

An Art Historical Journey Through the Low Countries in the Year of the Belgian Revolution



fig. 1 Eduard Steinbrück, *Portrait of Karl Schnaase*, 1837. Oil on canvas. Düsseldorf, Stadtmuseum.

fig. 1

While the title of *Niederländische Briefe* (Netherlandish Letters) is modest, the book itself is “ein Haupt- und Grundbuch,” a major and fundamental book in a new discipline, according to the German poet Karl Immermann.¹ In 1830 art history as a discipline was only beginning to be established within the canon of the humanities. *Niederländische Briefe* was the first important literary production of Karl Schnaase (1798–1875), and was published in 1834 by the renowned publisher Cotta.² The book of 539 pages presents, in a series of fictitious letters to a German correspondent, Schnaase’s experiences of a journey through Holland and Belgium in 1830, the year of the Belgian revolution. At first sight, the subject of Schnaase’s *Niederländische Briefe* appears to be a guide to the monuments and art collections of both countries, united since 1815 as the United Kingdom of the Netherlands.³ However, far more than a mere cicerone, the travel letters contain profound reflections on the arts, their cultural conditions and historical developments, with a scope extending beyond the Netherlands. Few works in the literature of art move in such a virtuoso way between the intellectual and the literary as Schnaase does in this book: intuition and abstraction, travel episodes, personal impressions and reflections of universal breadth follow each other almost abruptly, sometimes mutually permeating each other, creating a highly complex literary structure.

At the time the letters were published, Schnaase was working as a public prosecutor in Düsseldorf, where he was also a mentor and patron of painters of the Academy of Arts. His *Niederländische Briefe*, which emphasized such “lower” genres as landscape and genre painting, provided a literary legitimation for the innovations of the Düsseldorf School of Painting.⁴ This early work by Schnaase was a laboratory of thought from which his seven-volume masterpiece, the systematic elaboration called *Geschichte der bildenden Künste* (History of the Fine Arts), emerged a decade later. Schnaase’s work was one of the first comprehensive universal histories of art ever written, as in turn was Franz Kugler’s *Handbuch der Kunstgeschichte* (Handbook of Art History), published in 1842.⁵

The journey through the United Kingdom of the Netherlands forms the narrative backbone of the fictional letters. In the summer of 1830, Schnaase first went to Holland, where he combined a seaside holiday at Scheveningen with a visit to various historical cities, such as Delft, Leiden, and The Hague. The second part of the voyage was to the Catholic southern Netherlands, an area that freed itself from the rule of the Dutch King William I in the same summer of 1830 and constituted the new state of Belgium. On his art historical journey to Antwerp, Ghent, Bruges, Tournai, Brussels, Leuven, Namur, and Liège and a few smaller historic cities, Schnaase witnessed this political upheaval and reflected on it in his book. The journey probably took more than two months, from approximately the end of June to the beginning of September 1830. The author took great pains to avoid precise dates,⁶ but two dates appear for the Belgian part of the journey: a letter allegedly written on the way from Ghent to Bruges is dated July 31, and Schnaase witnessed an official birthday celebration of the king in Leuven on August 24 (see below).⁷ One day later, revolutionary unrest broke out in Brussels, which the traveler learned

about on the way to Liège. Very few documents are known to exist that were written by people traveling in the southern Netherlands during these decisive weeks of political upheaval.

The choice of the title *Niederländische Briefe* (which is not explained anywhere in the volume) is quite unusual. The first sentence of the preface speaks of two countries—“einer wirklichen, nicht fingierten Reise durch Holland und Belgien”⁸—that have been separate since the year of Schnaase’s journey, and are referred to as such throughout the book. There is also often mention of the individual regions Flanders, Brabant, and Limburg. However, Schnaase uses the terms “Niederlande” and “niederländisch” only to describe historical phenomena, such as in his discussion of fifteenth-century painting. Thus, the book title probably refers less to the Kingdom of the Netherlands, whose claim to represent the entirety of the seventeen provinces had just failed when Schnaase began his journey, and more to the cultural unity of the historical Low Countries, whose art treasures from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century are the focus of his observations, despite the division of faith in the area and the political separation of the North and South as a result of the Eighty Years’ War.⁹

Even if the journey had been real, the letters represent a literary construction. They are obviously based on diary entries, and the author makes them appear as authentic as possible. While he had witnessed an important phase of Belgian nation-building, in his book he deliberately relays only his travel impressions, made in the immediate run-up to and at the beginning of the revolution.¹⁰ Although the book was published in 1834, Schnaase never refers to the genesis of the new Kingdom of Belgium, for which a year after his travel a king of German descent was crowned, Leopold I of Sachsen-Coburg-Saalfeld.

Only at one point does he allow himself the joke of an obvious anachronism, when alluding to a famous remark by the historian Barthold Georg Niebuhr, which was not published until October 1830. In the letter of July 31, Schnaase makes this absurd prophecy: “Wenn Sie diese Zeilen erhalten, wissen Sie schon, was alle Gemüther bewegt: ‘Der Wahnwitz der französischen Minister hat den Talisman zerbrochen, der den Dämon der Revolution gefesselt hielt.’” He adds in a footnote that this is a well-known phrase later written by Niebuhr.¹¹

During his journey, Schnaase was largely dependent on his own observations, since in 1830 he could not yet rely on contemporary scholarly research on the buildings of the northern and southern Netherlands. The fundamental architectural history of Belgium by Antoine Schayes would not appear until 1849, a publication Schnaase would later consider in his *Geschichte der bildenden Künste*.¹² However, he prepared intensively for his journey by reading older art treatises, especially those by Karel van Mander and Arnold Houbraken. Schnaase’s use of various local chronicles, such as the *Histoire de Tournay* by Jean Cousin (1619–20), and special studies, such as the *Histoire de la vie de Rubens* by Jean François Marie Michel (1771), is remarkable, as is his use of the many engravings of cities and individual buildings documented in the book.

While only one edition of *Niederländische Briefe* appeared in the 19th century, for decades it was considered a reference work on the art of the Low Countries.¹³ Johann Wilhelm Loebell’s publication, *Reisebriefe aus Belgien* (Travel Letters from Belgium, 1837), imitates Schnaase’s own letters in long passages, and even Jacob Burckhardt’s first book *Kunstwerke der belgischen Städte* (Works of Art of Belgian Cities, 1842) takes Schnaase’s work as a model, although it has a completely different structure.¹⁴ As late as 1861, *Niederländische Briefe* appears as one of very few literary recommendations in the seventh edition of the Baedeker of Belgium and Holland, in which Schnaase’s analysis of the three Rubens paintings in Antwerp Cathedral is quoted in detail.¹⁵

fig. 2

A brief summary of the letters gives a first overview of the travel itinerary. In the first two letters, Schnaase's journey begins with a ride by steamboat from Cologne down the Rhine to Rotterdam, where Schnaase was expected by a friend, Bernhard, who showed him the cities of Rotterdam and Delft. The two friends then spent a seaside holiday at Scheveningen and visited The Hague and the picture gallery in the Mauritshuis several times.

In the third letter, from page 25 to 54, Schnaase develops the first comprehensive treatise on landscape painting based on the pictures of the Mauritshuis. His treatise is dedicated to this specific genre of Dutch art, but it also reflects on the history of the concept of nature from antiquity to the present, especially the Middle Ages and early modern times. A similar line of argumentation appears in the extensive fifth letter (80–156) with the theme of genre painting, or *Gesellschaftsmalerei* (literally, society painting),¹⁶ which likewise does not concentrate solely on the genesis of Dutch genre paintings of the seventeenth century, but rather examines in a far more general way the relationship of the individual to his social environment in different epochs and different European countries. At the end of the letter is a short but particularly interesting analysis of still life painting (149–156), in which Schnaase develops a strikingly modern conception of autonomous art.

In the fourth letter, about a trip to Leiden (55–79), very different topics alternate colorfully. The richly decorated town houses of the seventeenth century inspired Schnaase to write a defence—highly unusual at the time—of Baroque architecture. A visit to the university museum, on the other hand, exposed the scholar to Indian, Etruscan, and early Christian works of art; his observations on the art of remote epochs and regions herald the thematic range of his *Geschichte der bildenden Künste* (1843–1864).

