

G. R. Willey: *The Altar de Sacrificios Excavations: General Summary and Conclusions*, Pap. Peabody Mus. Amer. Archaeol. & Ethnol., lvi/3 (Cambridge, MA, 1973)

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**Altarpiece** [Fr. *postautel*, *retable*; Ger. *Altar*, *Altaraufsatz*; *Altarbild*, *Altartafel*, *Altarrückwand*, *Retabel*; It. *ancona*, *dossale*, *pala* (*d'altare*); Sp. *retablo*]. An image-bearing structure set on the rear part of the altar (see ALTAR, §II), abutting the back of the altarblock, or set behind the altar in such a way as to be visually joined with the altar when viewed from a distance. It is also sometimes called a *retable*, following the medieval term *retrotabulum* [*retabulum*, *retrotabularium*].

1. Definition. 2. Historical overview.

1. DEFINITION. The altarpiece was never officially prescribed by the Church, but it did perform a prescribed function alternatively carried out by a simple inscription on the altarblock: to declare to which saint or mystery the altar was dedicated. In fact, the altarpiece did more than merely identify the altar; its form and content evoked the mystery or personage whose cult was celebrated at the altar. This original and lasting function influenced the many forms taken by the altarpiece throughout its history. Since the altarpiece was not prescribed by the Church, its form varied enormously. For this reason, it is often impossible, and historically inaccurate, to draw neat distinctions between the altarpiece and other elements occasionally associated with the altar apparatus. For example, movable statues, often of the Virgin and Child, were occasionally placed on altars according to ritual needs, and at those times fulfilled the function of the altarpiece. Altarpieces also often contained relics, and in those instances served both as altarpiece and reliquary. Sacrament tabernacles, although often placed on a wall to the side of the altar, were occasionally placed on or above the altar and effectively assumed the role of the altarpiece. The *reredos*, originally a decorated hanging or screen behind the altar, was so often associated with the function of the altarpiece that the term has become an antiquated alternative to that of altarpiece. Finally, the original association of the Christian altar with the tomb of a saint, and theologically with the tomb of Christ, sometimes resulted in the amalgamation of a decorated tomb structure (traditionally that of a saint but eventually also of important lay figures) with the altarpiece.

Altarpieces adorned both high altars and side altars. High altars, which sustained the dedication of the entire church and served the purposes of High Mass, often carried large altarpieces with elaborate programmes. Side altars served a more private piety and their altarpieces were often endowed by private individuals. Such altars could be used by the faithful for extra-liturgical, private prayer more easily than the altarpiece on high altars, which were often concealed behind screens separating the choir from the nave of the church. Private devotional images often took the form of altarpieces and are frequently described as such, but they do not strictly belong to that category except in the relatively rare cases when they served on consecrated altars.

Altarpieces were produced in various materials; wood, stone and metal were all used in the Middle Ages. Metal altarpieces, of gold or silver, were rarer due to the preciousness of the materials. Stone was more commonly used in England and France, although wooden altarpieces, either carved or painted, eventually predominated all over Europe. In the large architectural altarpieces of the Baroque period, stone re-emerged as an important material, sometimes replaced by stucco. Sculpted altarpieces of ivory and of terracotta were made in Italy (the latter coming into conspicuous use in the 15th century), while alabaster altarpiece production was a speciality of England (RDK).

## 2. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW.

(i) Origins. (ii) Forms and development.

(i) *Origins*. The altar, a square block free on all sides, traditionally stood alone as the primary focus of the church. In the Early Christian Church nothing was allowed on the sacred table, or *mensa*, except for the sacred books and the instruments (pyx, chalice and paten) necessary for celebrating the Eucharist. A free-standing ciborium was one means devised to adorn the simple altar without violating this rule. By AD 1000, the altar had evolved into a rectangular form with a more defined front and back (Bishop, 1918). This development prepared the way for the appearance, on the rear edge of the altar table, of a panel decorated with sacred figures: the altarpiece.

