123 In his 1934 Enjoying Pictures, Bell chastised those “Philistines” who mocked the idea of making a religion of art for “if to live by and for ecstasies that are not of this hum-drum world is to be religious,” art and aesthetics “have a lively faith in another, a better, but not a future life…” as art “does work miracles.”124 In the above examples, it is clear that art and its experience represented an alternative belief system for Fry and Bell. For Fry and Bell, the importance of art and its experience merited the use of the same descriptive techniques and language used to describe divine religious encounters, albeit in a secular context.

And here, with Fry and Bell’s aesthetic secular spiritualism the driving force, Byzantine art assumed a role of primary importance. Like their other praised art works, Byzantine art was described by Fry and Bell through devotional analogy, coded by the critics as transformative and otherworldly. In a 1911 Slade lecture on “Monumental Painting,” for instance, Fry described Ravenna’s Byzantine mosaic figures as “real celestial figures living and moving in a world of their own, as remote as possible from ours but grasped none the less with vivid certitude by the artist who reveals it.” Fry noted that Byzantine art provided a visual language which could “create figures with the impress of supernatural power.”125 And yet, unlike secular works described through similarly ecstatic terms, Byzantine art was a historically Christian, religious art. As a result, Byzantine art became an ideal model through which Fry and Bell could articulate how their concept of artistic experience as secular spiritualism worked. Fry and Bell’s characterization and praise of the religious art of the Byzantine Empire poignantly demonstrated
how the aesthetic experience of good form could be akin to religious ecstasy, yet independent of a religious context.

The Byzantine art Fry and Bell predominately cited (such as the Hagia Sophia mosaics and the San Vitale mosaics in Ravenna) were overtly religious mosaics on Old and New Testament subjects found in the context of houses of worship. Yet, the intensity of Byzantine art’s connection to organized religion as inspiration and in use paradoxically underscored the distinction between aesthetic emotion and religious emotion, as Fry and Bell’s writings transformed artworks designed for religious purposes into purely secular vehicles for religiously inspired expression. In his 1912 “An Appreciation of the Swenigorodskoi Enamels,” Fry pointed out that while the Byzantine enamels’ Christian subjects were common types, the Byzantine enamels specifically had “no taint of the pastiche or the replica” because they had “vitality” “in a high degree,” a vitality independent of and unaffected by the triteness of its religious subjects.126 Writing to G.L. Dickinson in 1913, Fry noted that “the new thing” (Byzantine Ravenna mosaics of the sixth century) “wasn’t a religious thing,” though what it did was create “this new life which crystallized out into the spirituality of the Middle Ages and St. Francis.”127 Fry echoed this sentiment throughout his career, and in his posthumous 1935 “Henri Matisse,” Fry isolated Byzantine art from “Christian art” by claiming that while the rise of Christian art brought with it an increase in symbolic expression, Byzantine art was the antidote, as Byzantine art, despite being an inherently Christian, religious art, was “expressive of the recovery of the objet d’art.”128

Bell, who argued in Art that periods of great religious activity were correlative to periods of great artistic activity, cited Byzantine art—specifically “Sta. Sophia at Constantinople, and the sixth century churches and mosaics at Ravenna”—as the moment when “the Christian slope
establishes itself in Europe.” For Bell, the Christian slope in art was the pinnacle of post-Classical artistic achievement, and correlated with the rise of Christian art (exemplified by Byzantine art, relatively chronologically) but separated from any actual religious causation. Bell’s text disavowed the religious inspiration and devotional intentions of Byzantine art, claiming that the Byzantines, while believing themselves to be religious and working in a religious vein while producing religious works, created superior works of art despite not because of their subjects. Bell echoed this point in Since Cézanne, where he noted that though most “of us know…only a little about…Byzantine theology,” Byzantine works possessed “permanent,” “universal,” and “purely aesthetic” qualities, identifying religion as an instigator, but not a cause of Byzantine art’s value.

The extent to which iterations of Byzantine art placed distance between a religious-like expression and organized religion soon became a testament to quality in Fry’s assessments of Byzantine artistic production. For example, in lecture II, “Epic Art,” from a lecture series from 1905-1907, Fry, in an excised passage, denigrated “the mosaic workers of the early Middle Ages,” identifying as examples written in the text’s margins the Byzantine monuments in both Monreale and Torcello, for their “style of extreme rigidity corresponding to the ideas that were imposed on them by Christian dogma.” In his 1911 lectures on Monumental Painting, Fry again denigrated Monreale’s mosaics as inferior Byzantine, caused by dogmatic Christianity which was as “artificially expressed as the Greek worship of physical perfection was in the Pediment of the Parthenon.” Similarly, in a 1929 review of an exhibition of Russian icons at the Victoria and Albert museum, Fry argued for the superiority of Russian Byzantine over the “general Byzantine framework” by claiming that Russian Byzantine works had a greater “passion for the most abstract religious ideas, ideas altogether withdrawn from the common
world of human life and nature” and therefore were “far more remote from us than the Byzantine art out of which it came.” Earlier, non-Russian Byzantine artists treated the “symbolic expressions” which the Russians eventually adopted with a “certain objectivity as forming part of a pageant and ceremonial.” The Russian icon artist, in contrast, was “bent exclusively on the inner vision which the contemplation of divine beings and sacred histories aroused” and imbued even the “same formula for rocks” found in earlier Byzantine works with an intensity and unreality. Quality in Byzantine artistic production to Fry was inversely proportionate to the degree of religious stringency: the more dogmatic the religious environment, the less high-quality Byzantine work was to be found.

Fry and Bell’s assertion of Byzantine art’s religious context of generation as correlative rather than causal of the affective potential of Byzantine form subsequently enabled Fry and Bell to naturalize discussions of Modern art through religious terminology. Byzantine art’s connection to religion was endemic to its creation, subject matter, and historical moment, making descriptions of Byzantine art using religious terminology familiar, appropriate, and organic. When works of Modern, secular art were compared favorably to Byzantine works, it was then a logical and easy transition to think of the Modern works through the same terms used to describe the Byzantine ones. In his 1904 “Three Pictures in Tempera by William Blake,” Fry claimed that both Giotto and William Blake both took from Byzantine art “the sentiment of supernatural dignity” and “superhuman purposefulness of the gestures.” Similarly, Blake’s inspiration from Byzantine art was “directly and divinely revealed to him,” which, while Fry remained a bit skeptical of Blake’s otherworldly contacts with Byzantine art, suggesting instead that Blake may have merely seen illuminated manuscripts or prints of Byzantine works, Fry did not take issue with Byzantine art as a divinely connected inspiration. In Art, Bell parodied and yet,
embraced, common knowledge Biblical phrases to explain the arrival of Byzantine art and subsequently Post-Impressionist art. He stated that “Post-Impressionism is nothing but the reassertion of the first commandment of art—Thou shalt create form. By this assertion it shakes hands across the ages with the Byzantine primitives…” Bell here coded both Byzantine and Post-Impressionist art as subservient to a divine command, though one concerned not with a Judeo-Christian deity, but with art. In a letter to G. L. Dickinson from 1913, Fry couldn’t pinpoint just what the “new excitement” was that Byzantine art engendered which carried forward into the Middle Ages; he knew it “wasn’t a religious thing,” but beyond that, he could just identify it as an undefinable marker of “new life,” foreshadowing a future application of a similar characterization of an indefinable aesthetic emotion to discuss the secular work of Cézanne. The suspended disbelief necessary to disavow the meaningfulness of Byzantine art’s religious functionality and content modelled for inherently secular, Modern art the intensity of aesthetic emotion, as an emotion in keeping with but separate from the emotions generated through organized religious practice.

Fry’s 1915-1916 Omega corner cupboard (Fig. 5.10), which overtly copies the composition and placement of a Russian Byzantine devotional icon but with decidedly secular subject matter, offers direct proof that Bloomsbury’s Byzantium was a means through which Fry and Bell could establish the gravity of aesthetic emotion as connected to a religious-like sentiment, but divorced from actual organized religion. This corner cupboard was part of a furniture suite made by Omega and designed by Fry for Lala Vandervelde, the wife of the Belgian ambassador to England. It is thought that this triangular corner cupboard was originally designed to go on top of a larger cupboard. I propose, alternatively, the possibility that this triangular corner cupboard may not have been attached to another, larger piece of furniture, by
virtue of the extent to which in shape, placement on the wall, and decorative organization, Fry’s 1915-1916 corner cupboard appears as a secular incarnation of one of the hallmarks of Russian Orthodox (Russian Byzantine) personal devotional practice: the corner icon, a Russian Orthodox icon placed in what was known as the Krasnyi Ugol, or “Red or Beautiful Corner.” According to Oleg Tarasov, icons were placed in the “‘main corner’ of a Russian peasant house” to transform that corner into “the ‘High Jerusalem,’ the ‘window to Heaven,’” or “the ‘image of the other world.’”

Fry’s corner-cupboard should be viewed as part of a Modernist art historical tradition of interpreting the Russian-Byzantine or Russian Orthodox corner house icon through a secular lens. For instance, Kazimir Malevich began his Suprematist movement at the “0.10 Last Futurist Exhibition” in 1915 in Petrograd by suspending his 1915 Black Square in a corner above his other Suprematist works as if replacement for the Russian Orthodox corner house icon, and Vladimir Tatlin’s competing contributions to the 0.10 exhibition, also referenced the Orthodox corner house icon with the placement of his corner-counter reliefs. In Fry’s iteration, like the corner house icon, Fry’s cupboard occupied the corner of the room. If it was not intended to be attached to a larger furniture cabinet, the cupboard would have hung suspended from the corner. The corner cupboard’s positioning—in a corner, with a flat, rectangular face on top of a triangular back base—is consistent with the positioning and appearance of a corner house icon.

More specifically, the decoration of Fry’s corner cupboard links the work to the Russian Orthodox icon corner tradition. In Fry’s cupboard, the subject is a seemingly banal, traditional still life: two flowers (what appear to be red lady slipper flowers) reside in a conical grey vase. An ovoid, extending from the inside of the vase to the edges of the flowers, encloses the flowers within a grey, Cubist-fractured background. The ovoid, flowers, and vase are present against a
rectangular background painted gold. This central rectangle is bordered by a gold, black, and gold striped pattern on the top and bottom, and a gold, black, and green striped pattern on the left and right sides. On either side of the central rectangle are smaller, grey rectangles. The entire, larger rectangular composition is bordered on the top by golden lines, and on the left and right sides by burnt orange lines. Yet, the central composition directly invokes the format and coloration of a religious icon. The two red flowers, one more vertical, the other smaller and bent, act as visual surrogates for iconic representations of the Virgin Mary and infant Jesus, and, like figures of the Virgin and Child, are here similarly contained by a nimbus—the grey ovoid shape. Like the typical corner house icon, the central figures (the flowers and the vase) are against a gold, Heavenly ground. Secular subject matter—the floral still life—is here elevated in stature by virtue of Fry rendering it as if a religious, Russian-Byzantine corner house icon. Fry’s decision to render the mundane flowers and vase through the clearly identifiable pictorial format and structure of a Russian-Byzantine corner house icon suggests that while the devotional religious content of the corner house icon has been removed, the intensity of a spiritual, religious-like function remains in a secular context; in so doing, Fry’s corner-cupboard underscores the importance of Byzantium and Byzantine iconography to the articulation of Fry and Bell’s ideal of an aesthetic secular spiritualism.

In conclusion, Fry and Bell’s aesthetic program was one directly tied to the desire to offer art as an alternative to organized religion. With descriptive language, secular devotional rhetorical structures, and models of art-making taken from Christian religious expressions, yet presented as counter to those same structures and models found in organized religion, Fry and Bell redefined art and aesthetic appreciation as a secular spiritual encounter. Byzantine art was critical to the success of Fry and Bell’s aesthetic secular spiritualism. With its inherent link to
organized religion in impetus and iconography, Byzantine art provided a poignant example of art’s ability to produce a religious-like effect, but outside of the confines of organized religion. Byzantine art also provided the iconographic model for religious icons which Fry, Vanessa Bell, and Duncan Grant co-opted to underline and emphasize the importance and transformative resonance of decidedly secular subject matter. Byzantine art’s role as an ideal art in Fry and Bell’s aesthetic program was then inseparable from the lofty aims Fry and Bell held for good form, and good art. With Byzantine art as an ideal, in Fry and Bell’s aesthetics, the power of good art and good form could be nothing less than a spiritual experience.