After a few peaceful days in Scheveningen, Schnaase continued his journey on his own by boat up the Scheldt towards the Catholic southern Netherlands. The long trip gave Schnaase the opportunity to summarize his observations of Dutch architecture of the Middle Ages in the sixth letter (157–180).

In the short seventh letter (181–187), Schnaase describes Antwerp, his first stop in Belgium, whose ancient cityscape and Gothic cathedral filled him with enthusiasm. An analysis of the cathedral becomes the starting point of the important eighth letter (188–218), which deals with architectural history in general (a topic that will be dealt with at the end of the article). After a brief presentation of the other churches of Antwerp in the ninth letter (219–230), Schnaase dedicates the long tenth letter (231–285) to the Antwerp School of Painting, painters of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, from Quentin Metsys to Peter Paul Rubens, whose works Schnaase had studied in the Picture Gallery of the Antwerp Academy. This letter also contains one of the most elaborate arguments of the book: the development of painting in the early modern period, especially in terms of the interactions between Italian and Netherlandish art, and the special significance of Rubens.¹⁷

In the next letter, the eleventh, dedicated to the city of Ghent (286–309), Schnaase focuses on the Gothic churches, above all the famous altarpiece of the Van Eyck brothers, but his art historical observations are somewhat overshadowed by his negative impressions of the rapidly developing industrial city. In contrast to Ghent, Bruges offered an intact medieval cityscape, but also a multitude of important paintings of the fifteenth century. The works of Hans Memling in the Hospital of Saint John, and in the Academy of Arts in particular, deeply impressed the author. The twelfth letter (310–362) thus contains detailed descriptions of the art treasures of Bruges as well as a treatise on early Netherlandish painting and its relationship to the so-called Cologne School of the fifteenth century, based on an analysis of the Ghent Altarpiece.¹⁸

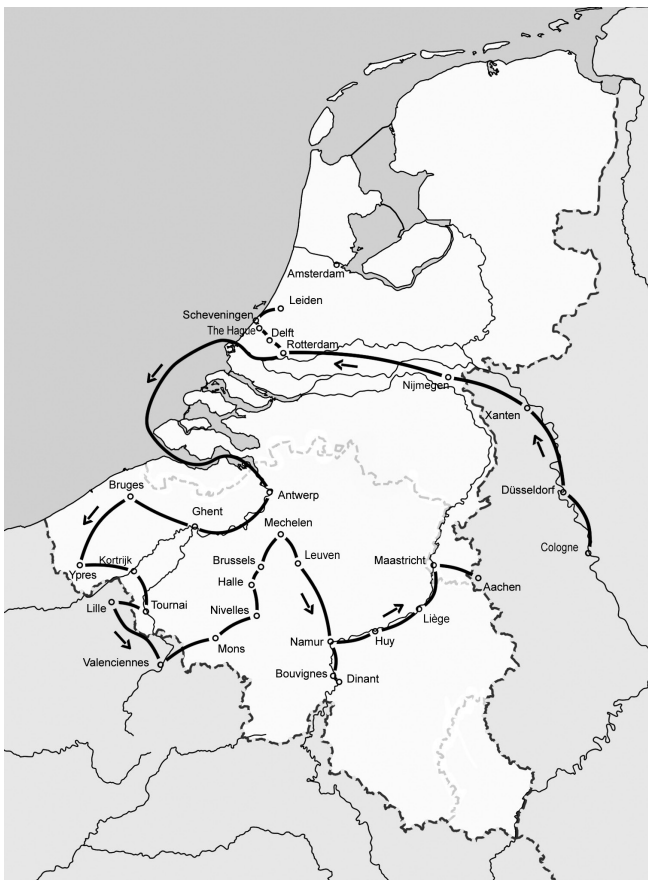


fig. 2 Itinerary of Karl Schnaase's journey through Holland and Belgium in 1830. Map by Henrik Karge, Friederike Berger, and Carina Stegerwald.

fig. 3



fig. 3 De la Barrière, *Tournai Cathedral*, 1823. Drawing by de la Barrière, lithograph by Dewasme in Tournai, from *Collection des principales vues des Pays-Bas*.



fig. 5 De la Barrière, *Portal of the Counts' Castle (Gravensteen) in Ghent*, 1823. Drawing by de la Barrière, lithograph by Dewasme in Tournai from *Collection des principales vues des Pays-Bas*.

Schnaase's thoughts on Romanesque architecture are the focus of the fifteenth letter (400–435): Schnaase had traveled by diligence from Bruges via Ypres to Courtrai (Kortrijk) and from there on foot to Tournai, where he was welcomed by the huge cathedral from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The experience of the Gregorian choral singing combined with the impression of the Romanesque interior inspired the author to reflect on the relationship between architecture and music. In contrast, the traveler's "antiquarische Hoffnung," his desire for all things antiquarian, was disappointed in the town of Courtrai, as he remarks with some irony: "Leider—denn zwischen dem Alterthümlichen und der Industrie ist einmal offener Krieg—ist sie eine üppig aufblühende Fabrikstadt, und der mercantilische Unternehmungsgeist räumt tüchtig auf. [...] Wer übrigens das Alterthümliche nicht vermißt, mag sich an dem Neuen wohl erfreuen. Alles ist geräumig und heiter."¹⁹

In Tournai, writes Schnaase in the sixteenth letter (436–480), "hatte mich der französische Geist angeweht."²⁰ He describes how he crossed the border to Lille and Valenciennes, into the country of the victorious July Revolution. He included these cities in his itinerary, and in his book, fully aware that they had formerly belonged to the (Spanish) Netherlands.²¹ Thus, with regard to Valenciennes, he refers to the works *Commentariorum de rebus memorabilibus, quae in Europa, maxime vero in Belgio ...* by Lodovico Guicciardini (1566) and *Les Délices des Pays-Bas* by Jean-Baptiste Christyn (1769) (494).

Now the tone of the book changes considerably: the political events of the year 1830 determined the further course of the journey and thus also, increasingly, the nature of Schnaase's reflections on the journey. In the sixteenth letter, he makes only a few ironic remarks about the excited political mood in the French border region; Schnaase registered above all the radical destruction the medieval monuments had suffered during the French Revolution.

The seventeenth letter (481–508), in turn, is more entertaining: it contains many observations on the cityscape and the population of Brussels, in particular on the contrast between the Flemings living in the old town and the French-speaking modern society that dominated the new urban areas and the public spaces. In any case, the author was not very fond of the modern life and arts of Brussels that he observed in a large trade exhibition in the Palais de l'industrie et des arts. The text includes some humorous asides, such as Schnaase's opinion on the popularity of Manneken Pis. Overall, however, the description of Brussels is characterized by the increasing tensions that, as we know, led to the Belgian uprising in the summer of 1830.

As he continued through Belgium, Schnaase witnessed the official birthday party for the Dutch king in Leuven, during which the famous town hall was festively illuminated, while the rest of the city remained in a bleak and gloomy silence. In Namur—here begins the final eighteenth letter (509–539)—and even more so in Liège, the traveler finally became involved in the erupting revolution, which is not portrayed as particularly threateningly but rather with amusement at the almost cheerful and excited atmosphere: "Es hat sich in diesen Gegenden eine Praxis der Revolutionen gebildet, die sie wie ein leichtes und alltägliches Geschäft behandelt."²²

Bruges, "Pompeii of the Middle Ages"

Schnaase's descriptions of Belgium are twofold: the dreamy mood in some old cities, such as Bruges, contrasts with the experience of modern life in Brussels and other major cities. The author noted that the old but highly industrialized city of Ghent was quite different from the antiquated scenery of Bruges, which appeared to him as a "Pompeji des Mittelalters."²³ In a certain sense, Schnaase's description of Bruges in the twelfth letter of the *Niederländische Briefe* anticipated the image of the city promulgated by the symbolist literature and art of the late nineteenth century:²⁴



fig. 6 Auguste van Lokeren, *Workers' Houses Inside the Counts' Castle (Gravensteen) in Ghent*, 1831. Lithograph of an ink drawing.