There is no agreement among scholars as to the conditions and factors that led to the appearance of the altarpiece; sources for its development have been located in the various kinds of images traditionally associated with the altar. The most important images in Early Christian art were placed in the central cupola or apse, and bore an evident relation to the altar positioned beneath them (Hager, 1962). Already in the Early Christian period mural decorations were designed to be seen in direct relation to altars affixed to the painted walls or to the niche-like openings in the wall known as *arcosolia* (Rohault de Fleury, 1983; Barbier, 1968). Indeed, the development of the altarpiece has often been seen in relation to the contemporary proliferation of side altars set against the wall in this manner. Most scholars, however, would agree that the later medieval form now known as the altarpiece evolved not from fixed wall images but from the first image-bearing objects allowed on to the surface of the altar.

A crucial development in this history was the practice of setting relics, traditionally embedded within or underneath the altar, in decorated reliquaries on top of the altar (see RELIQUARY, §II, 2). This practice is documented as early as the 9th century in a homily of Pope Leo IV (reg 847–55). Reliquaries in this period served on the one hand to protect and preserve the relic from exposure and, on the other, to proclaim in figures, ornament and rich materials the sacred presence that they hid from view. Smaller reliquary shrines were placed towards the rear of the altar. Large ones containing the entire body of a saint were set either lengthwise on a block behind the altar or transversely, with one end resting on the back edge of the altar and the other on a support set up behind (Bishop).



1. *Pentecost*, gilt copper, 0.57×2.17 m, 12th century (Paris, Musée de Cluny)

Another type of reliquary took the form of a statue and was placed on the altar or on a support behind it. The appearance of this new source of imagery on the altar was a precedent for the later development of the altarpiece as a permanent feature of the altar apparatus. Another source of imagery on the altar was provided by the decoration, either textile or sculpted, covering the front of the altar-block and known as the antependium or altar frontal. The early format and composition of the altarpiece, a rectangular field containing a row of frontal figures usually arranged under an arcade, strongly resembles the earlier antependium type (see §(ii) (a) below).

The advent of the altarpiece marks a significant development not only in the history of the altar, but also in the nature and function of the Christian image. The autonomous image now assumed a legitimate position at the centre of Christian worship. Rather than adorning the outer surface of another sacred object, whether reliquary, altar frontal or church wall, it now stood in a structure made for no purpose other than to hold the image up to view. As a part of the altar apparatus, the image was now an important element of church architecture in its own right. The appearance of this new element on or behind the altar accompanied changes in the positions assumed by priest, deacon and subdeacon while celebrating mass. Until the 10th century, it was common for the celebrant to stand on the far side of the altar, facing the congregation, but later he came to stand before the altar, with his back to the congregation. As long as the celebrant stood on the far side of the altar, it can be assumed that an altarpiece would have constituted an impermissible obstruction. The records, however, are scattered so sparsely over the period between the 9th and the 11th centuries that it cannot be determined whether the changes they document are causes or consequences of the appearance of the altarpiece.

#### (ii) *Forms and development.*

(a) *Before c. 1400.* Although claims have been made to document or to date altarpieces to the 8th century or 9th, significant numbers of records of their existence appear only in the 11th century, and the earliest surviving group

of any size dates from the 12th century. The basic form of the earliest known altarpieces is an antependium-like rectangular panel, usually showing a series of saints flanking a central figure of Christ or the Virgin (e.g. Pala d'Oro, gold and silver, 1105, with later additions; Venice, S Marco; see VENICE, fig. 20; *Virgin and Child with Saints*, stone, 12th century; Brauweiler, St Nikolaus und Medardus). This basic form was also sometimes given extensions on the upper border of the frame (e.g. *Pentecost*, gilt copper, 12th century; Paris, Mus. Cluny; see fig. 1).

In Italy, the altar became a primary setting for painting on panel, a format developed in the West from the example of Byzantine icons, which were imported in increasing numbers after the conquest of Constantinople in 1204. Under the influence of the cults of the Virgin and of the Cross, propagated by the mendicant orders, icons with the Virgin and monumental crucifixes, besides being used as processional images, or hung on church walls or rood screens, were also adapted for use on altars. Gabled panels in a vertical format representing a full-length saint flanked by scenes of his or her life (sometimes called *rito retabiles*) were also popular in 13th-century Italy, especially in mendicant settings (e.g. Bonaventura Berlinghieri's *Sy Francis*, 1235; Pescia, S Francesco; for illustration see BERLINGHIERI, (2); *Sy Catherine*, 1250s; Pisa, Mus. N. S. Matteo). Marian images grew larger and higher (e.g. *Madonna degli Occhi Grossi*, before 1260; Siena, Mus. Opera Duomo; Coppo di Marcovaldo's *Madonna del Bordone*, 1261; Siena, S Maria dei Servi; see COPPO DI MARCOVALDO, fig. 1), and eventually also took on the large, vertical, gabled format (e.g. Cimabue's *Santa Trinità Madonna*, 1280–85; Florence, Uffizi; Duccio's *Rucellai Madonna*, 1285; Florence, Uffizi; see DUCCIO, fig. 1; Giotto's *Ognissanti Madonna*, c. 1310; Florence, Uffizi).