4. Leonard Woolf reviewed Sigmund Freud’s Psychopathy of Everyday Life in 1914, and Virginia and Leonard Woolf’s Hogarth Press published the first English translation of Interpretation of Dreams by Freud in 1921. Fry and Bell also mentioned psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic concepts in their writings. For example, in his article “Children’s Drawings” from 1917, Fry identifies the designation “primitive” for art forms as applying “not so much to a period in time as to a particular psychological attitude which occurs most frequently in those periods we call primitive, but which is not universal even in these periods.” Roger Fry, “Children’s Drawings” (1917), in A Roger Fry Reader, ed. Christopher Reed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 267. Bell’s Charleston library included such texts as John M. Thornburn’s 1925 Art and the Unconscious, and Bell also demonstrated knowledge of psychoanalysis and Freud’s works in his critique of both. In his 1924 “Dr. Freud on Art” in a
1924 edition of *The Nation and The Athenaeum*, Bell claimed that psychoanalysis has “nothing to do with art” as art “has nothing to do with dreams,” the artist instead being “a good deal wider awake” and aware “than most people.” Clive Bell, “Dr. Freud on Art,” *The Nation and The Athenaeum* 25, No. 23 (September 6, 1924): 690-691. In his text on Proust, Bell distinguished between “art” and psychoanalysis as a scientific discipline, claiming that “any intelligent disciple of Freud should be equipped to write a psychological novel, and if novel-writing were a science and not an art, doubtless the novels of psycho-analytically minded authors would be less unreadable than they usually are.” Clive Bell, *Proust* (London: Hogarth Press, 1928), 58. Fry, though knowledgeable about psychoanalysis, was skeptical of the application and use of psychoanalysis in art history and aesthetic analysis, a point reinforced by Christopher Reed. Christopher Reed, “Revision and Design,” in *A Roger Fry Reader*, 313. In “The Artist and Psycho-analysis,” for example, Fry demonstrated his understanding of the field, but also isolated art from psychoanalysis as methodologies. Roger Fry, “The Artist and Psycho-Analysis” (1924), in *A Roger Fry Reader*, 351–65.

5. Maud Lavin comes closest to the assessment of this chapter. Lavin ascribes Fry’s characterization of the aesthetic emotion as well as Cézanne’s creative process to occult-related mysticism and transcendentalism as a furtherance of Fry’s Formalist “rejection of the social, material world,” but does not directly relate Fry’s interest in mysticism to and as a critique of organized religion. Lavin interprets Fry’s writings as an idea of “contemplation [as] the entry to a higher spirituality” which “can be defined as mysticism.” Maud Lavin, “Roger Fry, Cézanne, and Mysticism,” *Arts Magazine* 58, no. 1 (September 1983): 99-100. Benjamin Harvey identifies Fry’s “verbal inadequacy” in the face of Cézanne as a “sign of the aesthetic value of Cézanne’s art,” and a residual of Fry’s Quaker upbringing, specifically the Quaker belief that silence and silent meditation were ways to experience divine revelation. Benjamin Harvey, “The Rest is Silence: The Senses of Roger Fry’s Endings,” *Journal of Art Historiography, Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 9 (December 2013): 1–13, accessed November 9, 2017, https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2013/12/harvey.pdf. However, in contrast to Harvey, I argue that the depth of Fry’s engagement with schemas of religious devotion and expression extended beyond any parallels one may find between his aesthetic program and his specific religious background.

6. This idea, of a creative medium acting as a spiritually inflected replacement for organized religion in the British Modern era, is one which has been addressed in the context of Modernist literature. In Pericles Lewis’ 2010 *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel*, Lewis claims that Modernist writers such as Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot, and W. B. Yeats, among others, sought to capture what he terms the “secular sacred” in their texts, a “form of transcendent or ultimate meaning to be discovered in this world, without reference to the supernatural.” In the pursuit of the secular sacred through their writings, the authors ultimately sought to “offer alternative accounts of the role of religion in modern life” and to “provide a substitute for, the sorts of shared normative values that institutional religion no longer adequately supplied” in the twentieth century. Pericles Lewis, *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 19-22, 25.


8. Ibid.


11. Ibid., 42.

12. Ibid., 42–44.

13. Ibid., 45.


15. Roger Fry, *Cézanne: A Study of his Development* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1927), 53. Fry did attempt to temper his critique of Cézanne’s character by qualifying his comment, stating that Cézanne’s belief in the Catholic Church was “not from any religious conviction but because ‘Rome was so strong.’” Cézanne may have proclaimed himself a member of the Catholic Church, and observed its rituals and doctrines, but Cézanne didn’t really believe in Catholicism—he was merely afraid of its power.

16. Ibid., 37.


18. Elizabeth Fry was the daughter-in-law of Roger Fry’s great-great-grandfather’s brother.


20. Ibid., 179.


22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.


29. Kenneth Clark, introduction to *Last Lectures*, xi.


32. Ibid., 54.


35. Ibid., 16.

36. Ibid.

37. Fry, quoted in ibid., 21.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid., 25.

40. For example, Woolf recounts how, at Fry’s first boarding school, he learned firsthand the disconnect between religious practice and religious behavior. He described bewilderment at his lack of knowledge or understanding of sex, despite having “read through the whole of the Bible in the years of my preparatory school.” Fry was “without the faintest enlightenment on [sex] being borne in upon me even by the smuttiest parts of the Old Testament” as his mother “had so firmly impressed on me the supreme virtue of the act of reading the Bible and of its incomparable prophylactic power” that he relied on the act of reading, not the substance of the texts, as a talisman against the anxieties of the day. One consequence of this unthinking “fetishism” of the Bible, in Woolf’s terms, was Fry’s claim that he “did not exercise my intelligence or imagination much upon what I read.” The other consequence was that Fry’s lack of understanding of sex led him to misunderstand the sexual abuse perpetuated by one of the clergymen at the school. According to Fry, this clergyman would engage in a ritualistic flogging of students with other students forced to watch. Traumatized by what he had witnessed, what Fry would later realize was a “sado-masochistic ritual,” Fry had difficulty reconciling the disconnect between a respected clergyman and a man who could engage in these terrible acts of violence. To this event Fry attributed a nascent pacifism, as Fry claimed that his experience of the
clergyman’s abuse resulted in a “morbid horror of all violence between men so that I can scarcely endure any simulation of it on the stage.” Ibid., 34.

41. Ibid., 39.

42. Woolf cited Fry’s response to his mother after a first visit from McTaggart, apologizing for their disappointment in McTaggart but claiming that he knew they would feel differently about him if they could only see him alone as Fry did. Fry, quoted in ibid., 40. On October 18, 1885, he wrote to his mother, trying to defend McTaggart, as he was “sorry if my friendship should be a cause of anxiety to you.” Fry tried to assuage his mother’s fears regarding McTaggart as a negative influence, claiming that “he is a fellow of really fine character in many ways” and that while Fry had “often wished and prayed that he might be convinced of what we believe to be the truth,” he did not “think the want of Christianity ought to debar me from a friendship.” Though, to appease his mother, Fry noted that their “friendship can never be of the very highest kind.” He concluded his correspondence essentially chiding his mother for thinking that McTaggart could exert such a negative influence on Fry’s faith, stating: “I confess I do not feel that there is any danger to my own Christianity from his companionship, as I hope my Christianity is not so weak a structure as not to stand the proximity of doubt.” Roger Fry to Lady Fry, October 18, 1885, Letters of Roger Fry, 1:108–9.


44. Woolf, Roger Fry, 46, 48.

45. Ibid., 41.

46. Ibid., 48.

47. In a letter to N. Wedd, Fry stated that he and his friends went on a boat trip, which resulted in a “very pleasant little service together, Pain leading in prayer and I preaching, followed by a hymn,” while the “rest went for beer.” Fry to N. Wedd, August 2, 1889, Letters of Roger Fry, 1:123. Fry did, however, continue to be involved in Quaker causes and associate himself with Quaker institutions. He was involved with his sister Margerey’s Quaker relief work in France during the First World War, and his wife, Helen Fry, was institutionalized at the famous, progressive Quaker asylum, The Retreat, from 1910 until her death.


49. Ibid., 63.

50. Ibid., 77.


53. Bell, Enjoying Pictures, 93.

55. Ibid., 53.

56. Ibid., 70–71.

57. Ibid., 68.


61. Ibid., 142.

62. Ibid., 175.


72. Bell mentioned Aristotle in *On British Freedom*, for example. However, one might assume that the study of Classical texts was an essential part of his Cambridge education regardless. Clive Bell, *On British Freedom* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1923), 54. Similarly, Fry discussed Aristotle in a letter to his father Sir Edward Fry around 1905, but, again, knowledge of Classical texts would have been a standard part of Fry’s education. Roger Fry to Sir Edward Fry, June 8, 1905, *Letters of Roger Fry*, 1:239–41.


74. Ibid., 9.

75. For the connection between Aquinas and negative theology, see ibid., 5; and Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (1256-1274), trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Benzinger Brothers, 1947), pt I, question 14, points 2–3, https://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa/home.html. In *Guide for the Perplexed*, written in the twelfth century, for example, Maimonides claimed, “Know that for the human mind there are certain objects of perception which are within the scope of its nature and capacity; on the other hand, there are, amongst things which actually exist, certain objects which the mind can in no way and by no means grasp: the gates of perception are closed against it…You, however, know how all these subjects are connected together; for there is nothing else in existence but [The Divine] and His works, the latter including all existing things besides Him; we can only obtain a knowledge of Him through His works; His works give evidence of His existence, and show what must be assumed concerning Him, that is to say, what must be attributed to Him either affirmatively or negatively…Again, many propositions based on the nature of numbers and the properties of geometrical figures, are useful in examining things which must be negatived in reference to [The Divine], and these negations will lead us to further inferences…We have already, on several occasions, shown in this treatise that everything that implies corporeality or passiveness, is to be negatived in reference to [The Divine], for all passiveness implies change; and the agent producing that state is undoubtedly different from the object affected by it; and if [The Divine] could be affected in any way whatever, another being beside Him would act on Him and cause change in Him. All kinds of non-existence must likewise be negatived in reference to Him; no perfection whatever can therefore be imagined to be at one time absent from Him, and at another present in Him: for if this were the case, He would [at a certain time] only be potentially perfect.” Moses Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, trans. M. Friedländer, 2nd ed. (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), 40, 45–46, 78.

76. Evidence for Bloomsbury knowledge of Aquinas can be found in John Maynard Keynes’s list of books bequeathed to King’s College in 1946. His donated works included two texts by Aquinas, which Keynes listed as “Aquinas Caten and Aedne Zamir 1475 and Aquinas Quodlibus Religionen(?) 1475.” John Maynard Keynes, “Accession Lists of Philosophical and Literary Works,” 1920–49, Personal Papers, JMK/PP/55A, John Maynard Keynes Papers, King’s College Archive Centre, Cambridge, UK.

77. Fry, *Cézanne*, 2.

78. Ibid., 3.

80. Ibid.

81. Fry, “Blake and British Art,” (1914) in A Roger Fry Reader, 155.


83. Ibid.


87. Rorem, Pseudo-Dionysius, 205, 210. David Morgan defines Eastern Orthodox (modern-day Byzantine) icons as a “channel of grace that visualizes the holy figure, who directs grace to the believer.” David Morgan, The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 61. Hans Belting illustrates the different functions of religious icons, ranging from the use of “symbolic, or rather ideographic, vocabulary to make their point” to icons that illustrate more complex ideas via “artistic, or better, psychological means.” In Belting’s telling, as for other scholars, the icon was not merely a passive image, but rather active and illustrative, a gateway to understand Christian liturgy or connect with the divine. Hans Belting, “An Image and Its Function in the Liturgy: The Man of Sorrows in Byzantium,” Dumbarton Oaks Papers 34/35 (1980/1981): 10. For a summary of texts relating to the pre-Modern and Medieval period and visuality, see Cynthia Hahn’s "Visuality," in A Companion to Medieval Art: Romanesque and Gothic in Northern Europe, ed. Conrad Rudolph (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 45-64.