Welch ein Unterschied zu Gent! Dort überall Thätigkeit, Auf- und Abladen der Wagen, Hin- und Hertragen der Ballen, dampfende Schornsteine hinter den neuen Fabrikgebäuden, eilende Commis und dichte Schaaren elender Arbeiter; daneben elegante Kaufläden, moderner Luxus, und die wenigen Ueberreste alt-flandrischer Zeit vernachlässigt und vergessen. [...] Und in diesen Straßen sieht man keine unruhig eilenden, geräuschvollen Gestalten, sondern einzelne Frauen, schwarz gekleidet und mit einem weißen Tuche verschleiert, stets wie zum Kirchgange [...] So hat, wer von Gent nach Brügge kommt, den Gegensatz des Geräusches und der Stille, des gegenwärtigen täglichen Lebens und der Vergangenheit fast wie bei Neapel und Rom. Es ist, als ob, seitdem im sechzehnten Jahrhundert der Welthandel sich von hier fortzog und in andre Häfen überging, der Gang der Zeit für Brügge gestockt hätte. Das Alte scheint, wie in einem Pompeji des Mittelalters, verschüttet und geschützt und jetzt erst wieder aufgedeckt zu seyn.²⁵

But unlike the later literature of *décadence*, such as Georges Rodenbach's famous novel *Bruges-la-morte* (1892), Schnaase painted the old city not as a picture of morbid melancholy but as a splendid treasure of a golden past: "Bei dieser Alterthümlichkeit ist aber nirgends Verfall, nirgends Mangel und Vernachlässigung; alles Alte wird erhalten, reinlich und mit Liebe gepflegt. [...] Es ist daher nicht das Malerische der Ruinen oder der Enge, sondern ein heiteres, fröhliches Bild, das wieder nicht selten an die toscanischen Städte der Ebene, an Pistoja und Prato erinnert."²⁶

On the other hand, Schnaase also remarks that Bruges was, as in its heyday, the place where foreigners met: "außer dem Französischen, das fast gleiche Rechte mit dem Flamländischen hat, hört man auf allen Straßen englisch, ja selbst spanisch und portugiesisch sprechen."²⁷ The reason for this, according to Schnaase, was that times were hard, since many foreigners, as a result of political or economic pressure in their homelands, had turned away to the relatively cheaper Flemish town, but even Bruges did not seem to him to be safe for all time: "Und wer weiß, wie bald auch das Ungewitter, das im Westen heraufzieht, sie auch aus dieser Freistätte vertreiben wird!"²⁸

Industry, social contrasts, and the omens of revolution

Even before the founding of the Kingdom of Belgium, the area of the southern Netherlands was the earliest centre of industrialization on the European continent, with the textile industry in the Flemish cities and the heavy industry in Wallonia. The industrial character of the country caught Schnaase's eye at several points along his journey, and he comments on it several times. However, he was shocked that even the old trading city of Ghent revealed the social misery of the industrial workforce. Schnaase also visited the Gravensteen, the former castle of the counts of Flanders, although he was not aware that it was being used as a textile factory—his vivid description may even serve as an informative source about the state of "die alte Citadelle" in the year 1830:

Schon war die Dämmerung vorgeschritten, als ich einen alterthümlich pittoresken Punkt antraf, den kleinen Markt, der an die alte Citadelle anstößt. Ihre schwarzen kolossalen Mauern ragen finster über die kleinen Wohnhäuser herüber, die daran angebaut sind. Das massige Thor, von welchem ein breiter, unbeleuchteter, bedeckter Gang aufwärts führt, reizte mich zu einem Versuche in das Innere zu dringen; allein kaum war ich eben wieder ins Helle gelangt, so zeigten die neuen, noch kaum vollendeten Gebäude mit ihren Dampfröhren, daß auch hier Fabriken angelegt sind, und indem drängte auch schon der Schwarm der eben entlassenen

fig. 4

fig. 5, 6



Borremans del. et lith.

Lith. de P. Simonau, à Bruxelles.

Vue générale de la Ville de Gand.

A general View of the Town of Ghent.

A Gand, chez J. Pellizzaro, Marchand d'Estampes, rue du Soleil, N° 3.

Comp. II, 16. 1835

fig. 4 Henri Borremans, *General View of the City of Ghent*, before 1837. Drawing by Borremans, lithograph by P. Simonau, published by J. Pellizzaro in Ghent.

Arbeiter auf mich zu. Auf der andern Seite war kein Ausweg, und ich mußte daher dem Strome dieser wilden Menge durch den finstern Gang und in die engen Straßen folgen. Wie sie in ihren Kitteln mit ihren Holzschuhen um mich her klapperten, in dem übelklingenden, unverständlichen Dialekte schrien und tobten, hatte ich denn wenigstens eine schwache Reminiscenz an das Getümmel der aufrührerischen Menge dieser frühesten aller Fabrikstädte.²⁹

During his short stay in Ghent, Schnaase noticed a restless political mood, which drove him to continue his journey quickly: “Ueberdieß trieb und beunruhigte mich die drückende Hitze dieser Tage, und noch mehr als sie, die Gewitterschwüle, die während dessen am politischen Horizont aufgetreten ist, und mit nahen Stürmen droht.”³⁰ Furthermore, the traveler informs his fictitious German correspondent about the consequences in the southern Netherlands of the July revolution in Paris:

Mehr als in Ihren entfernten Gegenden wirft dieß Ereigniß hier, wo die Erinnerungen des Kaiserreiches die Bewohner noch aufs genaueste mit Frankreich verbinden, und wo Gährungsstoff genug aufgehäuft ist, um die erheblichsten Folgen für das eigene Land voraus zu sehen. So ist denn das Ereigniß nicht bloß im Munde der Müßigen, sondern Aller Gedanken sind damit beschäftigt, und überall tritt es entgegen, bei den Reichen, bei den Beamten und besonders bei den Holländern mit Besorgniß, bei den meisten Belgiern, besonders bei der jüngern und ärmern Classe mit unruhiger, drohender Freude.³¹

It is interesting to compare Schnaase’s impressions with those of Georg Forster, who in 1790, forty years earlier, had together with the young Alexander von Humboldt visited the Belgian cities under the impress of the French Revolution and reported on his experiences in the book *Ansichten vom Niederrhein, von Brabant, Flandern, Holland, England und Frankreich* (Views of the Lower Rhineland, Brabant, Flanders, Holland, England and France), published in the years 1791 and 1792.³² The events show striking parallels: in both 1790 and 1830, the revolutionary disturbances moved from France to the Belgian cities, and the German travelers foresaw the spread of the revolution into their homeland. While many German intellectuals, including Forster and Humboldt, had been fascinated by the French Revolution around 1790 and hoped for a change for the better in Germany, Schnaase’s troubled reaction to the July Revolution was again characteristic of the mood around 1830 of much of the German bourgeoisie. Although some voices also rose in favour of the Belgian uprising—like that of the young German poet Ludolf Wienbarg, in his travelogues, *Holland in den Jahren 1831 und 1832* (Holland in the Years 1831 and 1832)³³—most Germans, especially the established intellectuals, feared a social-revolutionary impulse that could also endanger their own position. Some writers, like Barthold Georg Niebuhr and Ernst Moritz Arndt, even passionately condemned the Belgian revolution.³⁴



fig. 7 Constantin-Fidèle Coene, *Episode of the Revolution of 1830. Attack of the Park of Brussels by the Belgians, 1830*. Oil on canvas. Brussels, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique.

fig. 7

It is characteristic of Schnaase’s attitude, however, that he registered the revolutionary events and their social circumstances with a cool eye and a touch of sarcasm; revolution seemed to him almost commonplace in the area.³⁵ Schnaase was an eyewitness to a proletarian character of the uprisings that is not often dealt with in historical analyses.³⁶ What annoyed him most was that the unrest prevented his undisturbed enjoyment of the historical monuments of Belgium—a reaction that may be understandable in the face of the art historical concerns of his journey but which nevertheless reveals a clear tendency toward escapism. However, Schnaase’s conservative attitude, which cannot be separated from his professional position as a jurist, changed noticeably in the following years, when Schnaase supported political and social reforms in the