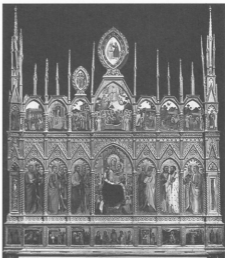
Although the early history of the painted altarpiece in Italy is marked by experiments with these various formats, the most important source for its later development was the horizontal painted panel, often known as a *dossal*. It followed from the antependium tradition, with a central figure of Christ or the Virgin flanked by figures of saints (e.g. Margarito d'Arezzo's *Virgin and Child with New*

*Testament Scenes*, c. 1285; Monte San Savino, S Maria di Vertighe). These soon developed single-gabled forms and painted or carved arched above the figures (e.g. *Christ with Saints*, c. 1265; Pisa, Mus. N. S Matteo; Meliore's *Christ with the Virgin and Saints*, 1271; Florence, Uffizi). By the 1280s, this type had evolved a many-gabled tier above the arcade (e.g. Vigoroso da Siena's *Virgin and Child with Saints*, 1280s; Perugia, G.N. Umbria). The development of an elaborate gabled outer structure enfolding several vertically conceived individual compartments, in contrast to the earlier, horizontally unified single panel, paved the way for the development of the POLYPYCH in the 14th century. The new several-tiered format was probably related to the simultaneous appearance of the PREDELLA, the decorated step-like block that developed to support this enlarged structure and to ensure the entire altarpiece's visibility.

Duccio's colossal double-sided *Maestà* (1308–11; for locations see DUCCIO, §1 and fig. 2), painted for the high altar of Siena Cathedral, was a grandiose resolution of the various strains of altarpiece design produced up to that time in Italy. It combined the full-length gabled Virgin type with the horizontal composition comprising a row of saints into one, vast, integrated vision of the celestial court. On the predella and on the back were smaller panels with scenes from the *Life of the Virgin* and the *Life of Christ*. The sheer grandeur and complexity of the altarpiece made it a virtually autonomous structure, and it has been argued that the *Maestà* was the first in a long series of Italian altarpieces to be buttressed by an independent structure (Gardner von Teuffel, 1979).

Duccio's *Maestà* remained something of an exception, and the many-tiered polypych became the most characteristic form of the period. Polypychs were increasingly elaborate, their frames often featuring piers, colonettes, cusped arches, tracery, pinnacles, crockets and finials, eventually transforming the altarpiece into an architectonic structure resembling in detail and spatial principles the façades of contemporary full-scale Gothic architecture. In Italy such altarpieces were usually made of wood and painted (e.g. Simone Martini's S Caterina Altarpiece, 1320; Pisa, Mus. N. S Matteo; *Virgin and Child with Saints* by Pietro Nelli (fl. 1375–1419) and Tommaso del Mazza (fl. 1375–91), 1375; Impruneta, S Maria; see fig. 2). In northern Europe they were commonly executed in stone, as in the high altar (1290) of the Elisabethkirche in Marburg, or the 14th-century *Passion* altarpiece (Paris, Mus. Cluny). Stone altarpieces were less common in Italy, and they usually show the influence either of Italian painted works or of north European stone altarpieces (e.g. Tommaso Pisano's *Virgin and Child with Angels*, 13(?60)s; Pisa, S Francesco; *Virgin and Child with Saints*, c. 1370; Arezzo Cathedral; Pierpaolo and Jacobello dalle Masegne's *Coronation of the Virgin*, 1388–92; Bologna, S Francesco).