90. Roger Fry, “Reflections on Germany and Its Art Collections,” manuscript, 1928, REF1/27, Fry Papers.


92. Ibid., 13.


95. Larsen, *Crisis of Doubt*, 246-249.


99. Ibid. Indeed, that both religion and critiques of religion occupied a good amount of non-art space on Fry’s reading lists, found in undated notebooks believed to have been composed between 1900 and 1911, indicates the prominence of questions of religion in the intellectual circle of Fry and his milieu. Fry’s lists included, for example, L. W. King’s 1899 *Babylonian Religion and Mythology*, an unidentified text entitled “Myth Magic and Religion,” a text on Baruch Spinoza’s life and work, an unidentified text entitled “La Doctrine de la Trinite La Christ of Clerpe” [sic], Alfred Firmin Loisy’s *La Religion d’Israël*, George Tyrrell’s 1910 *Christianity at the Crossroads*, T. R. Glover’s *The Conflict of Religions in the Early Roman Empire*, an unidentified text entitled “Protestantism and Art,” Vladimir G. Simkhovitch’s *Towards an Understanding of Jesus*, and Albert Schweitzer’s *The Search for the Historical Jesus*, among other texts which focused on religious critique or religious history. Roger Fry, Notebook Diaries, 1900–11, REFS/2, Fry Papers.

100. Larsen, *Crisis of Doubt*, vii, 10. Larsen extends this argument to demonstrate how the Bible featured prominently in Victorian culture in “fascinating and underexplored ways,” and was a “dominant presence in Vicodin though and culture.” Larsen, *A People of One Book*, 1.

101. This shift to occult beliefs is exemplified by the British secularist Annie Bessant’s conversion to Theosophy. Bessant later became the successor to the leader and founder of Theosophy, Helene Patrovna Blavatsky. Knight and Mason, *Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature*, 152–53, 206. See also: Alex Own, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

103. The politics of religion in England in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also appeared in Fry and Bell’s writings. In “Art and Life,” Fry stated that “it would be interesting at this point to consider how far during the nineteenth-century reactionary political and religious thought was inspired primarily by aesthetic consideration—a curious instance of the counter-influence of art on life might perhaps be discovered in the devotees of the Oxford Movement. But this would take us too far afield.” “Art and Life” (1917), in Vision and Design, 6. The Oxford Movement, also known as the “Tractarian Movement,” “Anglo-Catholicism,” or the nineteenth-century Catholic revival in Anglican practice (Larsen, A People of One Book, 11) was a movement of Anglican church members away from the more Protestant traditions of Church of England, and towards the reinstatement of older church traditions closer to Catholicism. Anglican-Catholic practice is often referred to as the “High Church” practice, as opposed to the more Protestant-modeled Anglicanism, which defines “Low Church” practice. Among the Oxford Movement’s devotees, obliquely referenced in Fry’s quote, were the Pre-Raphaelite artists, such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti, John Everett Millais, and Edward Coley Burne-Jones. The implication Fry made here was that artistic innovation, a signal of progress, was inversely related to what Fry coded as the regressive association with the Oxford Movement’s call for greater religiosity, a return to more stringent Catholic, doctrinaire practice.


105. Larsen, A People of One Book, 44.

106. For the Pre-Raphaelite interpretation of the Oxford Movement ideas through a fetishized Medieval past, and for the relationship of the Rossetti family to Tractarianism, see Knight and Mason, Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature, 87, 98–100. Overall, however, Fry and Bell denigrated the Pre-Raphaelite movement, equating it with Impressionism and the decadence of Roman art, among other accusations. Roger Fry, “Six Lectures on Monumental Painting: Lecture I,” 1911, REF1/88/1, Fry Papers. In his introduction to Maurice Denis’s article “Cézanne,” translated by Fry and published in The Burlington Magazine in 1910, Fry criticized the Pre-Raphaelites in comparison to Cézanne, stating that this “new conception of art, in which the decorative elements preponderate…is not the outcome of any conscious archaistic endeavor, such as made, and perhaps inevitably marred, our own pre-Raphaelite movement.” Roger Fry, “Introductory Note to Maurice Denis, ‘Cézanne,’” in A Roger Fry Reader, 76.

107. This distinction also occurred in Bell’s writings with the differentiation between artistic “paganism” and religious “paganism.” In a typescript for a Chicago lecture “Cézanne and Impressionism,” written about 1950, Bell describes the Impressionist “Paganism” of Pierre-Auguste Renoir as “the acceptance of life as something good and satisfying in itself,” which pointedly “does not consist in a proper respect for the pagan past.” Clive Bell, “Cézanne and Impressionism,” typescript, c. 1950, Trinity/BELL/4/9, Papers of Arthur Clive Heward Bell, Trinity College Library, Cambridge, UK.


113. Ibid., 90.

114. Ibid., 95.

115. Ibid.

116. Roger Fry, “Transition from Classical to Modern Art: Lecture I,” draft manuscript for Cambridge University Extension lecture series on Florentine painting, 1894–1910, REF1/65/1, Fry Papers; Roger Fry, “Comedic,” draft manuscript for a lecture series on different phases of art, ca. 1905–7, REF1/76/5, Fry Papers.

117. Roger Fry, “Principles of Pictorial Design,” 1910–19, REF1/91, Fry Papers. It should also be mentioned that Wassily Kandinsky's use of “spirit” and “spiritual” in relation to a universalized transcendentalism/metaphysicalism was another model for Fry. Kandinsky’s 1911 *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* was published in English in 1914, translated by Michael Sadler as *The Art of Spiritual Harmony*. Fry admired Kandinsky as an artist and theorist, and included paintings by Kandinsky in the *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition*. In his August 2, 1913 article “The Allied Artists” in *The Nation*, Fry described Kandinsky as “pushing forward... into a new world of expressive form.” Roger Fry, “The Allied Artists” (1913), in *A Roger Fry Reader*, ed. Christopher Reed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 151. It was, in fact, in the 1911-1913 British avant-garde magazine *Rhythm* which Sandler co-edited that Fry may have first encountered Kandinsky’s work, and specifically a connection between Kandinsky’s idea of spirituality and nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century occult, Theosophical concepts. According to Caroline Maclean, in *The Vogue for Russia*, the landmark ideas of Kandinsky’s German text would have been known in Britain in *Rhythm* as early as 1912, prior to the 1914 English translation. The interest in Kandinsky generated by *Rhythm* and then by subsequent British publications was a function of “Russian culture and modernism... connected to a growing interest in spiritual aesthetics, an interest that grew from a mixture of sources, including the Victorian fashion for spiritualism, the turn-of-the-century theosophical movement, and a reaction... against empiricism.” Caroline Maclean, *The Vogue for Russia: Modernism and the Unseen in Britain 1900-1930*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 71. Bell was also aware and supportive of Kandinsky and his work; in his 1918 *Pot-Boilers*, for instance, Bell identified Kandinsky as one of the seminal figures English artists should turn to as an example of the “contemporary movement.” Clive Bell, *Pot-Boilers*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1918), 215. For an example of an article which connects Kandinsky’s innovative content to the artist’s desire for an affective or “activist” response in the viewer, a similar paradigm (though differently directed) to that model of an ideal artistic response desired by Fry and Bell, see Rose-Carol Washton Long’s article “Constructing the Total Work of Art: Painting and the Public.” Rose-Carol Washton Long, “Constructing the Total Work of Art: Painting and the Public,” in *Vasily Kandinsky: From Blaue Reiter to the Bauhaus, 1910-1925*, ed. Jill Lloyd (New York: Neue Galerie, 2013), 33-47.


120. Fry, “Title,” in Last Lectures, 37.


122. Bell, Art, 172.

123. Ibid., 181–84.

124. Bell, Enjoying Pictures, 106.

125. Fry, “Six Lectures on Monumental Painting: Lecture I.”


129. Bell, Art, 94.

130. Ibid., 95.

131. Ibid., 103.


133. Roger Fry, “Epic,” draft manuscript for a lecture series on different phases of art, ca. 1905–7, REF1/76/2, Fry Papers.


137. Ibid., 151.

138. Bell, Art, 38.

139. Fry to Dickinson, May 31, 1913.


142. Tarasov, Icon and Devotion, 39.

143. Many scholars have noted the connection between Malevich’s Suprematist work (specifically Black Square) and Russian icons. See, for example, Margaret Betz, “The Icon and Russian Modernism,” ArtForum, 25, no. 10 (Summer 1977): 38-45; W. Sherwin Simmons, Kasimir Malevich’s Black Square and the Genesis of Suprematism, 1907–1915 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1981); and Charlotte Douglas, Kazimir Malevich (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994). Andrew Spira dedicates a large portion of his text on Russian icons and the avant-gardes to the relationship between Russian icons and Malevich’s Suprematist works. Spira, The Avant-Garde Icon. It is important to consider why Fry’s attempt at a secularized Russian Orthodox corner house icon has not received the degree of attention or consideration as has Malevich’s in the history of Modern art. In part, one can assume, this relates back to the art historiographic bias towards abstraction over figurative work, with the former perceived to be progressive while the latter retrogressive, and the bias against decorative and applied art over traditional painted media.

144. Tatlin actually worked as an icon painter in the early years of his artistic career. John Milner, Vladimir Tatlin and the Russian Avant-Garde (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 8. In addition to Milner, other scholars have made the link between Tatlin and icons. See, for example, Margit Rowell, “Vladimir Tatlin: Form/Faktura,” October, no. 7 (Winter 1978): 83–108; Christina Lodder, Russian Constructivism (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983); Christina Lodder, “Colour in Vladimir Tatlin’s Counter-Reliefs,” Burlington Magazine 150, no. 1258 (January 2008): 28–34. Maria Taroutina, in her dissertation, discusses Tatlin’s relationship to the Russian Byzantine icon, and Russian Byzantium in general. She notes the relative lack of press attention paid to the seemingly blasphemous nature of Tatlin’s corner contributions as opposed to Malevich’s. (From the Tessera, 200).
Conclusion: Alfred H. Barr, Jr., and the Influence of Bloomsbury’s Byzantium

Fry and Bell’s Bloomsbury Byzantium provided a template for scholars to think of Modern work within a broader chronological frame of artistic production and artistic value. In so doing, Fry and Bell’s Bloomsbury Byzantium revealed the dialectics that shaped Modern art’s narrative. In a manner akin to Mikhail Bakhtin’s 1934-1935 notion of dialogic language and literary work, in which works or ideas are formed as a continuous dialogue among past and present iterations, Fry and Bell’s idea of Byzantium was a conversant that mediated between past and contemporary narratives of art history, as well as between their views and of those of their predecessors and cultural context.\(^1\) Nowhere is Bloomsbury’s Byzantium’s role in the dialectic of Fry’s and Bell’s Modernism more acute than in the impact of their writings on future Formalist critics. Bloomsbury’s idea of Byzantium opened up avenues for future scholars to stake their own claims for critical originality via their Byzantium’s similarity to and divergence from Fry and Bell’s iteration. “Bloomsbury’s Byzantium and the Writing of Modern Art” began with the example of Clement Greenberg’s interpretation of Fry and Bell’s Byzantium, foreshadowing the impact of Bloomsbury’s Byzantium on subsequent critical generations. This chapter concludes by recounting the previously unexplored historiographic legacy of Fry and Bell’s Bloomsbury Byzantium in the writings and exhibitions of Alfred H. Barr, Jr., first director of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York.\(^2\) Barr’s work at MoMA made the Bloomsbury narrative of Modern art the status quo, and shaped the American artistic environment into which Greenberg came of age.\(^3\) Despite the fact that Barr eschewed the label “Formalist” during his lifetime, Fry, Bell, Barr, and Greenberg are typically linked as Modernist Formalist authors in art historiography.\(^4\) Yet, critically, just as much as any shades of Formalism,
Byzantium linked Bloomsbury’s ideas of Modernism to Barr’s.\(^5\) For example, both Barr and Fry used the same landmark exhibition of Russian icons to advocate for avant-garde Russian art as a natural extension of Byzantine precedent. The icon exhibition was a travelling show that Fry reviewed after its 1929 London debut at the Victoria and Albert Museum and that Barr reviewed in 1931, using a similar argumentative framework, after the exhibition arrived at New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art (Met).\(^6\) With Bloomsbury’s Byzantium at its core, this chapter’s examination of the relationship between Barr, and Fry’s and Bell’s work then investigates the intellectual chain of influence that anticipates Greenberg’s relationship to Bloomsbury, as Barr’s successor.

