Wilhelm Lübke (1826-1893) was an influential German art and architectural historian whose positivist approach to the nascent discipline of art history and his approachable writings earned him a wide following both in academe and the wider public. He studied philology in Bonn, and applied its methods for studying the historical development of language to the study of art and architectural history, making a name for himself with the publication of his illustrated *History of Architecture* (1855), which founded the mode of art and architectural history survey popular in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Lübke, together with Karl von Lützow, produced the new edition of the influential survey *Denkmäler der Kunst* [The Monuments of Art] (Stuttgart, 1863–4). He taught architecture and art history at the Bauakademie in Berlin (1857), the Polytechnikum in Zurich, Switzerland (1860-85), the Kunsthochschule in Stuttgart and the Grossherzogliche Sammlungen in Karlsruhe (1885). The mid-nineteenth century was a period of great political turmoil in the German states, with various efforts at unification violently launched and thwarted by internal divisions. Lübke noticed the new importance that divergent political factions were giving to historic buildings alternatively as symbols of German unity, or of cultural differences between states. In this essay, Lübke denounced the fact that all sides were pouring money into unbridled restorations in order to remake the past in the image of their political views. Unethical architects were tampering with the built record with impunity and to such a degree that historians like himself would soon find it impossible to recover any sense of historical truth. He characterized restoration as a disease, a fever, which impaired a clear-sighted view of history. It was important for art historical work to remain autonomous from politics and to begin to regulate preservation work. In line with Ruskin, Lübke called attention to previously unappreciated material features of buildings, such as the patina of dust they acquired over time, and argued for their significance as part of the historical record, leading the way to Aloïs Riegl’s later theorization of age value. His philological attention to the details of the built and artistic record became a part of the standard methods for establishing the age, authorship and authenticity of buildings and artworks. In 1871, he was a key figure in the famous Holbein Convention, where the leading German art historians came together to examine and determine the authenticity of the two Burgomeister Meyer Madonna paintings (they established the autograph to be Darmstadt, and Dresden the copy). The event helped give to art historians authority over the means and methods employed in preservation work, subordinating architects and artists who lacked rigorous historiographical training.

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