The winged altarpiece, or *Flügelaltar*, developed in Germany and the Netherlands in the early 14th century. The movable wings made it possible to vary the altarpiece imagery in accordance with the changing requirements of the liturgical calendar. Even in its earliest examples this form achieved grand proportions (e.g. high altar, c. 1320; Cismar, Benedictine Abbey Church, see fig. 3; high altar, 1331; Oberwesel, Unsere Liebe Frau). Most typically, it



2. Pietro Nelli and Tommaso del Mazza: *Virgin and Child with Saints*, 1375 (tempera on panel, Impruneta, S Maria)



3. Altarpiece, stone, 6.50x6.37 m, c. 1320, former Benedictine abbey church, Cismar

was sculpted on the inside and painted on the outside (e.g. Master Bertram's Grabow Altarpiece, 1383; Hamburg, Ksthalle; Jacques de Baerze's and Melchior Broederlam's altarpiece for the Charterhouse of Champenol, 1390-99; Dijon, Mus. B.-A.).

(b) c. 1400-c. 1600. In the 15th century there was a proliferation of altarpieces, largely the result of the growing initiative of non-ecclesiastical and non-aristocratic patrons. The endowment of altars and chapels was often the concern of individual families or confraternities, and by the end of the 15th century churches north and south of the Alps were filled with privately endowed altars, each with its own altarpiece. The prevalence of private sources of patronage is reflected in the frequent appearance of donor portraits in altarpieces of this period.

In the Netherlands in the 15th century panel painting flourished and entirely superseded sculpture on the winged altarpiece. Hubert and Jan van Eyck's Ghent Altarpiece (c. 1423-32; Ghent, St Bavo) was the first and the greatest monument in this tradition. Its apocalyptic *Adoration of the Lamb* is set into an all-encompassing pictorial illusion including a sweeping landscape, crowds of saints, architectural interiors and even marble sculpture. This altarpiece represented a world of such illusionistic and iconographic complexity as to assume the scope and symbolic allusions of the High Gothic cathedral (Brand Philip, 1971), and it set the precedent for many ambitious painted winged altarpieces in the Netherlands, including Rogier van der Weyden's *Last Judgement* (1443-51; Beaune, Hôtel-Dieu), and Hugo van der Goes's *Portinari Altarpiece* (c. 1473-8; Florence, Uffizi; see GOES, HUGO VAN DER, fig. 1).

In Germany, by contrast, the wood-carving tradition remained predominant in winged altarpiece production and reached its climax in the later 15th-century SCHNITZ-ALTAR, which consisted of a box-like central shrine (*Corpus*) carrying the main figures, wings (*Flügel*), sometimes double, either painted or carved in relief, a predella (*Sarg*), usually carved, and a richly carved architectural superstructure (*Auszug*) above the shrine (e.g. Michael Pacher's St Wolfgang Altarpiece, 1471-81; St Wolfgangsee, St Wolfgang; see PACHER, MICHAEL, fig. 1; Veit Stoss's altarpiece, 1477-89; Kraków, St Mary; Michel Erhart's *Virgin and Child with Saints*, c. 1493-4; Blaubeuren, Benedictine Klosterkirche; for illustration see SCHNITZ-ALTAR). The status and quality of wood-carving achieved such high levels in this tradition that eventually altarpieces were made to be displayed without painting or gilding. Tilman Riemenschneider's dismembered altarpiece (1490-92) for St Maria Magdalena, Münnerstadt, is the first known uncoloured altarpiece of this type. Painting, however, was not neglected in Germany; Matthias Grünewald's Isenheim Altarpiece (1515; Colmar, Mus. Unterlinden; see GRÜNEWALD, MATTHIAS, fig. 2), although it has a sculpted centre, is known primarily for its dramatically painted double wings.

In Spain the architectonic altarpiece, usually made of polychrome wood, was the dominant form from the 15th century and throughout the 16th (see RETABLE, §1). It eventually reached enormous proportions, virtually replacing the church architecture of the apse (e.g. Niccolò Dell'i's high altar, c. 1445; Salamanca, Old Cathedral; high altar



4. Titian: *Assumption of the Virgin*, oil on panel, 6.9x3.6 m, 1518 (Venice, S Maria Gloriosa dei Frari)

by Pedro Berruguete, Diego de la Santa Cruz and Juan de Borgoña, 1506; Ávila Cathedral; high altar, 1504; Toledo Cathedral).

