

Bakunin and Raphael

H-ArtHist (Sedlarz)

Dear Listmembers,

I seek a published source, in German, for the anecdote below. Please note that I'm aware that the story may be apocryphal, and that while I would welcome any relevant information, the matter of the story's status as historical truth or fiction is ultimately not my concern. Ideally, I'd like to have a published source (historical, literary, journalistic -- any form will do) from the period 1890-1920, but I would be grateful for any information on German sources of any period. (The leads I've pursued thus far are so many and varied that it would be impossible to list them here. All suggestions are welcome!)

Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin is said to have proposed hanging Raphael's masterpiece the „Sistine Madonna" on the barricades during the Dresden uprising of May 1849. Bakunin's objective was to deter the Prussian troops from firing on the revolutionaries by placing the prized painting in the line of fire. ("The story," writes E. H. Carr, "that Bakunin proposed to hang the *Sistine Madonna* on the barricades, on the ground that the Prussians were 'too cultured to fire on Raphael,' belongs to the world of picturesque legend.")

I seek a German source for any version of that "picturesque legend."

My aim is to establish the currency of the story among artists in Germany around

1920, the moment of the so-called „Kunstlump-Debatte" carried out among the Berlin Dadaists George Grosz and John Heartfield, the Expressionist painter and playwright Oskar Kokoschka (at the time Professor at the Kunstakademie in Dresden), and the German Communist Party critic, Gertrud Alexander. Damage done to masterpieces in Dresden's Zwinger galleries during the uprising of March 1920

was a focal point of the heated exchanges on art and politics among those several important figures of early Weimar culture.

Many thanks in advance for any assistance subscribers to the list may be able to provide. (To any subscribers who may have read this query previously on H-German and GSList, my apologies for the repetition -- I'm still looking for the

Arthist.net

perfect
source.)

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Reference:

Q: Bakunin and Raphael. In: Arthist.net, Feb 6, 2001 (accessed Dec 15, 2025),
<<https://arthist.net/archive/24325>>.