Barr’s interest in Modern art arrived after more extensive study of Early Modern work, and Barr’s ultimate career could not have been predicted from his earlier path. Barr was born into a family of Presbyterian ministers, and entered Princeton University in 1918 at the age of sixteen, obtaining Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degrees in 1922 and 1923, respectively.\(^7\) In his sophomore year at Princeton, Barr became enamored of art history under the influence of Medievalist and Early Christian art scholar Charles Rufus Morey.\(^8\) Morey was a seminal influence on Barr’s approach to art, both pre-Modern and Modern, and Barr would later credit Morey with the 1929 organization of MoMA’s curatorial strategy and departments.\(^9\) After graduating from Princeton, Barr taught Italian Painting and Northern European painting, among other courses, at Vassar College, and in 1924 he took his first journey abroad to Europe, where Barr visited Italy, France, and England. In the fall of 1924, Barr matriculated at Harvard University to pursue a doctorate in art history.\(^10\) At Harvard, Barr became the protégé of Paul J. Sachs, associate director of the Fogg Museum. Barr was poised to accept a fellowship from New York University to complete his doctorate on Modern art when Sachs recommended Barr in
1929, at the age of twenty-seven, to be the first director of a newly created Museum of Modern Art in New York.  

With a brief pause from his duties at MoMA in 1932 and 1933 due to extreme fatigue and close to a nervous collapse (a pause during which Barr and his wife Margaret’s (Marga’s) “relaxation” tour of Europe included a stay in Germany in 1933), Barr helmed the Museum of Modern Art from 1929 until MoMA trustees forced his resignation as director on October 15, 1943. In part, Barr’s dismissal was a consequence of his radical and broad view of what constituted “good” Modern art. As will be discussed later, Barr, like Fry before him, embraced the work of natural “primitives,” such as untrained folk artists or children, as well as non-Western artists. According to Sybil Gordon Kantor, in *Alfred H. Barr, Jr., and the Intellectual Origins of the Museum of Modern Art*, the impetus for Barr’s stepping down was MoMA’s President and Board Chairman, Stephen Clark’s, fury at Barr’s desire to exhibit a “decorated shoestand by a New York folk artist named Joe Milone.” After his resignation and until his retirement in 1967, Barr remained active and engaged with the goings on at the museum, albeit with a diminished title. Barr passed away in 1981 after a long and difficult struggle with Alzheimer’s disease.

Barr facilitated the canonization of Modern, Western art history. To Kantor, Barr’s time at MoMA “provided a basis for the establishment of ‘high modernism’ in the critical discourses of the art world,” and Alice Goldfarb Marquis, in her Barr biography *Alfred H. Barr Jr.: Missionary for the Modern*, claims that Barr “gave modern art a language, a literature, and a history.” It was Barr who set in motion the genealogy of Cubism as it is taught and understood today, acquiring Pablo Picasso’s 1907 *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon* for MoMA in the late 1930s and anointing the work as the landmark starting point of Analytic Cubist development.
founded the film department at MoMA, making a case for time-based media’s rightful place within a museum. Barr also established MoMA’s department of architecture and design, elevating both to the status of collection-worthy disciplines, and placed famed architect Philip Johnson as its first department head. In addition, Barr indirectly aided in the formation of foundational art history scholarship, including and beyond artistic Modernism. Through Barr’s work on behalf of refugees fleeing Nazi Germany in the 1930s, Barr helped bring to America art historian Erwin Panofsky and the scholar who would go on to become the author of one of the prominent survey textbooks of art history, H. W. Janson. Barr’s narrative of Modernism also directly inspired H. Harvard Arnason, an Early Christian archaeologist, to turn to Modern art. Arnason later penned what has become one of the seminal textbooks on Modern Art, with Barr’s perspective on Modernism, according to Marquis, the determinant of Arnason’s approach.

Barr’s art historical legacy was also inherently political. In the lead up to and during the Second World War, MoMA became a site for Barr to react to and against fascism and artistic oppression in Europe. During their time in Germany in 1933, Barr and his wife Marga, according to Marquis, attended and were “horrified” by the first prominent Nazi meeting on art in Stuttgart. As a result of these experiences, according to Irving Sandler in his introduction to Barr’s collected writings, Barr became a “passionate,” lifelong crusader for artistic freedom, with Barr, for example, dedicating his 1936 *Cubism and Abstract Art* exhibition to “those painters of squares and circles (and the architects influenced by them) who have suffered at the hands of philistines with political power.” Barr hoped to “raise the alarm” for Americans regarding the escalation of Nazi abuses, and Barr published articles such as “Nationalism in German Films” in his friends Lincoln Kirstein and Varian Fry’s Harvard magazine *Hound & Horn* in 1934 and “Art in the Third Reich—Preview, 1933,” a post-mortem reflection on how Barr’s 1933
experience in Germany foreshadowed what was to come, in the October 1945 publication *Magazine of Art*. Writing to Philip Johnson about the expulsion of Oskar Schlemmer’s 1932 *Bauhaus Stairway* from the Stuttgart Museum, Barr asked Johnson to buy the work “just to spite the sons of bitches,” and the work entered MoMA’s collection as a loan in 1933 and was officially gifted to MoMA by Johnson in 1942. *Bauhaus Stairway*’s acquisition was a deliberately politicized gesture, one that forever links any art historical analysis of the work to MoMA and Barr’s legacy of political engagement.

Barr’s achievements extended beyond Modernism, however, and Barr significantly contributed to the English-language scholarship on Byzantium and Byzantine art. Barr’s 1931 article “Russian Icons” for *The Arts* magazine, for instance, written in conjunction with a travelling exhibition of Russian icons at the Met (the catalogue for which can be found among Barr’s MoMA papers), was, in Kantor’s words, the “only accessible article in English” on Russian icon painting until 1954. In this article, Barr set out a genealogy of Russian icons, a genealogy that Barr established in large part based on information gathered during a 1927-1928 trip to Russia with his friend Jere Abbott. Barr cultivated an extensive historical knowledge of the context and origin of Russian icons. Barr used his 1931 article to explain the role of Russian icons in the Russian household, to chart a chronological program of stylistic development for the icons, and to trace historiographic tensions among Russian icon scholars, pointing to the debate among Russian historians as to the “relative amount of foreign influence upon Russian painters.” In addition to the 1931 article, Barr pursued other academic studies of Byzantium. In 1928, Barr lectured on Russian icons at Wellesley, and Barr was quoted in the *Wellesley College News* as stating that Russian painting “should be thought of as a long struggle between Greek (Byzantine) classicism and a native (barbaric) tendency toward vigorous but primitive flat
geometric drawing.”26 Barr’s papers also include what appears to be a 1929 brief biographical sketch of the Byzantine icon painter Theophanes the Greek, focusing on his connection to Russian icon painting.27 In 1933, while Barr and Marga were on his respite trip in Germany, correspondences indicate that Barr had commissioned a translation of a fifteenth-century Russian text from a Harvard scholar, “The Letter, Written by the Priest-Monk Epiphanius to His Friend Cyril,” regarding Theophanes the Greek and the Hagia Sophia.28

Barr’s knowledge of Byzantine art derived from a variety of sources. In 1924, Barr went to Italy, and travelled to Naples, Rome, Siena, Ravenna, and Venice, among other locations that possess the Italo-Byzantine monuments Fry and Bell cited in their works.29 Barr, like Fry and Bell, noted the writings of N. P. Kondakov as well as O. M. Dalton’s 1925 *East Christian Art* as resources for his own Byzantine knowledge.30 In a course list generated by Barr as part of his application for a doctoral fellowship at New York University, Barr listed among those courses in which he “actively participated” several courses that would have included some address of Byzantine art.31 Under the heading “Early Medieval Period,” Barr listed two courses by Medievalist Charles Rufus Morey, including “Medieval Art” at Princeton 1919-1920, and a co-taught course with Morey at Princeton, “Early Medieval Manuscripts” from 1922-1923. Barr took “Medieval Ornament” at Princeton from 1922-1923, “Medieval Art” at Princeton with Ernest DeWald from 1925-1926, and, most directly, two courses at Harvard with famed Romanesque scholar A. Kingsley Porter, including “Byzantine Art (1924-1925),” and “Romanesque Architecture (1924-1925).”32 Of Porter’s Byzantine art course, Barr wrote to a friend in 1924 of his excitement: “…Listen to the sweet tale of my courses: 1. Byzantine Art [Porter]…”33
Of all of Barr’s academic connections to Byzantium, none was perhaps quite as
influential as the approach of the Princeton professor whose turned Barr towards art history:
Charles Rufus Morey. Morey was a medievalist who joined the Princeton faculty in 1906.
Morey’s writings and courses addressed not only the medieval era, but also “primitive” Italian
and Hellenistic art. Morey approached these periods from among the diversity of an area’s
material culture, including examination of “low-art” sources such as folk art and handicrafts, as
well as non-textual cultural markers, such as a period’s theological philosophy. Morey’s
method of art historical inquiry had a profound effect on Barr’s organizational schema for
MoMA. Just as Morey viewed all aesthetic products of a period as worthy of consideration, Barr
constructed MoMA’s departments and exhibitions such that design, decorative arts objects,
painting, and sculpture could all be viewed as equally worthy of discussion. Morey also, by
virtue of his field, introduced Barr to Byzantium and Byzantine art.

Though Morey pioneered the study of Early Christian art, Morey’s view on Byzantium
was an instance of damning with faint praise. This suggests that Barr took from Morey more an
awareness of Byzantium, rather than a full-throated embrace of it. In his seminal 1942 text Early
Christian Art, for instance, Morey’s characterization of Byzantium aligned with a Gibbon and
Vasari-esque narrative of decline. Indeed, Morey characterized the end of the Roman Empire as
a “calamity of cosmic significance.” Describing similarities between archaic Greek art and
Constantinian art, Morey noted that both conceived of relief through “narrative and description”
and adhered to a “primitive method of rendering things in sequence,” but the former did so
“because he had not yet reached the power to simultaneously represent” while the Constantinian
sculptor (Early Christian or pre- or proto-Byzantine) did so “because he had lost it.” While
Morey did describe Byzantine art as possessing a “stately beauty” and a “monumental
equilibrium,” he maintained the terminology of “decadence” to designate Byzantine art in its later phases, and noted that Italy “succeeded to a steadily disintegrating iteration of the Ravennate manner.”

Barr indicated his adherence to Morey’s view of Byzantium as both worthy of study, and connected to a Gibbon-embodied narrative of Byzantium as decadent, linked to the Fall of Rome, in draft papers for a proposed dissertation on Primitivism in Modern European art and in his 1931 article on Russian icons. In his dissertation proposal, Barr claimed that “From Cimabue back to the end of Roman art there stretched a thousand years of barbarous gloom which could be comfortably ignored by the man of taste, ‘tho already a few dilettantes (Walpole, Bedford) and a few artists (Blake, Füssli) were moved with vague enthusiasm for the Gothick…” Intended to document an initial avant-garde interest in so-called “primitive” European art, Barr’s chronology here adhered to the Gibbon-esque belief in the decline of art from the fall of Rome until the Renaissance, as Barr marked the period between the “end of Roman art,” and therefore the beginning of Byzantine art, until Cimabue (proto-Renaissance) as one of “barbarous gloom.” Barr claimed this “gloom” was only lightened not by avant-garde artists turning to Byzantium, but instead by outliers embracing medieval or “Gothick” forms. In Barr’s 1931 “Russian Icons,” Barr described an early Russian icon as “very Byzantine in feeling,” with its “large eyes, the sweeping curves of the hair and features, the curious balance between the spiritual and the sensual in the mask, even a suspicion of vacuity” that “may well epitomize the sumptuous but enervated culture of Constantinople at the end of the twelfth century.” Here, like the simultaneous praise and derision of Byzantium found in Morey’s writings, Barr’s description of a praiseworthy example of Russian-Byzantine art coincided with the perception that the work,
from the last phases of the Byzantine empire, was equally symbolic of the denigrated, “enervated” culture into which Constantinople had degraded.