In 15th-century Italy the polyptych was largely outmoded by the unified, framed panel. This development involved changes both in altarpiece construction and pictorial convention. If the traditional polyptych was a painted and gilded piece of ecclesiastical furniture, the new type of altarpiece, known as the *pala*, was closer to a framed picture. The single, large panel was now made and painted independently of its frame, which, supported by the predella, was now designed in the style of classical architecture, with flanking pilasters mounted by an entablature. Within the frame, the painting was treated as a window giving on to a natural or architectural space and was thus differentiated pictorially as well as structurally from the frame. This pictorial realm was typically inhabited by saintly figures arranged around the Virgin and Child in

a *sacra conversazione* (e.g. Domenico Veneziano's *St Lucy* altarpiece, c. 1445–7; main panel Florence, Uffizi; see DOMENICO VENEZIANO, fig. 2; Fra Angelico's *S Marco* Altarpiece, c. 1438–40; Florence, Mus. S Marco; Piero della Francesca's *Brera Altarpiece*, c. 1475; Milan, Brera). In several Venetian altarpieces of this period the frame stands as the architectural entrance into a fictive chapel, conceived as an extension of the church space (e.g. Giovanni Bellini's *S Zaccaria Altarpiece*, 1505; Venice, S Zaccaria; for illustration see SACRA CONVERSAZIONE). The strong interest in natural setting and figural expression gave new dramatic force to narrative subjects (e.g. Leonardo da Vinci's *Adoration of the Magi*, 1481–3; Florence, Uffizi; Raphael's *Entombment*, 1507; Rome, Gal. Borghese; Titian's *Assumption of the Virgin*, 1518; Venice, S Maria Gloriosa dei Frari; see fig. 4), and prompted an increased use of narrative scenes as the main subjects of the altarpiece, which had hitherto more often consisted of a simple grouping of saintly figures.

The rise of the single painted panel as the predominant format for altarpieces was of great consequence for the history of European art. It encouraged the rise of the art of panel painting and paved the way for the predominance of the easel picture in the following centuries. A single picture commanding ceremonious attention at the focus of Christian worship, the Italian *pala* set a powerful structural and functional precedent for the easel pictures which, despite any religious context, were later appreciated as works of art in museums (Beling, 1987). The histories of several Renaissance altarpieces themselves document this transition; for example Raphael's *Entombment* (1507; Rome, Gal. Borghese) was taken from its church within a century and hung in a private gallery where it has remained to this day.

Italian sculpture and sculpted altarpieces also underwent important changes in this period. Donatello's high altar with the *Virgin and Child with Saints* (1443–50; Padua, Santo) and Niccolò Baronzelli's *Crucifixion and Saints* (1450; Ferrara Cathedral) were early examples of the transposition of the *sacra conversazione* into bronze sculpture and played an important role in disseminating the type in northern Italy, both for painted and sculpted altarpieces. Relief sculpture, in both terracotta and marble, was also commonly used on Italian altarpieces, for example Antonio Rossellino's *Nativity* (1470–75; see NAPLES, fig. 6) and Benedetto da Maiano's *Annunciation* (1489; both Naples, S Anna dei Lombardi) and Luca della Robbia's *Virgin and Child with SS Blaise and James* (c. 1465–70; Pescia, Palazzo Vescovile). Large statuary, free of an altarpiece structure, made a dramatic appearance on the altar at the turn of the 16th century with Michelangelo's *Pietà* (c. 1498–9; Rome, St Peter's) and his Bruges *Madonna* (1503; Bruges, Onze Lieve Vrouwe) and Andrea Sansovino's *Virgin and Child with St Anne* (1511–12; Rome, S Agostino).