Prussian Rhineland. During the revolution of 1848, as a liberal in Düsseldorf, he published the small book *Politischer Katechismus für das Volk* (Political catechism for the people), in which he pleads for the introduction of a constitutional monarchy in Prussia according to the British model.³⁷

Languages and cultures

During his journey through the Belgian provinces of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Schnaase was particularly interested in the complex linguistic situation of the country, which was marked by the tensions between old vernacular traditions, the political rule of the Dutch north, and the attraction of French culture. In addition, the author paid attention to the social aspects of language, for example when describing the industrial city of Courtrai:

Die Volkssprache ist noch flamländisch, doch scheint man in den höhern Ständen das Französische vorzuziehn. Zu verargen ist es ihnen nicht, theils wegen des üblen Klanges, theils wegen der großen Abweichungen des hiesigen Dialekts, da sich selbst die Bewohner benachbarter Städte, wie man mich versichert, oft untereinander mißverstehen.³⁸

In Brussels, Schnaase observed an increasing tendency to speak French, which was further reinforced by the political dominance of the Dutch in the United Kingdom:

Das große Uebergewicht des Französischen datirt sich erst aus neuerer Zeit, wenn auch schon früher in dieser Gränzgegend beide Idiome sich berührt haben mögen. Es ist aber noch jetzt im Steigen und wird nach dem natürlichen Gesetze des Widerspruchs durch die Anwesenheit der Holländer eher gefördert als rückgängig gemacht.³⁹

This observation has been confirmed by modern historiography: even though Flemish had often been referred to as the *langue belge* since the early nineteenth century,⁴⁰ it was only after the founding of the Belgian state, in the 1830s, that a Flemish awareness of language began to develop on an intellectual level.⁴¹ The social dimension of the problem can be seen in the following episode, which Schnaase reports from Brussels:

Eine Frau und zwar nur aus den mittleren Classen, gegen die ich meine Verwunderung äußerte, daß ihre beiden Töchter, die etwa vierzehn- bis sechzehnjährig seyn mochten, die eigentliche Muttersprache des Landes nicht einmal verstanden, nahm dieß ganz naiv als ein Lob ihrer Erziehung an. Sie selbst, meinte sie, habe diese abscheuliche Sprache in ihrer Jugend noch gesprochen, aber ihre Kinder habe sie sorgfältig davon zurückgehalten. *Car enfin, ce n'est pas une langue, Monsieur*, setzte sie hinzu.⁴²

Even in conversations in Flemish, the mockery often turned against the Dutch, who had a military presence in the Belgian cities:

Überhaupt lieben die Belgier über die Schwerfälligkeit der Holländer zu spotten, obgleich sie selbst nicht frei davon sind, und oft hört man sie dieselben Spottreden auf jene anwenden, welche die Franzosen ursprünglich gegen sie selbst gebraucht haben. Vielleicht liegt gerade darin ein Reiz, indem sie sich nun von dem Fehler, für den sie sonst leiden mußten, frei glauben, und sich, was sie gern mögen, einbilden können, Franzosen zu sein. Leider ist aber das Lächerliche bei dieser halb französischen Nation eine höchst gefährliche Waffe in den Händen des Uebelwollenden; denn dem Spott widerspricht der Ernst vergebens, und beherrscht zu seyn von solchen, welche man, auch mit Unrecht, verlachen zu können glaubt, ist doppelt drückend.⁴³

Schnaase had no access to the dominant figures of the Dutch administration or the liberal or Catholic opposition in Belgium, but as a subtle observer of the country's social culture on the eve of the revolution, he noted how the complex use of languages at the various social levels played a major role.⁴⁴ Furthermore, his observations prove the increasing importance, since the early nineteenth century, of linguistic demarcations for the new identity formation of nations, and this new identity was naturally contradictory in Belgium.⁴⁵

In addition, when Schnaase traveled several times between the Flemish and Walloon language areas, he observed clear differences in the mentality of the inhabitants, the shape of their towns and villages, and even in their works of art. This inspired him to reflect extensively, in the sixteenth letter (436–480), on the relationship between language, culture, and artistic characteristics. He wondered why painting had a much stronger tradition in the areas where Dutch was spoken, both in Holland and in Brabant and Flanders, than in the French-speaking areas of Belgium. The leitmotif of this passage is the concept of “Theilung der Arbeit unter diesen christlichen Nationen.”⁴⁶ Schnaase resolutely opposes the common notion of a hierarchy of art nations, whether led by Greece, Italy, or France, by assuming an equal distribution of artistic talents across all peoples. At the same time, it was clear to him that no nation can be considered in isolation. In Schnaase's view, nations only develop intellectual characteristics through contact, both friendly and hostile, so that the specific artistic orientation of a primarily linguistically defined cultural nation promotes the opposite orientation of the neighbouring people. The totality of the arts thus only develops in the free interplay of nations.⁴⁷

Architecture and the discovery of space

Several of the observations and reflections laid out in the *Niederländische Briefe* are important to the theoretical foundations of the discipline of art history. In particular, in his treatment of a broad range of buildings erected in different historical epochs, he shows no preference for a single canonical style. He was probably the first art historian who devoted extended analyses to Romanesque, early Gothic, late Gothic, and Renaissance buildings in the same book and who tried to judge each of them fairly. With his appreciative description of lavishly decorated houses in Leiden (58–59), he was also the first author in German art literature to use the term “barock” to characterize buildings of the seventeenth century.⁴⁸

Schnaase's treatment of medieval buildings is particularly interesting. In his description of the cathedral of Tournai in the fifteenth letter (415–420, 425–434), he emphasizes, in an opinion uncommon at that time, the special value of Romanesque architecture.⁴⁹ In the simple forms and geometric clearness of the Romanesque church Schnaase sees the pure principle of architecture and an expression of the scholastic spirit of the twelfth century.

One passage in the eleventh letter (295–298) is dedicated to the Gothic churches in the city of Ghent, in particular the church of St. Nicholas, which was built in the early thirteenth century.⁵⁰ Schnaase comes to the important insight that early Gothic architecture had developed in northern France earlier than in Germany and the Netherlands (296). Moreover, he defends the traditional term of “gothische”⁵¹ architecture against the attempts of various German scholars to rename the style as “altdeutsche Baukunst” (old German architecture). This position shows a decided departure from the nationalistic attitude of German architectural historiography of those years, according to which such authors as Friedrich Schlegel, Sulpiz Boisserée, Georg Moller, Johann Gustav Büsching, and Christian Ludwig Stieglitz considered Gothic to be an originally German style.⁵²

The most profound architectural study of the book is in the eighth letter, dedicated to the cathedral of Antwerp. Schnaase embeds his discussion of the cathedral in a long discourse about

the history of architectural spaces from Roman times until the Middle Ages (188–218).⁵³ Although the author is quite aware of the imposing outward appearance of the cathedral, with its huge façade tower, he focuses his description almost exclusively on the seven-nave interior, which was built between 1351 and 1521.⁵⁴ The extraordinary width of the arches in this building, he says, does not generate the plain and bare impression of the Gothic churches of Italy, because the interior space of its seven naves creates such an enchanting impression: “jede Oeffnung bietet daher ein mannichfaltig beleuchtetes Bild von mehreren Pfeilern in verschiedener Entfernung mit ihren sich schneidenden Bogen, und gibt so statt des Eindrucks der Leere, den eines reichen reizenden Wechsels. Der Raum ist gefüllt, und seine Weite wird daher nach anderem Verhältnisse als gewöhnlich gemessen.”⁵⁵

fig. 8

Schnaase’s description of the interior of Antwerp Cathedral was determined by the recent restoration of the building. The Napoleonic troops had largely removed the Baroque embellishments of the medieval cathedral and shipped many works of art to Paris. After the end of French rule, only a few famous altarpieces by Rubens were returned to the cathedral, and its Gothic shape was restored by the architect Jan Blom.⁵⁶ The entire pillars and walls of the interior design were whitewashed in line with the prevailing neoclassical style—this general appearance certainly promoted Schnaase’s impression of a homogenous spatial continuum.⁵⁷ On the other hand, the filigree lines of the clustered columns emphasized by the white surfaces—still present today—also contribute to the complex spatial impression of the Antwerp Cathedral, as do the transept and the radiating chapels of the polygonal choir. His overall impression is conveyed in the description of the seven naves of unequal width, which according to Schnaase create different views and thus a changing picture, “das durch das wechselnde Spiel des Lichts an den zarten Gliedern und durch die sich mannichfaltig verschlingenden Wölbungen immer aufs Neue fesselt.”⁵⁸