Aside from Morey, Barr’s most impactful connection to Byzantine art occurred through his interest in Russian Orthodox icons, an interest that was piqued by his friend and art dealer J. B. Neumann’s knowledge of Russian art; Katherine Dreier’s exhibitions, and Louis Lozowick’s book *Modern Russian Art.* Barr’s taste for Russian icons continued in earnest with a 1927-1928 two-month trip to Russia, and then for the duration of his time at MoMA. In 1977, Barr’s travelling companion for the 1927-1928 trip, Jere Abbott, reflected on their journey. Abbott claimed it was contact with British Vorticist Wyndham Lewis that led Abbott and Barr to artist Nina Hamnett, who then influenced their decision to journey to Russia (though Kantor contends that, in fact, Barr had been thinking about going to Russia prior to his journey abroad, and had consulted Neumann about itineraries and contacts in both Germany and Russia prior to meeting Hamnett). From the beginning of Barr and Abbott’s Russian adventure, Russian icons were key to their experience. In Abbott’s 1977 recollection, Abbott noted that he purchased “My icon” in an “outdoor ‘flea’ market,” as distinct from Barr’s icon(s) and implying the acquisition of Russian icons as a standard, desired, or assumed souvenir. Barr’s Russian diary entries devoted equal attention to the radical, avant-garde Modern Russian artists and filmmakers he met, as they devoted time to Barr’s seemingly endless pursuit of Russian icons. Barr chased icons through Russia via his purchase of icons, books on icons, or photographic reproductions of icons, and through Barr’s trips to see *in situ* works. In a January 7 entry, Barr explained that he and Abbott turned down a socialization opportunity with a “young and beautiful Harvard ‘poet’” because “we [were intent] on icons” and so “decided not to join forces.” Prior to visiting a monastery in search of icons, Barr spent the evening before “cramming Kondakov, whose book
on icons is not so lucid as one might wish nor is the archaeology of icons at all a simple affair.”

On January 21, Barr went to the Ostroukov Museum to “borrow the muratov [sic] Les icones russes,” that Barr finished by January 24 and was then “eager to see and talk icons.” To Barr, “a great new field is opening up [icons], if only material (books and photographs) were available [in America].” Barr consequently “spent the afternoon in a vain hunt for books.” Barr’s diary entries were filled with similar attempts to collect as many books on Russian icons as possible, as well as some failed attempts to acquire photographic reproductions of icons. In several entries, Barr enthusiastically documented his experiences seeing Russian icons both in museum collections, and in churches.

Barr’s fascination with Russia, and specifically Russian Orthodox icons, only grew following his 1927-1928 journey. From the 1920s through 1963, correspondences, exhibition notifications, catalogues, and books on or relating to Russian icons can be found among the Barr’s papers in MoMA’s archives. In an undated letter to Igor Grabar, a Russian artist, art restorer, and advocate of icon preservation and documentation, Barr noted that while it had been “nearly two years since I last wrote,” Barr’s “interest in your work in the Restoration Workshop has not diminished.” Barr stated that he “read through some of your letters of the years 1928-1929 and noticed that you were working on a new edition of your book on Theophanes.” Barr proceeded to ask Grabar his opinion on the “exact interpretation of the word ‘isograph’ which is applied to Theophanes in the…letter of 1413,” wondering if the translation of “isograph as ‘zoograph’” in a text by Muratov was correct. A June 1933 letter in French between “N. Toll” at the Kondakov Institute in Prague and Barr suggests that Barr pursued the question of the “isograph” translation far and wide; Toll’s letter gave his opinion on the appropriate translation, citing Kondakov’s L’Icone Russe. In these letters, which were written both during his 1933
confrontations with Nazi oppressions and in the midst of the peak period of Barr’s contributions to Modern art advocacy at MoMA, Barr indicated the breadth of his scholarly knowledge of Russian icons, his ability to quote and cite different authors’ opinions on artists and texts, as well as his continued interest in broadening his knowledge of Russian icons.

In addition, among Barr’s MoMA papers is a reading list of available texts in Italian, English, German, French, and Russian on Russian icons, seemingly drafted in the late 1920s or early 1930s. Included on the list are a 1926 German catalogue for an exhibition Byzantinisch-Russische Monumentalmalerei and an article by Paolo Muratov on “La Pittura Bizantina,” published in the journal of the Italian interwar figurative collective of the same name, Valori Plastici. Books on Russian icons found in Barr’s MoMA papers also include a Russian text on Russian icons from 1958; a text on Andrei Rublev icons from 1960; a well-worn, re-taped and re-bound 1927 P. P. Muratov Les Icones Russes (dated and labeled on the inner cover “Alfred H Barr Jr / London / May 1928”); and a 1963 text on Russian icons. An undated document in the archives contained drafts of Barr’s attempts to map out a chronology of Russian icon painting, while another undated document, possibly written in preparation for his 1931 article on Russian icons, broke down the history of Russian icon production into clearly delineated periods, describing and identifying key works for each.

Yet, beyond these sources of information on Byzantium and Byzantine works, Barr’s ability to conceptualize and use Byzantine art in his writings depended upon the precedent set by Bloomsbury’s Byzantium. Like Fry and Bell, Barr’s interest in Byzantine art was just as much for its own sake, as it was for how Byzantine art could be used to support and explain Modern art to a confused public, and how Byzantine art, as a “primitive” art, could help integrate non-traditional art forms into the dialogue of Western art history. Given both the importance of
particularly Fry’s writings for Barr’s understanding of Modern art, and the integral role Byzantine art played in both Fry’s and Bell’s Modern art texts, Barr’s application of Byzantine art to his narrative of Modern art history occurred through the inspiration and model of Bloomsbury’s Byzantium.

Fry’s and Bell’s writings, and the lasting impact of Fry’s ideas on MoMA’s venerable predecessor, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, provided Barr with a foundational knowledge of Modernism. In Sandler’s introduction to Barr’s selected writings, he notes that Fry’s 1920 Vision and Design and Bell’s 1914 Art were Modern art “primers” for Barr. Kantor claims that Barr developed and characterized his understanding of Paul Cézanne and Modern art through Fry and Bell’s work, and notes that Barr favored quotes by Cézanne that Fry equally preferred. In Daniel Robbins’ “Abbreviated Historiography of Cubism,” Robbins notes that Barr had a “sensitive understanding” of Fry’s theories, particularly Fry’s 1920 Vision and Design, and Barr “certainly knew and had absorbed the theories of Clive Bell as well.” Barr also relied heavily on the Dial magazine, which featured writings by and regarding Fry and Bell, and stated that the Dial was a direct source for many of his “modernist ideas.” A 1922 July – December edition of the Dial, for instance, contained both an article by Fry, “M Jean Marchand,” and a review by Raymond Mortimer of Bell’s 1922 Since Cézanne. In 1925, Fry contributed an article entitled “The Religion of Culture” to The Dial. Barr’s copy of the July 1926 issue of The Dial is found among his papers at the Museum of Modern Art. Barr later exhibited copies and photographs of Modern art from The Dial at Harvard’s Fogg museum in 1926 and at Wellesley in 1927, marking both The Dial, and, through its contents, Fry and Bell, prominent contributors to Barr’s Modern art education. Even as early as 1937, Fry and Bell’s writings were perceived to have inspired Barr’s approach to Modern art. In Lloyd Goodrich’s 1937 article “The Creed of Abstract
Painting,” Goodrich argued that Fry, with Bell as a supportive sidekick, was a “brillian[t] and persuasiv[e]” advocate for the “modern ‘pure’ esthetic,” despite Fry and Bell’s general antipathy to being “out-and-out abstractionist[s].” Though Goodrich didn’t mention Barr by name, the specter of Barr and his work provides an explanatory context for Goodrich’s article, which was published shortly after Barr’s widely publicized and well-known defense of the abstract tendency in Modern art, his 1936 MoMA exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art*.

Though Barr mentioned Bell in his letters and texts, his writings more often highlighted Fry’s works as important resources on Modern art. Fry appeared with frequency on Barr’s undergraduate course syllabi, as well as in Barr’s index of recommended works on Modern art in Barr’s own texts. In his 1943 *What is Modern Painting?*, Barr listed Fry’s *Cézanne* and *Henri Matisse* as authoritative sources. In his 1951 *Matisse: His Art and His Public*, Barr’s index listed six texts written by Fry for the reader’s reference, tied with the author Christian Zervos as named authors with the most bibliographic citations (for comparison: Barr listed his own writings only five times). Barr was also sufficiently knowledgeable of Fry’s body of written work to make critical distinctions between and among different periods of Fry’s texts. Discussing the influence of Matisse on the young Parisian avant-garde, Barr noted that the rapid effect of Matisse’s vibrant color palette on the avant-garde was such that in “1910 for instance, Roger Fry could think of the work of the younger Paris painters in terms of the ‘expressiveness’ of the primitive or barbaric artist or of children. But by 1912 he frequently used the term ‘classic’ and even compares Derain to Poussin.” Barr accompanied this comment with a footnote, in which he identified the work Fry must have been referring to in his 1912 declaration, André Derain’s *Window on the Park* from 1912. The Derain had been shown at the Second Post-Impressionist exhibition and, as Barr made sure to point out, now resided in MoMA’s collection. Discussing
Fry’s English-language preface to a 1930 volume of Matisse plates, Barr elaborated on the shift in Fry’s views on Matisse from 1912 until the 1930s, and interpreted Fry’s writings for Barr’s readership. Barr noted that in 1912, in his preface for the Second Post-Impressionist exhibition, Fry had categorized Matisse’s work “in terms of the art of primitives and children,” and described Matisse as finding “an ‘equivalent’ for nature,” his paintings “interesting in themselves rather than for their representational or associational values.” Barr noted that, by 1930, Fry instead predominantly discussed Matisse’s style in terms of “equivoque and ellipses,” and described Fry’s assessment of Matisse’s “sense of linear rhythm” and color in relation to “pictorial depth.” Barr followed this comment with an authoritative interpretation of Fry’s point, indicating not only his awareness of Fry’s work, but also Barr’s close study of Fry’s texts.69 These examples suggest Barr’s more than merely passing familiarity with Fry’s writings.

Fry was also an implied influence on Barr’s knowledge of Modern art. In 1921, as a junior at Princeton, one of Barr’s earliest contacts with Modern art occurred at the “Loan Exhibition of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist Paintings” at the Met.70 The exhibit was organized by John Quinn, and the show was executed under the oversight of the director of the Met, Bryson Burroughs. According to Marquis, the exhibition caused a great stir at the time, in which the public, reacting with outrage comparable to the vitriol generated by Fry’s 1910 Manet and the Post-Impressionists exhibition, accused the museum of participating in a global effort to destroy culture and society through its support of the Post-impressionist artists.71 Burroughs, however, had previously been Fry’s assistant during Fry’s tenure at the Metropolitan, and Burroughs aided Fry in Fry’s attempts to build the Metropolitan’s European art collection. Burroughs, therefore, situated Impressionism and Post-Impressionism in accordance with the teachings of his former boss and mentor, Fry. In his introduction to the 1921 catalogue,
Burroughs, like Fry and Bell, claimed the pinnacle of Impressionism resided with Claude Monet, and derided the Impressionist movement for its “scant reliance on imagination or intellectuality and its scorn of composition,” as its “realism tended towards an imitation of the merely superficial appearances.” Burroughs also assumed the use of “Post-Impressionism” as a term designating the works of Cézanne, Seurat, van Gogh, and Gauguin, claiming that the relationship among all four as Post-Impressionists was “obvious,” as “each in his own manner recorded the fact that the Impressionists had pushed their theories to the extreme and that a return to other laws was necessary.” In deference to Fry, Burroughs similarly privileged Cézanne’s work, calling Cézanne the “dominating force in to-day’s development,” and linking Cézanne’s work, as did Fry and Bell, to historical, non-Modern precedents, such as “a certain likeness to Tintoretto” and possessing a “spiritual analogy to Greco”—a connection Burroughs stated “has been frequently noted,” pointedly by Fry. Therefore, the Met’s 1921 “Loan Exhibition,” one of Barr’s earliest and most extensive contacts with Modern art—specifically with the works of the Post-Impressionists—occurred through a framework, language, and lineage designed by Fry, and filtered through an exhibition helmed by Fry’s Metropolitan successor, Burroughs.

Fry’s institutional legacy, intentionally or not, also loomed over Barr’s collection acquisition strategies during Barr’s tenure at MoMA—particularly in MoMA’s early years of growth and development. In part this was due to Barr’s desired relationship between MoMA and the Met. In Barr’s 1932 assessment of MoMA’s collection and plans for MoMA’s collection, Barr outlined a potential relationship or collaboration between the two institutions. To ensure that MoMA did not become a stale repository of what “was” Modern, as opposed to displaying the most progressive and of-the-moment iterations of the Modern, Barr proposed that MoMA and the Met share collections, with the understanding that any works “over fifty years old would
then be under the control of the Metropolitan” while “paintings less than fifty years old” would be under MoMA’s control, “irrespective of ownership.” In light of this potential partnership, Barr devised a version of his “Torpedo Diagram,” an iconic symbol of the movements MoMA’s collection should emphasize (discussed later in this chapter), in which around the bubble of the torpedo, the Metropolitan’s collection buffered and supplemented MoMA’s “background” collections propelling the institution forward (Fig. 6.1). Needless to say, such a partnership was never realized, but what is critical to note is that Barr’s perception of the Met as a complete and encyclopedic art institution, such that MoMA and Met could equally benefit from a chronological split of displayed works, was one the credit for which must in large part be given to Fry, who built the Met’s European collection.

