



Wilhelm von Bode's Way of Art Appraisal

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Abstract: Wilhelm von Bode, 1845-1929, whose full name is Arnold Wilhelm von Bode, added the word "Feng" to his family name after being granted the title of nobility in 1914. He was a famous German art historian, museum director and founder of museology in the 19th century, and served as the general curator of the Berlin Museum from 1905 to 1920. In Bode's more than half a century long art museum work and art appraisal activities, he has identified countless works of art, and it is impossible to accurately count how many works of art he has evaluated and collected for the Berlin Art Museum and other art museums in Germany. His achievements in art appraisal have almost become a legend. These events recorded in the art history present Bode's specific details and ideas in the work of art appraisal, and more clearly delineate the intricate relationship between art appraisal and other social factors in the country's cultural construction.

Keywords: art science, art appraisal, art museum

1. Introduction

Bode lived in an era when Europe, especially the German speaking region, had made great progress in the exploration, research and practice of art theory. In this era, art museums were constantly changing from traditional to modern, and "art science" played an important role. When art appraisal is becoming more and more scientific, it undoubtedly integrates knowledge and skills in many professional fields.

Bode believed that the Renaissance was the highest point of Western civilization, so he enthusiastically collected and displayed many Renaissance works. In 1872, Bode began his first working career in the Royal Prussian Museums; In 1896, Bode entered the painting gallery. When Bode retired in 1920, Berlin's museum collections were comparable to those of Vienna, Munich and Paris. He systematically collected the paintings of the early Netherlands School, the works of Albrecht Durer, Rembrandt and Frans Hals, the Italian paintings of the 14th to 18th centuries, the Italian Renaissance sculpture, and the German sculpture. One of the keys to the success of Bode's collection is that he is actually a connoisseur, which is his ability to study the original works of art in almost all museums in Europe and North America. And his most well-known identity is also a connoisseur, although Bode claims to be a cultural historian, he once learned from another great cultural historian, Jacob Burckhardt.

2. Bode's appraisal thought

In the identification activities of works of art, Bode often shows a state of relying on intuition and improvised judgment. Most of them only give the identification results, and rarely explain the reasons for the identification results. Surprisingly, when he authenticates a work of art, he can almost immediately tell the origin or author of the work at first sight, and the accuracy is very high. Bode seems to consciously express himself in this way in order to add more mysterious mystery and authority to his legendary art appraisal activities, while avoiding unnecessary disputes. Bode's appraisal conclusion is not coincidentally accurate. In fact, it can withstand scientific verification. Sometimes, even though his appraisal result may not be very certain, his judgment also provides other art history scholars with very good clues and becomes the basis for further research.

As for art appraisal, Bode did not write special books, thus forming his own systematic theory. The more explicit statement is that when he commented on Morelli's art appraisal, There was a very good summary of art appraisal: "Just as every master has gradually formed a certain degree of typicality in form cognition and shape shaping, so does the color performance, that is, color levels, and color skills. It also needs to be carefully observed, which is decisive for identifying a master. And ancient philology, that is, the study of various signatures appearing in works, is also an important auxiliary means, especially the signatures of various artists. Even those who look at It is not the main element, for example, the materials used in the works have more or less significance. When all these characteristics of each artist are observed together, it is the correct 'experimental method'." Here Bode made a high summary of the art appraisal he understood, which includes: careful observation of the forms, colors and materials in the works, and mastery of ancient Chinese calligraphy and signature

handwriting. As an art appraiser from an art historian's background, it is self-evident that he has made a comprehensive and in-depth study of art history.

3. Learning experience of art history

Bode has a recognized talent in art appraisal, which is first related to his learning experience in art history.

In the summer of 1867, Bode completed his law major in Berlin and became a trainee judge in the Principality of Brunswick after passing the official law examination. He began to help arrange the art collections in the Brunswick Museum after his not hard work, which gradually aroused his enthusiasm for art. During this period, Bode sent a letter to Gustav Wagen, the curator of the Old Berlin Museum and art historian, asking about the study and employment of art history, but he was not supported and encouraged by Wagen. Bode traveled to the Netherlands and Belgium for the first time. After visiting museums in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, Bruges and other places, he felt that his love for art was growing, so he wrote to Carl Schnazer, another famous art historian in Germany at that time, to ask him again about the study and practice of art history. This time, he was warmly supported by Schnazer. Perhaps he had similar experiences. Like Bode, Schnazer studied law at the suggestion of his father when he was young. Although Schnazer's formal career has always been related to law and government, because of his love for art, he gradually became an expert in the field of art history, especially Christian art, and one of the founders of the scientific learning system of German art history. However, like Schnazer and Bode, there are still many people who have studied law or other professional backgrounds and then turned to art history, such as Konrad Fiedler [1841-1895], who is known as the father of modern art, Hermann Grimm [1828-1901], an early art history professor at the University of Berlin, and Hugovon Tschudi [1851-1911], the curator of the National Gallery of Fine Arts in Berlin. This may indicate from another aspect that art history was not a very popular profession at that time.