The cathedral of Antwerp was the largest building that Schnaase visited on his journey through the united Netherlands in 1830, and its detailed description in the eighth letter suggests an immediate and very intense visual impression. Nevertheless, there is clear evidence that the focus on the spatial analysis of the interior was motivated by the author’s knowledge of architectural paintings of the so-called Golden Age, images he held in his mind as he entered the Antwerp Cathedral.

fig. 9

No other church in the Netherlands, probably even in Europe, had been depicted as often by painters of the seventeenth century as the cathedral of Antwerp. In the course of the recatholicization of Antwerp after the Spanish reconquest of the formerly Calvinist city in 1585, the cathedral was filled again with altars and furniture, so that by the early seventeenth century the interior was characterized by a rich early Baroque decoration. The painters Hendrick Steenwijck the Younger, Pieter Neefs the Elder, and his son Pieter Neefs the Younger produced large quantities of more or less precise interiors of the cathedral as well as freely conceived interiors of unspecified churches, although these always emanate from the core structure of this metropolitan church.⁵⁹ In the nineteenth century, almost every important museum in Central Europe possessed at least one of these interior *vedute* of Antwerp Cathedral, which appeared in art even more frequently than the Dutch churches of Delft, Haarlem, and Utrecht appeared in the paintings of Gerard Houckgeest, Emanuel de Witte, or Pieter Saenredam.

In a passage from the ninth letter about the late Gothic parish church of St. Jacob in Antwerp, Schnaase states that its true beauty is in its lateral views, “welche die Steenwyks und Neefs in ihren Architekturstücken vorzugsweise darstellen.”⁶⁰ It can be assumed that the author already knew some of the “Steenwyks und Neefs” from German museums and therefore entered the main



fig. 8 Paul Lauters, *Interior View of Antwerp Cathedral*, about 1830. Coloured lithograph.



fig. 9 Pieter Neefs the Younger and Frans Francken III, *Interior View of Antwerp Cathedral*, 1654. Oil on canvas.

church of Antwerp with a picture of the interior in mind, shaped by the seventeenth-century paintings. In this sense, Schnaase combines the spheres of architecture as well as painting in his descriptions of the views through the seven naves of the cathedral.

Not only were subjective spatial constructions already laid out in the architectural paintings from the Golden Age of the Low Countries, but the notion of perspective that Schnaase engages with appears in other sources from the seventeenth century. It is a guiding principle in the treatise *Perspectiva*, published by the Antwerp architect Hans Vredeman de Vries in 1604–05, whose graphic inventions were fundamental for the many seventeenth-century paintings of the interior of the cathedral of Antwerp.⁶¹ However, at that time, perspective meant the correct geometric construction of deep spaces in two-dimensional drawings. In *Niederländische Briefe*, Schnaase pushes the concept of perspective further, treating space as a psychic entity, perhaps motivated by the constructions of the architectural painters of the Golden Age (and perhaps also Vredeman's treatise on perspective). He envisions the interior of the Antwerp cathedral as a perceptual space, in the sense of a mental construction of the viewer. The architectural elements of the wall determine the character of the space, yet the wall is "noch nicht das Innerste selbst." The true inner nature of the space arises "durch den Reflex aller Seiten in der Mitte des Ganzen und bleibt immer ein Ideelles, Unkörperliches."⁶²

Through the projection of lines of thought, according to Schnaase, the entire space of the medieval church is composed in the imagination of the beholder. No physical laws seem to unite space and pillars, and so "wirkt die Gleichheit der Verhältnisse auf beiden Seiten freier, das Auge verbindet die entsprechenden Pfeiler." Not only do the pillars mark the lateral lines but they also denote the sections of several successive, equal spaces.⁶³ Perception thus moves constantly between the inner conception of the mind and the physical, enclosed space, "eine Rückkehr von diesem zu jenem, ein pulsirendes organisches Leben."⁶⁴ By describing the interplay between the walls and vaults as real perimeters of the church interior and the mental conception of the beholder, Schnaase makes clear not only that space exists solely in the viewer's imagination, but also that space as a concept is essential for a comprehensive understanding of the architecture.

Paul Frankl, in *The Gothic*, the standard work about the historiography of this style, published in 1960, mentions the importance of Schnaase's discovery of architectural space as a phenomenon of human perception: "It is striking how much is said here [in *Niederländische Briefe*] about 'space' long before this concept had become of central importance for any discussion of architecture."⁶⁵ In the eighth letter of the *Niederländische Briefe*, we indeed find the root of the psychological and perceptual conception of space, which has become so important in modern architectural theory.⁶⁶ However, little is known about the reception paths of this term from Schnaase to Gottfried Semper⁶⁷ and August Schmarsow and finally to authors of the twentieth century, like Sigfried Giedion. Nevertheless, the cathedral of Antwerp and the numerous pictures of its interior created in the seventeenth century form the cradle of this vision.

Niederländische Briefe—a literary work about art, art history and society

Right up to the twentieth century, *Niederländische Briefe* substantially shaped central questions and guiding concepts of art historiography. However, its art theoretical dimension is integral to, but partly hidden by, the work's literary form.

At first glance it seems obvious that the publication should be classified as autobiographical travel literature, which in the first half of the nineteenth century was experiencing a significant upswing. This genre is characterized by the combination of subjective travel

impressions and object-related descriptions, giving the reader a detailed picture of foreign places and their inhabitants.⁶⁸ *Niederländische Briefe* fulfils the expectations of an objective art journey, and in fact part of it is a veritable art guide, providing details about art in Dutch and Belgian cities, descriptions of landscapes, and atmospheric impressions, as well as details about customs and folk characters—including the characteristic differences between Holland and Belgium, between Flanders and Wallonia—all of which belong to the standard repertoire of travel literature.

These descriptive and analytic passages, sketched with light pen and ink, are lightened up by small personal episodes that testify to a remarkable literary skill. Schnaase successfully displays a casual reserve with regard to his own person and his individual inclinations—a reserve that prevents the reader from being drawn into the described travel experiences in too penetrating a manner. The author maintains a friendly, sometimes slightly ironic distance from the reader throughout, which proves to be beneficial, especially when reading the demanding art theoretical passages that challenge any easy classification of the *Briefe* as autobiographical travel literature.

Niederländische Briefe in fact interweaves three different books: a collection of stimulating letters written during a journey through Holland and Belgium, a concise art guide for that journey, and an extensive treatise on the theory of art. Despite elegant transitions, the individual theoretical expositions stand quite abruptly next to each other, only loosely connected through their thematic, but ultimately accidental, relationships to the journey. It is only when looking back, having finished the book, that one notices that the three strands complement each other like a mosaic and form a rather comprehensive system of the theory and history of art.

This art history and theory is manifested not in any textbook-like systematic coherence but rather in a web-like linking of individual thematic complexes. This is the innovation that *Niederländische Briefe* brought to art-philosophical publications at the time: The overall art theory is consciously turned away from the usual systematic approach and illuminated from various sides, so that the reader is given greater freedom for his own thoughts and associations. Similarly, Schnaase's book can only be classified in the genre of art historical travel literature to a very limited extent, as the usual distinction between free literary and scientific travelogue does not apply.