Beyond the impact of Fry’s written work and his exhibition legacy, Barr also celebrated and praised Fry as a scholarly role model. In Barr’s famous 1927 “A Modern Art Questionnaire,” given to his Wellesley students at the start of Barr’s landmark Modern art course, the first modern art course in America, and later reprinted in an August 1927 edition of Vanity Fair, Barr listed Roger Fry (though not Bell) as tenth of the seminal figures students should know in Modern art. Barr asked students to fill in the details after each listed name to answer the question “What is the significance of each of the following in relation to Modern artistic expression?” For “Roger Fry,” Barr’s answer was: “Roger Fry. Organizer of the first Post-Impressionist Exhibition in England—the most brilliant English art critic supporting the modern aesthetic attitude (ma non troppo). In Barr’s 1951 Matisse: His Art and His Public, Barr assigned Fry a primary role in popularizing Henri Matisse’s work both in America and abroad in Britain. Barr stated that Fry “did more than anyone to spread Matisse’s fame in Britain.” Barr noted that the “first public exhibit of a Matisse canvas outside of France seems to have taken place in Britain”
at an exhibition in 1908 at the New Gallery in London. Barr claimed that *The Burlington Magazine* publicized the exhibition and Matisse via an unsigned review—what we now identify as Fry’s 1908 “The Last Phase of Impressionism.” Barr’s text also praised Fry’s 1910 “Manet and the Post-Impressionists” exhibition at the Grafton galleries, that included three Matisse oils, as an “epoch-making” exhibition.82

Barr also personally admired Fry as a human being. On a 1927 London visit, armed with introductory notes from Paul Sachs, Barr met with Fry himself, a visit upon which Barr reflected warmly.83 To the “Committee of the Roger Fry Memorial Fund’s” appeal for donations to purchase an Old Master painting following Fry’s 1934 death, Barr responded that he would happily contribute one pound to the memorial fund. Barr noted that he remembered “very well a delightful two hours spent with Mr. Fry in 1927. He was a great and generous personality. It is a privilege to assist in a small way in purchasing a painting as a memorial to him.”84

Yet, Barr took from Fry’s and Bell’s writings more than just a narrative of aesthetic Modernism and the value of nineteenth- and twentieth-century avant-garde art.85 Barr additionally took from the Bloomsbury authors their idea of a Bloomsbury Byzantium, a paradigm whereby Byzantine art was an integral art form and pedagogical tool to understand and explain Modern and non-traditional work. The legacy of Fry and Bell’s Bloomsbury Byzantium can be identified in how Barr integrated support for Byzantine art into his writings and exhibitions on Modern and “primitive” art.86

Barr connected Byzantine and Modern work by adapting Fry and Bell’s use of art historical precedents to explain and validate the works of the present. In his 1932 assessment of MoMA’s collection, Barr summarized the museum’s collections strategy, the “Theory and Contents of an Ideal Permanent Collection,” as a “torpedo moving through time, its nose the ever
advancing present, its tail the ever receding past of fifty to a hundred years ago.” A propeller “representing ‘Background’ collections” moved the torpedo forward. In the first iteration of this so-called “Torpedo Drawing” (Fig. 6.2), Barr placed at the propeller “European Prototypes and Sources” and “non-European prototypes and sources,” that pushed forward a chronological progression of Modern art beginning with Romanticism and Neoclassicism at the tail, then through the nineteenth-century Realism of Courbet, progressing through Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, and the “School of Paris” until reaching the front of the torpedo, in 1932, with the “Rest of Europe,” “Mexicans,” and “Americans” leading the way. In the “Torpedo Drawing,” Barr conceived of MoMA’s collecting strategy as a narrowly encyclopedic one: in lieu of covering all periods and all times, Barr focused on the educational narrative in which select non-Modern precedents paved the way for his preferred Modern works. Barr identified Byzantium as a key propellant of the torpedo. Barr described two “small collections represented by the propeller of the torpedo.” The first “would be a group of the fine paintings representing those phases of the older European traditions that seem most significant at present: for instance, a Fayum portrait, a Byzantine panel, Romanesque miniatures…” Here, Byzantine art was coded as an “older European tradition,” rather than as a foreign or exotic “other” to the European canon. Barr noted that the “second ‘Background’ collection would be composed of a small group of non-European works of art,” including “African and pre-Columbian objects” and “Coptic textiles.” “Coptic” art has often been categorized as “Byzantine” or related to “Byzantine” art, marking Byzantine aesthetic objects as crucial to both categories of “Background” objects informing and “propelling” the development of Barr’s Modern movements.

By presenting the archaic precedents for Modern art’s anti-naturalism or compositional distortions, Barr, like Fry and Bell, hoped to naturalize and legitimize Modern art by identifying
aspects of avant-garde works as consistent with a universal, eternal aesthetic drive. In a tentative list of exhibitions for the 1930s and 1940s, Barr proposed a 1935-1936 exhibition dedicated to “Russo-Byzantine Frescoes.”92 By way of explanation, Barr noted that “A lively and conscious interaction has been established between modern art and whatever resembles it in Medieval or Baroque, Egyptian or Cretan, Chinese or Mayan, Benin or Papuan” art. He therefore maintained that it was “one function of our Museum to exhibit these discoveries and resurrections of the ‘Modern’ art of the past.”93 Barr’s goals in showcasing and collecting the non-Modern “background” objects included the desire to “destroy or weaken the prejudice of the uneducated visitor against non-naturalistic kinds of art.”94 Taking a cue from Fry and Bell’s work, if Modern art was seen as the most current iteration of a long history or trajectory of similar forms or styles, including and especially Byzantine art, Modern art, to the “uneducated visitor,” would then become less threatening, and more accessible.

As a consequence of adopting Fry and Bell’s use of Byzantium as Modernism’s explanatory ancestral art form, Barr was able to view the connection between Byzantine and Modern art as natural, and assumed. Thus, Barr viewed Russian icons and reproductions of them as logical acquisitions for MoMA—a museum named specifically to present Modern art. Correspondences between Barr and a variety of scholars indicate that Barr was interested in photo-reproductions of Russian icons, with several letters implying either that Barr wanted these reproductions as part of MoMA’s collection or that Barr’s images of Russian icons were already part of MoMA’s collection. In letters dating from 1933 between Barr and L. Cherniavsky of the Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries in Moscow, Cherniavsky queried whether or not MoMA would like to purchase works by the painter Tomashevskaya, who was “known for her work in copying and research of old mural paintings,” specifically “copies of the murals of
the Nereditza church” (Cherniavsky sent Barr photographs of the available works).95 Barr responded in July of 1933, stating that he “regret[ted] that our museum has no funds at the present time for the publication of this artist’s copies after the frescoes in the Novgorod churches” though Barr asked for Cherniavsky to send him several photographs of the Russian Byzantine frescoes.96 MoMA, under Barr’s directives, also held substantial enough photograph reproductions of important Russian and Byzantine icons to warrant outside requests for print reproductions or scholarly use by academics and publishers. Correspondence from 1948 requested that Barr supply a photographic print of the “Vladimir Madonna” for the “chapter on Byzantine art” in a new art history textbook (the request noted Barr and MoMA had supplied a photograph of the same already for the 1947 version of Helen Gardner’s survey text Art Through the Ages). In 1952, letters between Barr’s secretary at MoMA, Letitia Howe, and John Sewall in the Department of Art at the University of Buffalo concerned the loan to Sewall of photographs of the “Vladimir Madonna” and the “Madonna of the Don” in MoMA’s holdings.97 These letters suggest that key images used to explain or describe Byzantine art in survey textbooks and in teaching actually had their origin with Barr, and the Museum of Modern Art.

In addition, Barr followed Fry and Bell’s lead in discussing Modernist Primitivism using Byzantium as a key “primitive” source. As with Fry’s and Bell’s writings, detailed in chapter 3, Barr advocated for Modern works as a companion to or in keeping with or as a return to natural “primitive” impulses and creative energies of those outside of mainstream, or artistically trained society.98 Barr’s interest in “primitive” art found its way into the organization strategy for MoMA. In 1941, the first installed gallery of MoMA’s new permanent collection was a display of works entitled “Modern Primitives,” suggesting the integral role Barr felt “primitive” art played in the comprehension of Modern art.99
When Barr was deciding upon his dissertation topic, he vacillated between two, distinct areas: the influence of “primitive” art on Modern work, entitled “A Brief History of the Rise and Decline of the Primitive Ideal in Modern European Painting,” and “Machine Art.” Byzantium was a critical “primitive” source Barr cited in his dissertation proposal. Barr grouped together as avant-garde influences “Gothic, Romanesque, Ottonian, Carolingian, Byzantine, Early Christian, Saracenic, pre-Hellenic, Assyrian, Egyptian…Persian, Mesopotamian…Chinese, Japanese, Cambodian, Polynesian….African, pre-Columbian [sic]” artworks, a “vast range of forgotten periods and exotic styles.” Within this list were artistic periods that, as discussed here and in previous chapters, have come to stand for or were connected to “Byzantine” art at one point or another, such as Gothic, Romanesque, Egyptian (i.e., Coptic Christian art), and Early Christian art. As a consequence, Barr’s list of “primitive” source materials was then one dominated by Byzantine or quasi-Byzantine references. Barr’s 1931 article on Russian icons was, in fact, a compilation of material he researched and gathered on “primitive” art during his 1926-1927 European and Russian journey, suggesting the strength of the appeal of Russian icons began with Barr’s search for “primitive” precedents for Modern works. Indeed, according to Kantor, one of the “strongest attractions to Russia for Barr was his desire to study medieval icons for his [proposed] thesis” on Primitivism in Modern art.

As a “primitive” art form, Byzantine art in Barr’s model assumed a role similar to the one it held in Fry and Bell’s writings. As a “primitive” art, calls to Byzantine art helped Barr’s writings and installations redefine and expand the trajectory of art history, identifying the predecessors for Modern art and opening up the Western art historical canon to non-traditional and non-Western work. Barr, as Fry and Bell did before him, looked to “primitive” inspiration to explain and praise Modern art. Citing avant-garde artists’ search for a “pure” and “new” art
form, “primitive” art, with Byzantine a prominently cited example, defined the origin narrative of Modernism Barr advocated through his MoMA installations and exhibitions. In addition, like Fry and Bell’s discussion of “primitive” art, Byzantine was just one “primitive” form among many. As a result, Byzantium, as a known, familiar art form within Western art history, elevated the less familiar and non-Western works to the status of art equally worthy of attention in Barr’s writings on “primitive” art and, most influentially, in the public platform of MoMA’s exhibitions and installations.

With Barr as an important example, Fry and Bell’s strategic use of Byzantium in their writings manifested itself in new, different, but no less prominent ways in the writings and museum exhibitions of the subsequent generations of Modern art critics and scholars. It should be noted that, with Barr as a case study, Byzantium wasn’t the only overlapping coordinate between the next generation of scholars and Fry and Bell’s work and lives. This suggests, perhaps, a predisposition on Barr’s part to respond to and incorporate many aspects of Fry and Bell’s ideas into his own, rather than Barr’s specific attraction to the critical usefulness of Bloomsbury’s Byzantium itself. Yet, Byzantium and its function in relation to Barr’s development of his own aesthetic philosophy and his guidance of MoMA’s organization and collections is perhaps one of the more impactful overlaps between Barr and the Bloomsbury critics. The aspects of Byzantium’s role in Fry and Bell’s writings Barr chose to emulate led to the founding, organizational principles of MoMA, and, through Barr’s seminal exhibitions, to the codification of narratives of artistic Modernism.

