

This PDF includes a chapter from the following book:

Gottfried Semper

In Search of Architecture

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Semper's Literary Estate

Semper's literary estate was considerable. It contained manuscripts, in several versions, of all the books and articles published in his lifetime, of the annual courses he had given as professor of architecture in Dresden and Zurich, of the many public lectures he gave at Marlborough House, written in English (incidentally, a language he never quite mastered). It included the voluminous manuscript of over five hundred pages of "Vergleichende Baulehre," the work on which he was engaged for so many years, and an equally extensive manuscript, again in several drafts, of "Theorie des Formell-Schönen"; prefaces and introductions of both these treatises are translated in this section. There are also manuscripts relating to buildings he had been commissioned to execute by order of the Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria in 1869: the so-called Kaiser Forum in Vienna, a grand project integrating the Imperial Palace or Hofburg into a cultural center, similar to the Dresden Forum with which, almost forty years before, he had started his career.¹ Of particular interest are the detailed programs for the statuary embellishment of the executed buildings, the Burgtheater and the two museum buildings. The ingenious allegorical significance of this decor engaged Semper's intensive and sustained interest.² Other documents of this period concern the building of the second Hoftheater at Dresden (1870–1878) after the first burned down in 1865. Semper directed the execution of his new design from Vienna, his permanent residence after 1871.³

Studying this great collection of manuscripts, one becomes aware of Semper's fertile mind. He was interested in a wide range of subjects: everything that concerned architecture was, of course, important to him, but so were art and artistic problems in general; he had an almost scholarly knowledge of matters connected with archeology and philology, was conversant with modern scientific achievements, and was fascinated by mathematical problems. Thus, exploring these manu-

scripts will always be a rewarding pursuit. Five of them have been chosen to make up this section.

Except for the introductory source notes, the footnotes are Semper's notes; numbered notes and bracketed passages are the editor's additions or comments. Every two or three folio numbers are given in brackets at the end of the last full paragraph on a folio.