In this play with literary genres Schnaase has greatly reduced the autobiographical traits in his travel work.⁶⁹ By dressing his memories and reflections in the literary form of letters, he achieves, on the one hand, a pronounced liveliness of his text.⁷⁰ The reader is led to learn about the author's actions and reflections, which seem to have happened only just a few days ago. On the other hand, the fictionality of the text increases greatly: the reader knows that the travel letters are not personally addressed, and from the temporal distance in relation to the events described, the reader can conclude that the immediacy of the letter-like narratives is based on a literary construction. Even authentic memories cannot be easily distinguished from fictional representations within the travel letters.

The specific literary form of Schnaase's work is thus what allows the author to openly analyze works of art on the basis of both the authentic experience of the originals and the intellectual appropriation of art through reflection. In *Niederländische Briefe*, the theory of art is not constructed as an isolated and coherent edifice of thought but is rather deliberately presented in fragments, whereby the subjectivity of the intellectual construction always remains apparent to the reader.

- 1 Karl Immermann, "Düsseldorfer Anfänge. Maskengespräche" (1840), in Karl Immermann, *Werke in fünf Bänden*, ed. Benno von Wiese (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1971–1977), 4:599.
- 2 Some publications about Schnaase: Peter Bethhausen, "Schnaase, Karl," in Peter Bethhausen, Peter H. Feist, and Christiane Fork, *Metzler Kunsthistoriker Lexikon* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1999), 365–368; Wolfgang Cortjaens, "Modelllandschaft Rhein Maas? Topographische und kulturpolitische Ordnungskriterien in der preußischen Kunstgeschichte des Vormärz: Karl Schnaase, Franz Kugler und Franz Mertens und die Konstruktion nationaler und regionaler 'Schulen,'" in *Historism and Cultural Identity in the Rhine-Meuse Region: Tensions between Nationalism and Regionalism in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Wolfgang Cortjaens, Jan De Meyer, and Tom Verschaffel (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2008), 94–111; Henrik Karge, "Karl Schnaase (1798–1875)," in *Dictionnaire des historiens d'art allemands*, ed. Michel Espagne and Bénédicte Savoy (Paris: CNRS éditions, 2010), 265–276; Henrik Karge, "Projecting the Future in German Art Historiography of the Nineteenth Century: Franz Kugler, Karl Schnaase, and Gottfried Semper," *Journal of Art Historiography* 9 (December 2013): 1–26, <https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2013/12/karge.pdf>; Tobias Teutenberg, *Die Unterweisung des Blicks: Visuelle Erziehung und visuelle Kultur im langen 19. Jahrhundert* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2019), 164–168; Henrik Karge, *Die Genese der modernen Kunstgeschichte im 19. Jahrhundert: Karl Schnaase—Franz Kugler—Jacob Burckhardt* (Hildesheim: Olms, forthcoming).
- 3 Karl Schnaase, *Niederländische Briefe* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1834); Karl Schnaase, *Niederländische Briefe: Mit einer Einleitung und einem Themenverzeichnis*, ed. Henrik Karge (reprint edition with an introduction by the editor) (Hildesheim, Zurich, New York: Olms-Weidmann, 2010). Some publications about this work: Michael Podro, *The Critical Historians of Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 31–43; Regine Prange, ed., *Kunstgeschichte 1750–1900: Eine kommentierte Anthologie* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2007), 80–85; Henrik Karge, "Karl (auch Carl) Schnaase; Niederländische Briefe, Stuttgart / Tübingen 1834," in *Hauptwerke der Kunstgeschichtsschreibung*, ed. Paul von Naredi-Rainer (Stuttgart: Kröner, 2010), 399–403; Teutenberg, *Unterweisung des Blicks*, 164–168.
- 4 See Henrik Karge, "'...erhielt die Praxis der Kunst hier ihr Komplement, die Theorie': Karl Immermann, Karl Schnaase und Friedrich von Uechtritz als Mentoren der Düsseldorfer Malerschule," in *Die Düsseldorfer Malerschule und ihre internationale Ausstrahlung 1819–1918*, ed. Bettina Baumgärtel, 2 vols. (Petersberg: Imhof, 2011), 1:62–75.
- 5 Franz Kugler, *Handbuch der Kunstgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Ebner & Seubert, 1842); Carl Schnaase, *Geschichte der bildenden Künste*, 7 vols. (Düsseldorf: Buddeus, 1843–1864), vol. 8 (published posthumously with a biography of the author by Wilhelm Lübke; Stuttgart: Ebner & Seubert, 1879). See Henrik Karge, "Franz Kugler und Karl Schnaase—zwei Projekte zur Etablierung der 'allgemeinen Kunstgeschichte,'" in *Franz Theodor Kugler: Deutscher Kunsthistoriker und Berliner Dichter*, ed. Michel Espagne, Bénédicte Savoy, and Céline Trautmann-Waller (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2010), 83–104.
- 6 Unfortunately, there are no further biographical sources on Schnaase's journey through the Low Countries.
- 7 Schnaase, *Niederländische Briefe*, 294, 490–491.
- 8 "[A] real, not fictitious journey through Holland and Belgium," Schnaase, *Niederländische Briefe*, III.
- 9 Compare the complex history of the terms "Netherlands," "Low Countries," and "Belgium" in the French and Netherlandish languages, analyzed in Sébastien Dubois, *L'invention de la Belgique: Genèse d'un État-Nation, 1648–1830* (Brussels: Racine, 2005), 17–192.
- 10 Studies about the emergence of a Belgian national consciousness since the eighteenth century include Otto Dann, "Der belgische Nationalstaat und seine Geschichte," in *Das Königreich Belgien: Geschichte und Kultur*, ed. Peter-Eckhard Knabe (Cologne: Janus, 1988), 13–50, esp. 18–25; Johannes Koll, "Belgien: Geschichtskultur und nationale Identität," in *Mythen der Nationen: Ein europäisches Panorama*, ed. Monika Flacke (Berlin: Deutsches Historisches Museum, 1998), 53–77; Johannes Koll, "Die belgische Nation": *Patriotismus und Nationalbewußtsein in den Südlichen Niederlanden im späten 18. Jahrhundert* (Münster: Waxmann, 2003) (for the situation before 1830, see 367–378); Dubois, *L'invention de la Belgique*, esp. 102–192. Compare also Stefaan Marteel, *The Intellectual Origins of the Belgian Revolution: Political Thought and Disunity in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, 1815–1830* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).
- 11 "When you receive these lines, you already know what moves all minds: 'The madness of the French ministers broke the talisman that bound the demon of the Revolution,'" Schnaase, *Niederländische Briefe*, 294: This is a somewhat imprecise quote from Barthold Georg Niebuhr, *Römische Geschichte*, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (Berlin: Reimer 1830), v (the preface of the second edition concludes by indicating a specific date, October 1830).
- 12 Antoine Schayes, *Histoire de l'Architecture en Belgique*, 2 vols. (Brussels: Jamar, 1849). See Ellen Van Impe's study in the present volume.
- 13 It was reprinted recently, edited by Henrik Karge: Schnaase, *Niederländische Briefe* (2010).
- 14 Johann Wilhelm Loebell, *Reisebriefe durch Belgien: Mit einigen Studien zur Politik, Geschichte und Kunst* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1837); Jacob Burckhardt, *Kunstwerke der belgischen Städte* (Düsseldorf: Buddeus, 1842); see also the new edition: Jacob Burckhardt, *Kleine Schriften*, vol. 1: *Kunsthistorische Schriften*, ed. Mikkel Mangold (Basel: Beck and Schwabe 2017) (volume 1 is also published as volume 7 of *Jacob Burckhardt Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*), 139–237. For a detailed analysis of Burckhardt's book, see Karge, *Genese der modernen Kunstgeschichte* (forthcoming).
- 15 Karl Baedeker, *Belgien und Holland: Handbuch für Reisende*, 7th ed. (Koblenz: Baedeker 1861), 4:98–99.
- 16 Schnaase, *Niederländische Briefe*, 80.
- 17 See Henrik Karge, "Karl Schnaase's Niederländische Briefe (1834): Early Netherlandish Painting in European Perspective," *Oud Holland* 133 (2020): 215–230, esp. 222–225.
- 18 For more details, see Karge, "Schnaase's Niederländische Briefe: Early Netherlandish Painting", 220–222.
- 19 "Unfortunately—for once there is open warfare between antiquity and industry—it is a lavishly flourishing factory town, and the mercantile spirit of enterprise is cleaning up nicely. [...] Those who do not miss the old, by the way, may well enjoy the new. Everything is spacious and bright," Schnaase, *Niederländische Briefe*, 405.
- 20 "In Tournai, the French spirit had blown over to me," Schnaase, *Niederländische Briefe*, 436.
- 21 I am grateful to Maarten Liefvooghe for this kind advice.
- 22 "In these areas, a practice of revolutions has emerged, which treats them as a light and everyday business," Schnaase, *Niederländische Briefe*, 514. This remark fits in with Dubois' observation that the inhabitants of Liège had already been ardent partisans of the French Revolution before 1800 (Dubois, *L'invention de la Belgique*, 387).