In conclusion, the art of Byzantium was a consistent aesthetic reference throughout the careers of Fry, Bell, and their Bloomsbury circle. As this dissertation demonstrated, Byzantine art provided inspiration for everything from a standard of artistic quality against which to judge
current art; to Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, Fry, and the Omega Workshops’ artistic products. For the artists of Bloomsbury, as well as for Fry and Bell, Byzantine art was mined for every aspect of its visuality. While Vanessa Bell directly copied imagery from the Theodora mosaics in Ravenna, she also played with the compositional qualities of mosaic, aspiring to paint in rectilinear dabs. In her work, she sought to capture not just the appearance of Byzantine mosaics, but additionally the experience of Byzantine mosaic *in situ*, with her experiments in color juxtapositions and light effects. Similarly, while Fry frequently referenced Byzantium and Byzantine art in his writings and mimicked mosaic borders in his paintings, he also incorporated the function of a prominent example of Byzantine art, the icon, into his writings. In lieu of merely citing Byzantine examples, Fry characterized the encounter with art as itself a Byzantine icon, with his textual characterization of art objects as intercessionaries that connected the viewer to transcendent aesthetic emotion. The Bloomsbury critics and artists explored every possible facet of Byzantine art and a Byzantine aesthetic, and found novel and radical ways to reference Byzantine inspiration in their works.

However, Byzantium’s most important role in Bloomsbury writing and art was as a dialogic node that not only mediated between and among coordinates impacting the work of one scholarly generation, but also extended the conversation forward, and into the works of the following generations. The ability for Bloomsbury’s Byzantium to function dialogically was a direct result of its status in Fry’s and Bell’s writings as an idea rather than as an illustration of a definitive historical era. Stripped of historical boundaries, the qualities defining Bloomsbury’s Byzantium were easily malleable, and represented a concept of Byzantium that could be adapted and incorporated into different contexts by subsequent authors and critics. For Fry and Bell, their Bloomsbury Byzantium constituted the art historiographic equivalent of a chimera. Like a
mythological chimera, an animal composed from an assemblage of incongruous, independent creatures, Bloomsbury’s Byzantium’s qualities, relevance, and use in the Bloomsbury critics’ writings stemmed from a hybrid of differing parts, each essentially independent from one another. For Fry and for Bell, their chimera idea of Byzantium enabled the critics to engage with the legacy of their peers and predecessors while simultaneously arguing for the originality of each author’s aesthetics. By defining their Byzantium as Italianate, and counter to German Gothic art, Fry and Bell stated their intellectual positions in relation to their nineteenth-century predecessors. Fry and Bell’s anti-German, Italianate Byzantium distinguished their Byzantium from John Ruskin’s Byzantine-Gothic ideal, as well as reasserted Fry’s continued connection to his mentor, Bernard Berenson, and Berenson’s vision of Early Italian art’s debt to Byzantine models. Without regard to historical accuracy, Bloomsbury’s Byzantium could serve a pedagogical function, logically connected to Modern work as a predecessor. As this dissertation discussed, Fry and Bell capitalized on both the ahistorical definition of their Byzantium and the visual affinity between Byzantine and Post-Impressionist and Modern works to explain new and complicated art, and to ground their defenses of Modern art within a validating historical lineage. Functioning symbolically, Bloomsbury’s Byzantium allowed Fry and Bell to collectivize their Byzantium as one among many other culturally and chronologically distinct “primitive” works of art. As a consequence of this grouping, as one “primitive” art among many, Bloomsbury’s Byzantium subsequently elevated its non-Western cohorts to positions of equal veneration in Fry’s and Bell’s writings, and entered non-Western art into the dialogue of Western art history. Relieved from the burden of historical use and value, Byzantine art, in origin a predominantly religious art, also enabled Fry and Bell to extend their innovative paradigm for artistic value, their affect-centric Formalism, to its logical conclusion. With Byzantine art redefined as
religiously inspired but secular in importance and aesthetic worth, Fry and Bell used their Byzantium as an exemplar of artistic experience as a secular spiritual encounter, a model of secular aesthetic devotion they held as highest praise for an encounter with Modern work. In sum, the ahistoricism of Bloomsbury’s Byzantium allowed Fry and Bell to make their cases for the necessity, logic, and inevitability of Modern art; the ideas of “aesthetic emotion” or “significant form;” the importance of art as a transformative medium in Modern society; and the expanded art historical canon, re-tooled to include European, non-Western, and non-traditional art forms previously anathema to the establishment, Classically minded art historical narratives.

Barr’s and then Greenberg’s different but no less enthusiastic embraces of Byzantine art illustrated the dialectical potential of Bloomsbury’s Byzantium. In Barr and Greenberg’s American Modernist framing of Byzantium, each author reinterpreted the significance and qualities of Byzantine art for his own purposes, and thereby knowingly or unwittingly used Byzantium for Modernist self-definition, a strategy exemplified by Fry’s and Bell’s aesthetics. This inter-generational conversation regarding Byzantium’s relationship to Modern art unravels the myth of an autonomous Modernist text. Just as Fry and Bell’s creation of Byzantium underscores the fact that individual art historical concepts are not inherent, but made, so, too, does their Byzantium as a dialogue of ideas suggest that the bigger frame within which this Byzantine chimera functioned, their writings on Modern art, was similarly a construction of disparate, context-specific ideas. Ultimately, Bloomsbury’s Byzantium teaches us to look closely at the mechanics of Modern art’s story, and to consider each text as much for its substance, as for its status as an amalgam of concepts, each in dialogue with writers of the past, present, and future.

2. Other historians of Modern art whose work could be related to Bloomsbury’s Byzantium, but who are not addressed in this dissertation, include Michael Fried, T. J. Clark, Albert Barnes, Leo Steinberg, and Meyer Schapiro, among, I am sure, many others. Note that the prominence of American scholars Barr and, later, Greenberg, and subsequently the importance of considering the impact of Fry and Bell’s Byzantium on their works, was partly a function of the geographic shift in art world authority from Europe and England to America in the wake of the two world wars. Bloomsbury’s Byzantium and its critical impact was necessarily contextually re-framed in an American context, with British cultural and intellectual particularities informing Fry and Bell’s concept of Byzantine art’s relationship to Modern works lost in the American critics’ translation.


5. Please note that the Museum of Modern Art reprocessed its Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Papers in 2016. Archival notations for the Barr Papers not in Roman numerals reflect the pre-2016 organization of the files.

6. The *Union of Soviet Socialist Republics Loan Exhibition* debuted in America at the Museum of Fine Arts Boston in 1930. This was the “first exhibition of Russian icons ever to take place in the United States,” and it travelled to nine additional venues, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where Barr saw it. Part of the goal of the exhibition’s Russian organizers was to encourage a “market demand for icons in the bourgeois West.” However, though the organizers of the exhibition actively promoted direct sales of the icons in Europe, by the time the exhibition reached America, the exhibition became “exclusively promotional” out of “fear of negative publicity.” Wendy R. Salmond, “How America Discovered Russian Icons: The Soviet Loan Exhibition of 1930-1932,” in *Alter Icons: The Russian Icon and Modernity*, ed. Douglas Greenfield and J. A. Gattrell (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 128–29. As Fry did with his 1930 review, Barr linked the Russo-Byzantine or Russian icon style to modern
Russian artists, identifying Natalia Goncharova, Mikhail Larionov, and David Burliuk as the Modern adherents to the Russian icon tradition. Roger Fry, “Review of Russian Ikons at the Victoria and Albert,” 1929, REF1/30, Roger Elliot Fry Papers, King’s College Archive Centre, Cambridge, UK (hereafter, Fry Papers). Alfred H. Barr, Jr., “Russian Icons,” The Arts 17, no. 5 (February 1931): 297, 299. Fry, however, though his writings discuss Boris Anrep as the modern inheritor of the Russian Byzantine spirit, was aware of and in the social circles of the pre-World War I Russian avant-gardes, particularly as they connected to the Ballet Russes. At Charleston, for example, Larionov and Duncan Grant were close enough that Larionov gifted Grant a drawing depicting Sergei Diaghilev. (This drawing was hanging in Duncan Grant’s bedroom, Charleston Farmhouse, at the time of the author’s visit on July 24, 2016.)

7. Reverend Alfred H. Barr, Sr., received a doctorate of divinity from Alma College in Michigan and later became the director of the Princeton Theological Seminary. Alfred Jr.’s paternal grandfather was Reverend John Campbell Barr. His maternal grandfather was a Presbyterian minister in Pennsylvania, and his maternal great-uncles were graduates of the Princeton Theological Seminary.

8. Kantor notes that Morey should be credited with establishing the American discipline of Medieval art. Kantor, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., 19.


10. Barr eventually received his doctorate in art history from Harvard in 1946, when he submitted a revised manuscript of his 1939 MoMA catalogue Picasso: Forty Years of His Art. Kantor, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., 4. This catalogue was later revised and published as Picasso: Fifty Years of His Art.

11. Sandler, introduction to Defining Modern Art, 7.


14. Ibid., xx-xxi; Marquis, Alfred H. Barr, Jr.

15. Yet, in Kantor’s words, Barr’s characterization of Demoiselles’s significance “became the central fact upon which subsequent histories of Modernism turned, whether it would be confirmed or contested.” Kantor, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., 344. For example, Barr referred to Demoiselles as “not only the first important cubist painting,” but also “the first picture in which Picasso’s formidable and defiant genius revealed itself.” Alfred H. Barr, Jr., What is Modern Painting?, 3rd ed. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1946), 30.

17. Ibid., 316.

18. Though art historian Meyer Schapiro would later criticize Barr and *Cubism and Abstract Art* for what Schapiro perceived to be the absence of a political or contextual approach, in July 1935, Schapiro wrote to Barr and noted that, in addition to the potential for Vincent van Gogh’s work to be read and interpreted as Socialist, “we are all thrilled by the militancy of the French workers. I hope you saw the great July 14 parade.” Here, Barr’s political leanings are implied as linked to Schapiro’s own Marxist views, indicating a sympathy for a link between art and politics perhaps less well-expressed in Barr’s most well-known exhibitions. Meyer Schapiro to Barr, July 25, 1935, VI.A.69, “Post-Impressionists,” 1935 (microfilm roll 3264, frame 812), Barr Papers. Although most scholars, including Kantor, do not view Barr and his writings as political or politically responsive, other do. See, for example, Kantor, *Alfred H. Barr, Jr.*, xx; Susan Noyes Platt, “Modernism, Formalism, and Politics: The ‘Cubism and Abstract Art’ Exhibition of 1936 at the Museum of Modern Art,” *Art Journal* 47, no. 4 (Winter 1988): 284–95; Karen Koehler, “The Bauhaus Manifesto Postwar to Postwar,” in *Bauhaus Construct: Fashioning Identity, Discourse and Modernism*, ed. Jeffrey Salenik and Robin Schuldenfrei (London: Routledge, 2009), 13–36; and Patricia Hills, “‘Truth, Freedom, Perfection’: Alfred Barr’s What is Modern Painting? as Cold War Rhetoric,” in *Pressing the Fight: Print, Propaganda, and the Cold War*, ed. Greg Barnhisel and Catherine Turner (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010), 251–75.


23. Folder IX.B.89, Barr Papers. Kantor, *Alfred H. Barr, Jr.*, 165. A pamphlet from the 1930s advertising “Unusual Talks by Bertha Ashley Searle” on the topic of “Russia and Russian Icons” in Cambridge, Massachusetts, was found among Barr’s MoMA papers. This pamphlet quoted Barr’s 1931 “Russian Icons” article, similarly distinguishing Byzantine painters from Russian icon painters by describing Russian icons as an art “inherited from Byzantium.” “Russia and Russian Icons,” pamphlet, 1930s, IX.B.79, Barr Papers.

24. At the start of the article, Barr noted that the “photographs of paintings in the exhibition are used with the permission of the Metropolitan Museum, the others, purchased at the Restoration Workshop, Moscow, are the property of Mr. Jere Abbott and the writer.” Barr, “Russian Icons,” 297.


30. Alfred H. Barr, Jr., “Russian-Byzantine Reading List,” c. 1930, IX.B.79, Barr Papers. Though Barr notes that as “Kondakov, who died in 1925…never returned to Russia after the revolution…his imposing book *The Russian Icon* is often misleading and irrelevant, for he was able to include only two or three of the icons cleaned since 1917, none of which he had seen.” Barr, “Russian Icons,” 307, 307n.