With Schnazer's encouragement, Bode went to Berlin University and Vienna University to study art history from the beginning of 1869 to the end of 1870, and obtained a doctorate in art history. During this period, Bode's study in Vienna was mainly conducted in art museums and art collection institutions, and mainly focused on practical work such as evaluation, sorting and classification of works. Such learning experience made many art historians who were college graduates at that time despise Bode, because Bode's study of art history and art appraisal was not formal enough. But at that time, the study of art history in Germany and even in Europe was far from being so popular and complete, so the professionals in art history were very scarce. Even in his reply to Bode, Wagen wrote: "At present (1867), I am the only museum director who studies art history, and the rest are painters." Bode himself more or less showed off: "As far as I am concerned, people are competing to invite me so formally, which is not my merit. However, whether in the older generation or the younger generation, I was indeed almost the only historian trained for the theoretical and practical work of the museum at that time, which is recognized by the professional community in Berlin. Even when I was still studying, I handled some work for the curator of the Berlin Painting Collection."

4. Long term accumulation and artistic investigation of works of art

It is generally believed in the professional circles that Bode's superb art appraisal ability comes from his long-term contact, observation and research of a large number of artistic works. His extensive study in many art museums and private art collection institutions in Europe and even the United States has brought him a profound professional accumulation, forming a huge accumulation of visual images and professional knowledge related to various works of art in his memory.

In the field of art appraisal, Bode showed his remarkable ability very early. In 1871, Bode followed the archaeology professor Alexander Conze [1831-1914] to Italy for the first time for an art investigation. During his stay in Florence, Bode met Carl E. Von Liffart [Karl E. von Liphart, 1808-1891], Liffart gave Bode positive affirmation and encouragement in art appraisal. When the two people visited the Uffizi Art Museum, Liffat deliberately tested the young Bode by asking his opinion on an unknown painting. According to his professional experience, Bode said that the author might be the Dutch artist Hercules Seghers [1590-1638], and Liffat happily gave Bode a warm hug, because Liffat himself believed that the author of the work was the unknown ancient master (Figure 1).

Such anecdotes were so many in Bode's art appraisal activities that they almost became legendary later. Bode once had an absolute authority in the art appraisal circle in Europe at that time. A colleague of his museum once described that: "In the German Emperor Friedrich Museum, the corridor outside Bode's office is like a doctor's outpatient reception room, where collectors and art dealers sit and wait for Bode's art to bring them 'diagnostic results'."

Bode's art appraisal is far beyond what can be learned only in art history books. He takes art inspection as an effective way to learn art history and art appraisal, and takes appreciation of the original works as a necessary means. "Bode knows that as an art history scholar, his career requires unlimited travel, needs to know various art collection institutions, and

needs to be able to use various archives and libraries." Bode not only made frequent visits to major art museums, private art collection institutions and art auctions, but also reflected his views on the young generation of art museum workers. In April 1908, Hans Pose [1879-1942], a museum assistant of Bode at that time, wrote a letter from Rome to Bode, "hoping to extend the study in Rome for another two weeks". Bode's request for extending working and traveling time for young scholars has always been reasonable, generous and friendly. Bode gave young scholars enough space, time and material support in the process of growing up, because he understood that the investigation activities at this time were more important for professional research and identification learning than having to go back to the museum to work.



Figure 1. Landscape by Heckles Segus

5. Take the best from all families

In fact, if we think that Bode's excellent art appraisal ability only comes from his long-term contact with and research on a large number of art works, depending on his amazing memory capacity, this explanation is still simple and one-sided. Bode's art appraisal ability absorbed the strengths of many experts in the formation process, and was initially influenced by the curator of Berlin's old museum, Vagan. As early as he studied law in Berlin, Bode had read and studied the works of Wagen and Kugler [Franz Theodor Kugler, 1808-1858]. When Bode entered the Berlin Museum, he more practically experienced and mastered the rigorous textual research and literature research methods of Wagen in the art appraisal, and gained full practical experience in the collation and cataloging of museum collections.