- 23 Schnaase, *Niederländische Briefe*, 311.
- 24 See George C. Schoolfield, A Baedeker of Decadence: *Charting a Literary Fashion, 1884–1927* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 100–116.
- 25 "What a difference to Ghent! There everywhere activity, loading and unloading of the wagons, moving of the bales back and forth, steaming chimneys behind the new factory buildings, rushing soldiers and dense crowds of miserable workers; besides elegant shops, modern luxury, and the few remnants of the old Flemish time neglected and forgotten. [...] And in these streets [of Bruges] one sees no restless hurrying, noisy figures, but single women, dressed in black and veiled with a white cloth, always as if going to church. [...] Thus, whoever comes from Ghent to Bruges has the contrast of the noise and the silence, the present daily life and the past, almost as in Naples and Rome. It is as if, since in the sixteenth century the world trade had departed from here and passed over to other ports, the course of time would have faltered in Bruges. The old city seems, as in a Pompeii of the Middle Ages, to be buried and protected and now only to be uncovered again," Schnaase, *Niederländische Briefe*, 310–311.
- 26 "Nowhere is there decay in this antiquity; nowhere is there dearth and neglect. Everything old is preserved, clean and cared for with love. [...] It is therefore not the picturesque of the ruins or the narrowness, but a serene, cheerful image that recalls not infrequently the Tuscan cities of the plain, Pistoia and Prato," Schnaase, *Niederländische Briefe*, 311.
- 27 "As well as French, which has almost the same rights as Flemish, you can hear English, even Spanish and Portuguese spoken on all the streets," Schnaase, *Niederländische Briefe*, 313.
- 28 "And who knows how soon the storm that is coming up in the West will drive them out of this sanctuary too!" Schnaase, *Niederländische Briefe*, 313.
- 29 "Twilight had already begun when I found an ancient picturesque point, the small market that touches the old citadel. Its black colossal walls rise darkly over the small houses that are attached to it. The massive gate, from which a broad, unlighted, covered corridor leads upwards, tempted me to penetrate into the interior. But scarcely had I reached the top than the new, barely finished buildings with their steampipes showed that here also factories were laid out, and a swarm of workers who had just finished their work was rushing toward me. On the other side there was no way out, and I therefore had to follow the stream of this wild crowd through the dark passage and into the narrow streets. As they rattled around me in their cloaks with their clogs, shouting and raging in their bad-sounding and incomprehensible dialect, I had at least a faint reminiscence of the turmoil produced by the tumultuous crowd of these earliest of all factory towns," Schnaase, *Niederländische Briefe*, 292–293.
- 30 "Moreover, the stifling heat of these days drove and troubled me, and even more the thundery oppressiveness, which has appeared on the political horizon, and is threatening with close storms," Schnaase, *Niederländische Briefe*, 294.
- 31 "More so than in your remote areas, this event has its effect here, where the memories of the Empire still link the inhabitants most closely with France, and where enough fermentable material has been piled up to expect the most significant consequences for the own country. So the event is not merely in the mouth of the idlers, but all thoughts are occupied with it, and it appears everywhere: in the minds of the rich, of the officials and especially of the Dutchmen with concern, in the minds of most of the Belgians, especially the younger and poorer classes with restless, threatening joy," Schnaase, *Niederländische Briefe*, 294–295.
- 32 This comparison has already been treated by Wolfgang Beyrodt, "Ansichten vom Niederrhein. Zum Verhältnis von Carl Schnaases Niederländischen Briefen zu Georg Forster," in *Welt und Wirkung von Hegels Ästhetik*, ed. Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert and Otto Pöggeler, Hegel-Studien, 27 (Bonn: Bouvier, 1986), 169–182.
- 33 Ludolf Wienbarg, *Holland in den Jahren 1831 und 1832* (Hamburg: Hoffmann & Campe, 1833).
- 34 On the political reactions to the Belgian revolution in Germany, see Hermann von der Dunk, *Der deutsche Vormärz und Belgien 1830/48* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1966).
- 35 "[A] practice of revolutions in these areas that treats them as an easy and everyday business," Schnaase, *Niederländische Briefe*, 514.
- 36 Most histories, such as Marteel, *Intellectual Origins of the Belgian Revolution*, treat the political and intellectual environment of the protagonists of the Belgian revolution. Interesting material on the proletarian forces in the revolution, on the other hand, can be found in the unconventional book by Adrien de Meeüs, *History of the Belgians* (New York: Praeger, 1962), esp. 267–272. He quotes from a letter of 1830 by the Dutch governor of Liège, Samuel Johannes Sandberg van Esselburg, to King William I: "The sponsors of the revolution are neither the nobles nor the priests. They are the young lawyers, the young folk from the lower classes, the people who want to rise in life, the malcontents of every sort" (269).
- 37 Karl Schnaase, *Politischer Katechismus für das Volk* (Düsseldorf: Buddeus, 1848).
- 38 "The popular language is still Flemish, but in the upper classes French seems to be preferred. It is not to be taken amiss with them, partly because of the bad sound, partly because of the great variations in the local dialect, since even the inhabitants of neighbouring towns, I am assured, often misunderstand each other," Schnaase, *Niederländische Briefe*, 405.
- 39 "The great preponderance of French only dates back to more recent times, although both idioms may have touched each other earlier in this border region. However, it is still on the rise and, according to the natural law of contradiction, is being encouraged rather than reversed by the presence of the Dutch," Schnaase, *Niederländische Briefe*, 482.
- 40 Cf. Dubois, *L'invention de la Belgique*, 388–392.
- 41 Cf. Dann, "Der belgische Nationalstaat," 35–36. A central figure was Hendrik Conscience in Antwerp, who wrote a history of Belgium whose trajectory led to the glorious destination of the present independent state. The German version is *Geschichte von Belgien*, 2nd enlarged ed. (Leipzig: Lorch, 1863).
- 42 "One woman, and from only the middle classes, to whom I expressed my astonishment that her two daughters, who might be about fourteen to sixteen years old, did not even understand the real mother tongue of the country, naively took this as a praise of her education. She herself, she said, had still spoken this horrible language in her youth, but she had carefully kept it from her children. *Car enfin, ce n'est pas une langue, Monsieur, she added.*" Schnaase, *Niederländische Briefe*, 482–483.
- 43 "In general the Belgians love to mock the ponderousness of the Dutch, although they themselves are not free of it, and one often hears them apply the same mocking speeches to those which the French originally used against themselves. Perhaps this is precisely the attraction of being free from the error for which they would otherwise have had to suffer, and being able to imagine, as they like to do, that they are French. Unfortunately, however, the ridiculous in this half-French nation is a most dangerous weapon in the hands of the malevolent; for mockery is vainly contradicted by seriousness, and to be dominated by those whom one thinks one can ridicule, even if wrongfully, is doubly oppressive," Schnaase, *Niederländische Briefe*, 402.
- 44 On the role of language diversity in the run-up to the Belgian Revolution, see Koll, "Die belgische Nation," 374; Dubois, *L'invention de la Belgique*, 388–392; Marteel, *Intellectual Origins of the Belgian Revolution*, 67–73.
- 45 Dubois, *L'invention de la Belgique*, 98–102, lists interesting sources which show that in earlier centuries the formation of identity had hardly been connected with language, so that many Belgians called themselves Spaniards or Austrians according to their subjectship under Habsburg rule.
- 46 "[D]ivision of labour between nations" Schnaase, *Niederländische Briefe*, 442.
- 47 For further details, see Henrik Karge, "Arbeitsteilung der Nationen: Karl Schnaases Entwurf eines historisch gewachsenen Systems der Künste," *Zeitschrift für Schweizerische Archäologie und Kunstgeschichte* 53 (1996): 295–306.
- 48 Schnaase, *Niederländische Briefe*, 58. See Ute Engel, *Stil und Nation: Barockforschung und deutsche Kunstgeschichte, ca. 1830–1933* (Paderborn: Fink, 2019), 72.
- 49 In this early work, Schnaase still uses the term "vorgothische Architektur" (pre-gothic architecture), the term "romanisch" (Romanesque) becoming common in the German language only around 1840. See Henrik Karge, "Zwischen Naturwissenschaft