The religious reforms of the 16th century brought new attention and some important changes to the form and function of the altarpiece. In northern Europe, the effect of the Protestant Reformation was to reduce sharply the number of altarpieces produced and to change the nature of those in existence. Private endowments conceived as 'good works' were all but eliminated. Rather than as

instruments of intercession, altarpieces made under Protestant auspices were conceived as a means of returning to the Word of God. Reformers preferred that altarpiece iconography be restricted to subjects well-suited to the sacrament celebrated at the altar, such as the Last Supper (e.g. Lucas Cranach II's Dessau Altarpiece, 1565; Dessau-Mildensee, Parish Church). In their most extreme form, Protestant altarpieces displayed the actual text from the Bible instead of images (e.g. altarpiece of 1537; Dinkelsbühl, Spitalkirche). Eventually the Protestant conception of the altarpiece found expression in the *Kanzelaltar*, or pulpit altar, in which the altarpiece literally became the place from where the word was preached (e.g. Thomas Maler's *Passion* altarpiece, c. 1500, altered, overpainted and attached to pulpit c. 1605; Berneuchen, nr Landsberg, Parish Church).

The Counter-Reformation in Italy also stimulated the reform of altars. In the interest of clarity and unity, numerous medieval screens separating the choir and high altar from the nave were removed. The reforming authorities also worked to regain control over the endowment



5. Alessandro Algardi: *Beheading of St Paul*, marble, 1644, (Bologna, S Paolo Maggiore)



6. Egid Quirin Asam: *Assumption of the Virgin*, marble, 1719–23 (Rohr, abbey church of *Mariae Himmelfahrt*)

and the dedication of side altars, and thereby also to regulate the form and iconography of their altarpieces. The late medieval profusion of private altars and chapels gave way to systematically conceived schemes in which all chapels of the same church were given the same design, with their altarpieces planned as a cycle through the entire church. Such were the schemes conceived in 1565 by Duke Cosimo I de' Medici for the Florentine churches of Santa Croce and S Maria Novella, which were adorned with altarpieces by Giorgio Vasari and his school. A similar, even more regular scheme was conceived by Andrea Palladio and the Capuchin friars at the Venetian church, Il Redentore, in the late 1570s.

(c) *After c. 1600.* The dynamic qualities that characterize Baroque art brought important changes to altarpiece design. Figures in motion entirely superseded static devotional images and statues, and designs more often transgressed the traditional restriction to a two-dimensional panel format. Important altarpieces consisting of a single painting or relief continued to be made (e.g. Caravaggio's *Virgin of Loretto*, 1603; Rome, S Agostino; Alessandro Algardi's *Encounter of Pope Leo the Great and Attila*, 1646; Rome, St Peter's; see ALGARDI, ALESSANDRO, fig. 3), but increasingly architecture was used as the theatrical setting for the three-dimensional display of the altarpiece's subject in sculpture, as in Algardi's *Beheading of St Paul* (1644;

Bologna, S Paolo Maggiore; see fig. 5). The conception could expand to include painting, as in the high altar of S Andrea al Quirinale, Rome, conceived by Gianlorenzo Bernini c. 1660, in which Guglielmo Cortese's painting of the *Martyrdom of St Andrew* is carried aloft by a host of sculpted angels rising up through the architecture.

In such works, the fictitious architecture of the altarpiece and the architecture of the church intermingle. In Rococo churches, particularly in northern Europe, such integration became so complete as to transform the entire church into a fanciful confection, and in such otherworldly surroundings the miracle revealed at the altar acquires an unexpected believability (e.g. *Assumption of the Virgin*, 1719–23; Rohr, abbey church of *Mariae Himmelfahrt*; see fig. 6).

These works fully realize a development already discernible in the Gothic altarpiece. If the altar began as a free block set in the middle of the church architecture, it was now again a free block, set into the middle of an all-encompassing altarpiece architecture. The altar, once the setting for the altarpiece, was now one element in the machinery of the altarpiece.

Although altarpiece commissions continued to be made and fulfilled in the 19th century, the altarpiece was no longer an evolving form but had become a relic, a symbol of a former integration of art in religious life: for example Ingres's famous altarpiece, the *Vow of Louis XIII* (1824; Montauban Cathedral; see INGRES, JEAN-AUGUSTE-DOMINIQUE, fig. 3), is itself a depiction of an altar surmounted by a Virgin modelled on the Virgins of Raphael's altarpieces. For Ingres, the painting of an altarpiece was primarily an occasion to pay homage to the great Renaissance painter, and to the idea of artistic perfection in the service of religion that Raphael represented.