In addition, as early as 1869, Bode had made friends with Gustavo Frizzoni, a student of Morelli [1840-1919]. Bode studied Morelli's art appraisal methods under the advice and guidance of Frizzoni. So no matter how severely Bode criticized Morelli in his later years, he was once a follower of Morelli's "experimental method", and never denied Morelli's contribution to art appraisal until his later years.

During his study in Berlin, Bode also met Louis Schmidt [Louis Schmidt,? - 1879], an art restoration expert in the Berlin painting collection at that time. He learned a lot about the methods of art identification and authenticity identification, as well as many ancient artists and works that were rarely studied in the art history at that time. It should not be overlooked that Bode participated in a painting training class during his early study of art history in Berlin. Although it was not a long time, he maintained a lifelong friendship with his classmate, the later famous German painter Max Liebermann [1847-1935] (Figure 2).

These have a positive impact on the formation of Bode's aesthetic taste. He attaches great importance to the appreciation of works of art. Compared with many academic appraisers, Bode can often be very sensitive to find good works that are highly artistic but often ignored. These experiences in Bode's early years show that he learned extensively and learned from others. With his increasingly in-depth work in the museum, Bode further improved his identification ability in practice.

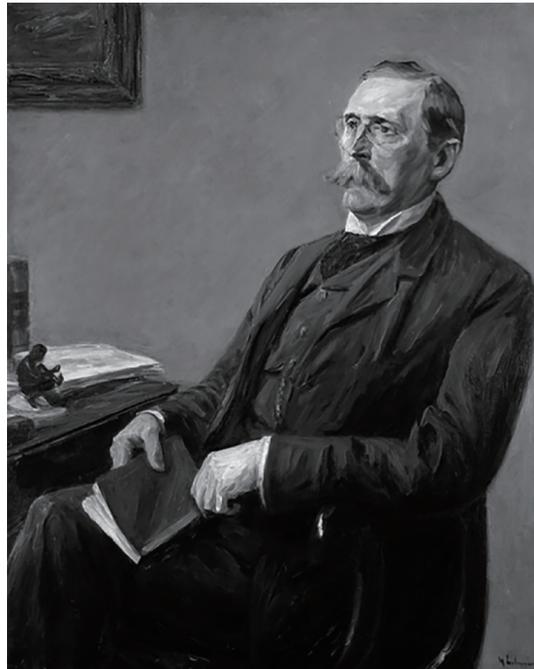


Figure 2. Portrait of Bode by Lieberman

6. Epilogue

In general, during his sixty years of work in his art museums, Bode has been constantly visiting, visiting and appreciating all kinds of art museums, private art collection institutions, art auctions and galleries in Europe and the United States, from Russia to Spain, from France to the United States. Moreover, Bode's art appraisal covers a wide range, from painting, sculpture to arts and crafts, from Rembrandt's and Donatello's works to palace furniture and Persian carpet. Therefore, when a work of art appears in front of Bode, he can almost immediately make accurate judgments about its origin, author, appearance, value and authenticity. Bode's art appraisal is essentially a comprehensive application of experience and perception. On the one hand, it is based on his rich professional knowledge and experience, and on the other hand, it depends on his keen perception and aesthetic taste.

Friedrich Winkler [1888-1965] wrote in his article commemorating Bode: "Bode acted as The greatest art appraiser had a positive influence on the way of scientific observation. This kind of art appraisal method, which originated in the north of Germany, was successfully applied to art history by Lummer from Winkelmann. Later, it was mastered by his students, as well as Wagen, the most famous art museum curator and art appraiser before Bode, and reached its peak here in Bode. As the successor of Wagen, Bode continued to advance the research of art history in the Berlin Museum, and developed a set of methods from the research and appraisal of painting art, which are still effective today. "

The all-round development of art and science promoted by Bode has effectively promoted the professional development of art museums, and has a direct impact on the collection and identification, collation and research, display and dissemination of works of art in the museum, as well as the corresponding administrative management. Bode was evaluated by his contemporaries as an extremely knowledgeable art historian, an art museum curator with great management talent, a great art expert, and a social activist with extensive contacts. Under the leadership and improvement of Bode, the internal work of the German Art Museum, such as venue construction, works collection, professional research, exhibition layout, etc., fully reflects the professionalism guided by art science. Bode's many methods and measures are still used by many art museums in the world today, so some historians regard Bode as one of the founders of modern museology.

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