31. Alfred H. Barr, Jr., application for dissertation fellowship, c. 1928, 15.c.1.b, Barr Papers.

32. Ibid.


35. Ibid., 26, 155.


37. Ibid., 56.

38. Ibid., 171, 197–98. It should be noted, however, that Morey, like Fry and Bell before him, focused on Italianate Byzantium, a point that was deliberately invoked in a scathing critique of *Early Christian Art* by Barr’s friend, art historian Meyer Schapiro, who claimed Morey “underestimate[d] Constantinople between the fourth and seventh centuries, when that city was the capital of the Eastern empire and the assured source of works of sculpture, painting, and architecture of the highest quality.” In his review, Schapiro, while acknowledging that Morey “largely inspired” the “investigation of Early Christian art in this country,” claimed that Morey’s text suffered from the “rather schematic character” of Morey’s views, that “begins to break down when the theory is applied as tenaciously in this book to the whole variety of early Christian works.” In particular, Schapiro noted that Morey was “still guided by limiting academic standards in judging this art”—in other words, by the denigration of Early Christian, Byzantine, and Gothic art that has plagued art history since Vasari. As a consequence, Morey frequently abused “certain works as crude and comical and degenerate, because of their naiveté or distortions of human forms,” specifically his “attitude toward Coptic, barbarian, and Merovingian art.” What Morey’s texts and Schapiro’s critique indicate is that Barr’s knowledge
of Byzantine art via Morey was one of awareness and exposure to Early Christian, Coptic, and Byzantine art as deserving of attention, but one that suffered from the traditional art historical biases against Byzantine art. Meyer Schapiro, review of *Early Christian Art* by Charles Rufus Morey, *Review of Religion* 8, no. 2 (January 1944): 165–86.


40. Barr, “Russian Icons,” 311.


43. Abbott, preface to “Russian Diary,” 103.

44. Alfred H. Barr, Jr., “Russian Diary” (1927), in *Defining Modern Art*, 115.

45. Ibid., 118.

46. Ibid., 125, 127.

47. On February 14, for instance, Barr described his “Vain search for a photographer to buy icon photos.” Ibid., 127, 132–33.

48. Ibid., 132–35.

49. Barr to Igor Grabar, [1930s?], folder IX.B.79, Barr Papers.

50. N. Toll to Barr, June 17, 1933, folder IX.B.79, Barr Papers.

51. Folder IX.B.79, Barr Papers.


53. Draft chronology of Russian icon painting, IX.B.78, Barr Papers; “Russian Icon Brief Outline,” draft, IX.B.81, Barr Papers. This latter document identified the origins of Russian icons with Egyptian portrait conventions, “Greco-Oriental” models from Egypt and Syria, and “Byzantine (Constantinopolitan)” influence. Barr, however, included a note qualifying his discussion of Byzantine influence on Russian icons, stating that “No single Byz. icon older than IX century. Russians would see no Byz. icons till X or XI c. Most early icons in Russia were Greek, painted in Greek-Orient and are XIV and XV.” The distinction between Russian icons as
“Russian work which was Greek and Byzantine-inspired” as opposed to official “Byzantine” work would continue throughout Barr’s career, and is perhaps similarly symptomatic of the slightly denigrating tone toward Byzantium adopted by Barr’s mentor, Morey. Barr’s distinction between Orthodox icons as “Byzantine” or “Russian” was also a not-uncommon native Russian categorization. Barr’s categorization of icons, some as “Byzantine” or “Russian-Byzantine,” and some as the derivation of a particularly Russian, native style was then also consistent with the contemporary Russian perspective on the national origins of Orthodox icons. According to Jefferson J. A. Gattrell, one of the earliest modern celebration of Russian icons in Russia took place in 1913 at the Exhibition of Old Russian Art, an exhibition that “played an undeniable role in repositioning the icon at the forefront of Russian avant-garde art.” This exhibition included displays of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century icons, that were “presented as a uniquely Russian artistic legacy, at once distinct from earlier Byzantine models and not yet overrun by the norms of the Western Renaissance.” Jefferson J. A. Gattrell, introduction to Alter Icons, 5.

54. Sandler, introduction to Defining Modern Art, 11.

55. Kantor, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., 80, 217.


57. Kantor, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., 130.


60. Folder VI.B.1, Barr Papers.

61. Kantor, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., 131.


63. For example, in 1922, Barr suggested art history texts to a friend, stating that “for very modern Painting Clive Bell’s Since Cézanne is the book—Clive Bell’s Art is a really exciting system of aesthetics. It is stimulating in the extreme, his point of view is convincing and radical.” Barr, quoted in Kantor, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., 32.

64. For example, Barr assigned Fry’s writing on Dürer from Vision and Design for his Wellesley College course on Northern Renaissance art, claiming the article was “very delightful.” “Northern Painting: Art 311,” Wellesley College Course Notes, 1926-1928, 15.C.1.a, Barr Papers.

65. Barr, What is Modern Art?, 46-47.
66. Ibid.


68. Ibid., 540n4.

69. Barr stated, for example, that by “‘ellipses’ Fry meant simply the omission of necessary detail without sacrifice of representational legibility. By ‘*equivoque*’ he meant Matisse’s mastery of the ‘dual nature of painting,’ his synthesis of its descriptive and formal functions without serious sacrifice of either.” Ibid., 203.


72. Bryson Burroughs, introduction to *Loan Exhibition of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist Paintings* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1921), x.


75. Documents in MoMA’s archives suggest that in 1932 Barr was part of a team trying to raise funds to have Fry lecture at MoMA. “Lectures and Special Events,” 1932, folder I.22.b, Early Museum History: Administrative Records, Museum of Modern Art Archives.

76. Alfred H. Barr, Jr., “MoMA Assessment,” 1932, 9a.7A, Barr Papers.

77. In his MoMA–Met partnership, Barr attempted to ensure a continued influx of new work into MoMA, an institution that, unlike the more established Met, was more cash-shy and dependent on future bequests rather than current gifts.


79. Ibid., 57–58.


84. Lac Martin, Christie Manson and Woods, to Barr, December 24, 1934, I.A.15 (microfilm roll 2165, frame 816), Barr Papers; Barr to Sir Alec Martin, January 10, 1935, I.A.15 (microfilm roll 2165, frame 815), Barr Papers.
85. It should be noted, however, that Barr was not simply a cipher for Fry’s (and Bell’s) ideas. For example, far from simply adopting or incorporating Bloomsbury theories wholesale, Barr, in fact, often resisted directly linking himself to Fry, Bell, and the Bloomsbury circle. In his 1928 review of London art museums, published in *The Arts*, Barr made a distinction between his own approach and that of Fry and Bell, identifying Fry, Bell, and their direct followers somewhat disparagingly as “English critics of the Fry-Bell-significant-form school” as a means to juxtapose the “significant-form school” critique of artist Stanley Spencer with his own opinion that Spencer’s work was “one of the most original and personal styles in English painting.” Alfred H. Barr, Jr., “Modern Art in London Museums,” *The Arts* 14, no. 4 (October 1928): 187–94. In a 1931 *The Arts* article on German figurative artist Otto Dix, Barr praised Dix’s work precisely because it, and the work of other interwar figurative painters, returned to an examination of things in the world, as opposed to the empty “anarchy of dreams or the discipline of geometries” embodied by “organization, crystallization, composition, rhythmic order,” and, most specifically “significant form.” It was similarly against “significant form” that Barr continued to frame his praise of Dix’s work. Barr claimed that Dix’s 1924 Der Krieg print series and other works that graphically addressed Dix’s experience during the World War I were antidotes to the war works of artists who attempted, and failed, to fully encapsulate the human experience of war; such “failed” war artists adhered to the “ivory tower of ‘significant form’—magnificent but scarcely war.” Alfred H. Barr, Jr., “Otto Dix” (1931), in *Defining Modern Art*, 147, 151. As a caveat to Barr’s praise of Fry in his 1927 “A Modern Art Questionnaire,” Barr, after declaring Fry to be “the most brilliant English art critic supporting the modern aesthetic attitude,” added the phrase “ma non troppo,” an Italian musical designation meaning “but not too much,” perhaps signaling Barr’s contention that Fry’s work and perspective were not quite up to contemporary standards, or that Fry was a figure of *historical* Modernism, as opposed to Barr himself as a proponent of more current, avant-garde works. Barr’s complicated relationship to Fry’s work and to hallmarks of Bloomsbury Modern art criticism doesn’t negate the impact of Fry and Bell’s work on Barr’s art historical contributions. Instead, this information suggests the importance to Barr of those ideas, such as Bloomsbury’s Byzantium, that Barr selectively adopted from among Fry and Bell’s writings. With Bloomsbury’s Byzantium a key example, Barr took from Fry and Bell the concepts he felt most beneficial to his own story of aesthetic Modernism. Barr, “A Modern Art Questionnaire,” 58.

86. It should be noted that, as part of a project for future study, Barr, like Fry and Bell, had an interest in viewing art through the lens of organized religion and religious models. However, unlike for Fry and Bell, Byzantium was not specifically a part of Barr’s methodology for aligning art with religiously inspired spirituality.

87. Barr, “MoMA Assessment.”

88. Ibid.

89. Ibid.

90. Ibid.

91. See, for example, Fry’s review of Duthuit’s text on Coptic art, Roger Fry, “The Significance of Coptic Sculpture,” *Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 60, no. 350 (May

92. Barr, “MoMA Assessment.”

93. Ibid.

94. Ibid.


96. Barr to Cherniavsky, July 1933, IX.B.79, Barr Papers.

97. Letitia Howe to John Sewall, [1952], IX.B.94, Barr Papers; Marion Howe to Barr, July 30, 1948, IX.B.94, Barr Papers.

98. Barr, however, adopted a slightly more circumspect and less patronizing approach to the “primitive” art works he praised than did Fry and Bell. In his dissertation proposal, Barr claimed that a definition of the “Primitive Ideal in art” was “impossible because of its diversity and because it would be in relation to a conception of civilized ideal.” In other words, in lieu of a blanket assumption that early work or non-Western artworks were sub-civilized or less advanced artistic objects, Barr implied that though he was labeling certain works “primitive,” he understood the relativity of this definition, and the extent to which a work could be “primitive” only in relation to a subjective description of what work was “civilized.” Indeed, Barr himself stated as such in draft pages from his proposal, claiming that “Primitivism depends so much upon relativity.” Similarly, describing the tradition in European painting to denigrate medieval and Gothic work in favor of the Renaissance, Barr noted that part of this historiographic bias stemmed from the compositional characteristics of the so-called “primitive” works that “break into the naturalism of the European tradition” and were “to some extent primitive by comp[arison] with a scientific [i.e., naturalistic] ideal.” Alfred H. Barr, Jr., “A Brief History of the Rise and Decline of the Primitive Ideal in Modern European Painting,” dissertation proposal draft, c. 1926–28, folder 15.C.1.b, Barr Papers. In his 1948 *Life* magazine MoMA roundtable “Prospectus,” Barr identified the influence of “African sculpture and decorative suggestions of Ancient Greek art” on Modern artists, but suggested that in the process of turning to these sources, the artists “metamorphosed” the “primitive” styles “into cubism and neo-classicism,” divesting the “primitive” works of “the associations they had for the African and the Greek.” Barr continued by maintaining that while the Modern artist might “assume the manner of an educated primitive, a child, an African savage, a geometrician or a pre-Hellenic Greek.” Barr then questioned the authenticity of this type of emulation or mimicry, nothing that “in doing so, is he not merely masquerading and casing to be himself?” Alfred H. Barr, Jr., “Prospectus” for *Life* magazine round table no. 2, June 11–13, 1948, folder VI.A.47, “Life Symposium,” 1948 (microfilm roll 3264, frame 283), Barr Papers.

99. In the November 1941 *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art*, Barr situated the “Modern Primitives,” today identified as “outsider artists,” as essential to an understanding of
the trajectory of Modern art, and the “best introduction to a general survey of modern painting such as the Museum Collection will eventually present.” The “Modern Primitives,” unlike the more official artistic counterparts in the MoMA’s current and future collection, to Barr represented pure creative energy belonging to “no movement or ‘ism,’” and were more “international in character” than their “professionally trained colleagues,” sharing the “common denominator of Western culture at its most democratic level and all express the straightforward, innocent and convincing vision of the common man, ignorant of art or unaffected by it.” Alfred H. Barr, Jr., “The Museum Collection, Gallery 1: Modern Primitives, Artists of the People,” Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art 9, no. 2 (November 1941): 6–8, 9a.17, Barr Papers.

100. It was Barr’s interest in “primitive” art for his dissertation, in fact, that piqued the curiosity of Fry and other members of the British avant-garde, such as Wyndham Lewis, on Barr’s late-1920s research trip to London. Kantor, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., 147.

101. Barr, “A Brief History.”

102. See, for example, J. B. Bullen, Byzantium Rediscovered (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2003); and Morey, Early Christian Art.

103. Kantor, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., 148.

104. Ibid., 164.
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