und Kulturgeschichte: Die Entfaltung des Systems der Epochenstile im 19. Jahrhundert," in *Stilfragen zur Kunst des Mittelalters: Eine Einführung*, ed. Bruno Klein and Bruno Boerner (Berlin: Reimer, 2006), 39–60, esp. 44–47.

50 See Marjan Buyle, et al., *Architecture gothique en Belgique* (Brussels: Racine, 1997), 50–52.

51 Schnaase, *Niederländische Briefe*, 173.

52 See Paul Frankl, *The Gothic: Literary Sources and Interpretations through Eight Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), esp. 458–467; Nikolaus Pevsner, *Some Architectural Writers of the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 23–24; Klaus Niehr, *Gotikbilder—Gotiktheorien: Studien zur Wahrnehmung und Erforschung mittelalterlicher Architektur in Deutschland zwischen ca. 1750 und 1850* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1999); Karge, "Zwischen Naturwissenschaft und Kulturgeschichte," 40–44.

53 The importance of this treatise has already been highlighted by Frankl, *The Gothic*, 545–546. See also Podro, *Critical Historians of Art*, 31–43; Karge, "Frühwerk Karl Schnaases," 413–415; Teutenberg, *Unterweisung des Blicks*, 164–168.

54 See Buyle, et al., *Architecture gothique en Belgique*, 82, 96–102.

55 "[E]ach opening therefore offers a manifold illuminated image of several pillars at various distances with their intersecting arches, and thus gives, instead of the impression of emptiness, that of a rich, charming interchange. The space is filled, and its breadth is therefore measured according to other proportions than usual." Schnaase, *Niederländische Briefe*, 207.

56 See Madeleine Manderyck, "De Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekathedraal van Antwerpen, een gotische binnenruimte? Het herscheppen van een middeleeuws kerinterieur in de negentiende en twintigste eeuw," in *Van Quinten Metsijs tot Peter Paul Rubens: Meesterwerken uit het Koninklijk Museum terug in de kathedraal*, ed. Ria Fabri and Nico Van Hout (Antwerp: De Kathedraal VZW & BAI Publishers, 2009), 55–63. I am indebted to Ulrich Alexander, Antwerp, for much useful information about the cathedral of Antwerp and its historiography.

57 This has been pointed out by Tobias Teutenberg, "Objects at a Distance: Karl Schnaase's Description of the Antwerp Cathedral (1834) and the Pedagogic Conditioning of the Eye During the Nineteenth Century," in *Vision in Motion: Streams of Sensation and Configuration of Time*, ed. Michael F. Zimmermann (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2016), 147–163, and Teutenberg, *Unterweisung des Blicks*, 165.

58 "[G]ives a different picture from every standpoint, which through the changing play of light on the delicate members and through the manifoldly intersecting vaults captures the attention again and again." Schnaase, *Niederländische Briefe*, 210.

59 Hans Jantzen, *Das niederländische Architekturbild* (Leipzig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1910), 19–49; Thomas Fusenig, "Neefs und Co.—Die Antwerpener Architekturalerei im frühen 17. Jahrhundert," in *Hans Vredeman de Vries und die Folgen*, ed. Heiner Borggreffe and Vera Lüpkes (Marburg: Jonas, 2005), 143–151; Claire Baisier, ed., *Divine Interiors. Experience Churches in the Age of Rubens*, exhib. cat., Museum Mayer van den Bergh, Antwerp, 2016 (Kontich: BAI, 2016).

60 "[W]hich the Steenwijks and Neefs represent in exemplary fashion in their architectural pieces." Schnaase, *Niederländische Briefe*, 222.

61 Hans Vredeman de Vries, *Perspectiva theorica ac practica*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Hondius, 1604–1605). Vredeman also published a German version of the treatise.

62 "[T]hrough the reflection of all sides in the middle of the whole, and always remains an ideal, immaterial matter." Schnaase, *Niederländische Briefe*, 192.

63 "[T]he equality of ratios on both sides seems freer, the eye connects the corresponding pillars." Schnaase, *Niederländische Briefe*, 198.

64 "[A] return from these to that, a pulsating organic life." Schnaase, *Niederländische Briefe*, 200.

65 Frankl, *Gothic*, 545.

66 Schnaase's pioneering role has not yet been noticed in the research about the history of architectural theory and the notions of space. Therefore, the statement of Adrian Forty that "as a term, 'space' simply did not exist in the architectural vocabulary until the 1890s" must be contradicted (Adrian Forty, *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 256–275, esp. 156.) For recognitions of Schnaase's new conception, see Harry Francis Mallgrave, *Modern Architectural Theory: A Historical Survey, 1673–1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 196; Teutenberg, *Unterweisung des Blicks*, 164–168. For a more detailed presentation of this topic, see Karge, *Genese der modernen Kunstgeschichte* (forthcoming).

67 See Henrik Karge, "Farben und Raum in Sempers *Stil*. Vom Polychromiestreit zur Wahrnehmungstheorie der Farben," in *Polychromie & Wissen*, ed. Uta Hassler (Munich: Hirmer 2019), 18–39.

68 See, generally, Peter J. Brenner, *Der Reisebericht in der deutschen Literatur: Ein Forschungsüberblick als Vorstudie zu einer Gattungsgeschichte* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1990), esp. 361–449.

69 In this respect, *Niederländische Briefe* differs markedly from two works that may have served as models for Schnaase in their intertwining of different literary levels: Heinrich Heine's *Reisebilder* and Karl Immermann's *Reisejournal*; he knew both authors well. Immermann, *Werke*, 4:9–226. Cf. Gert Vonhoff, "Auf dem Weg zur Geschichte. Immermanns Reisetagebücher und 'Reisejournal,'" *Immermann-Jahrbuch* 5 (2004): 83–93; Heinrich Heine, *Reisebilder*, 4 vols. (Hamburg: Hoffmann & Campe, 1826–1831). For analysis of the *Niederländische Briefe* as a literary work, see Friedrich Sengle, *Biedermeierzeit: Deutsche Literatur im Spannungsfeld zwischen Restauration und Revolution 1815–1848*, 3 vols. (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1971–1980), 2: 242, 267, 789, 795.

70 This dressing, the elegant literary "packaging" of the art scholarly expositions, was sometimes criticized. In 1840, Karl Immermann remarked in his *Maskengespräche*, "The light travel descriptions, which are inserted between the profound deductions, are more of a false attraction than an ornament." Immermann, *Werke*, 4:599–600.

Provenance figures

- fig. 1 © Stadtmuseum Düsseldorf B 622.
- fig. 3, 5 Ghent University Library
BIB.ACC.028231, CC BY-SA 4.0.
- fig. 4 Ghent University Library
BIB.GRA.003516
- fig. 6 Collection Ghent City Archives,
SCMS_FO_1906, reproduced with
permission.
- fig. 7 KIK-IRPA, Brussels, cliché B114733,
CC-BY 4.0.
- fig. 8 Collection Henrik Karge,
reproduced with permission.
- fig. 9 The Hague, Mauritshuis,
reproduced with permission.