For the Romantics, who found in the Christian faith a model for a new cult of nature and of art, the symbolic change of the altarpiece format was particularly powerful. When Caspar David Friedrich, in his *Cross in the Mountain* (1807–8; Dresden, Gemäldegalerie Neue Meister), gave to the landscape painting the form and status of the altarpiece, he did so in order to induce a sacred attitude towards the subject of his art: it was a devotional image of a new kind. The altarpiece format lent an aura of holiness to various kinds of aesthetic experience throughout the 19th century, and at the end of the century became a favourite device of the Pre-Raphaelites, who used it in various secular genres (e.g. Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Blessed Damsel*, 1875; Cambridge, MA, Fogg).

The design of 20th-century churches has espoused values of simplicity and has not contributed significantly to the history of the altarpiece. By reinstating a single, free-standing altar as the focus of the church, modern churches have in a sense returned to Early Christian ideals. Indeed, the Second Vatican Council's decree (1962) that a priest should celebrate *ad populum*, or towards the congregation, is a return to Early Christian practice and has again precluded the use of altarpieces. The 1000-year history of their making is now a closed episode in the history of art.

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**Alta Vista.** Site of Pre-Columbian culture near Chalchihuites, Zacatecas, northern Mexico. It was explored by Gamio in 1910 and by Kelly in 1971 and 1976. Its chronology is still uncertain, but the most important occupation was during the Classic period (c. AD 250-c. 900). Alta Vista was a small, highly developed ceremonial centre that exploited a massive mining complex for malachite, azurite, hematite, limonite, coloured chert, galena, cinnabar, rock crystal and other semi-precious materials. More than 800 mines, some of them over 1 km in extent, have been surveyed (Weigand); they are made up of chambers, adits, shafts, tunnels, internal spoil heaps and external spoil heaps comprised of millions of tons of residue. Because far more material was produced than could possibly have been used regionally, there is a strong argument for central Mexican sponsorship, possibly even control, of the mines by TEOTIHUACÁN.

The ceremonial centre comprises a complex series of interrelated buildings whose overall effect is monumental. The main compound is a square plaza surrounded by a banquette topped by platforms. On the north side there is a small pyramid covering a crypt, which contained three high-status burials. Adjacent to the plaza is a structure, once roofed, known as the Hall of Columns, which also contained prestige burials. At an angle to the Hall of

Columns is an 'observatory' structure, which, because of its placement on the Tropic of Cancer, clearly had special meaning for Mesoamericans. It may have been coordinated with the pecked, double calendar circle at Cerro de Chapin, a nearby site to the south. Other architectural features include a colonnaded entrance fronting a road to the mines, a palace-like court with a skull rack (see TZOMPAN-TLI), and a habitation area, damaged by modern ploughing, in the surrounding fields. The mining complex, observatory and pecked stone circle all point to a sophisticated society that was well-integrated with central Mesoamerican civilization. Human sacrifice also occurred on a large scale at Alta Vista. In addition to the trade in mined materials with central Mesoamerica, long-distance contacts were made with the south-west of the USA to import turquoise in large quantity. Pottery from Alta Vista includes elaborate 'pseudo-cloisonné'; incised, polished black tripods; finely painted red-on-brown wares; and small carved lapidary items. Only one large stone sculpture, of a skeletal firegod (Mexico City, Mus. N. Antropol.), has been found, at Cerro de Motecuhzuma.

In adjacent valleys other sites related to Alta Vista include Cerro de Motecuhzuma, which may also have had a columned hall; Gualterio, with a ballcourt; and numerous agricultural hamlets and villages.

The major finds from Alta Vista are in the Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City, and at the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Guadalupe, Zacatecas.

For further discussion of Pre-Columbian Mexico see MESOAMERICA, PRE-COLUMBIAN.

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**Altdeutsch style.** German 19th-century historicist revival style, which imitated in architecture, furniture and other arts the characteristics of works from earlier periods, especially the 15th and 16th centuries.

**Aldorfer** [Aldorffer; Altorfer]. German family of painters, draughtsmen, printmakers and architects. The painter Ulrich Aldorfer (b. 1468-91), who became a Regensburg citizen in 1478, may have been the father of (1) Albrecht Aldorfer and (2) Erhard Aldorfer. The family name undoubtedly derives from one of several towns named Aldorf in Switzerland and Bavaria, though Albrecht Aldorfer's Regensburg citizenship record (1505) refers to him as a 'painter from Amberg'.

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