
CYNTHIA GAMBLE

John Ruskin, Eugène Viollet-le-Duc and the Alps

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(Plates 49–53)

My most intense happinesses have of course been among mountains.

John Ruskin¹

*More than ever I am happy and have a complete grasp of my ideas in
these icy solitudes.*

Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, in Chamonix²

The Alpine Club is an important link between John Ruskin, 1819–1900, and Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, 1814–1879. Ruskin became a member of the Alpine Club in December 1869, fulfilling the criterion of promoting a ‘better knowledge of the mountains through literature, science and art’.³ A L Mumm, in the Alpine Club Register of 1864–1876, devoted eight pages to Ruskin’s life, his writings and particularly his travels in the mountains. Viollet-le-Duc was a founder member of the French Alpine Club in 1874.

These two geniuses of the 19th century, one English and one French, at first sight might appear very different: their ideas on restoration of buildings were certainly opposed. Ruskin is well known as a forthright teacher and writer on social, moral, economic, political and environmental issues, and as a great art critic. Viollet-le-Duc, on the other hand, is known throughout the world as an architect and enthusiastic restorer of, for example, Amiens Cathedral, the Château of Pierrefonds, the church at Vézelay. Both men have been, and I believe still are, much maligned and misrepresented. One of the few writers this century to recognise Viollet-le-Duc’s importance was Jean Gimpel who, in 1958, described him as ‘one of the most outstanding figures of the nineteenth century’.⁴ Ruskin’s close friend and biographer W G Collingwood, also a member of the Alpine Club, described Viollet-le-Duc as ‘the great Viollet-le-Duc’ and ‘art-writer turned geologist’. It was François Mitterrand who, more recently, acknowledged Ruskin as ‘[le] grand Ruskin’.⁵ Unknown to the general public, and to each other, Viollet-le-Duc and Ruskin were great painters of the Alps, scientific recorders of geology and meteorology, indefatigable walkers and climbers, but not in the Alpine Club’s sense of the word ‘climbers’ using ropes and ice axes.

Both men had the good fortune to be born at a propitious moment in the history of mountaineering, and were able to benefit from Henri de Saussure's *Voyages dans les Alpes*, of 1779, a four-volume, richly illustrated, scientific and artistic work on the minerals and geology of the Alps, based on de Saussure's own observations; and from James Forbes' *Travels through the Alps of Savoy* published in 1843. Alexander von Humbolt's geological writings were also influential on Ruskin. The *Murray Guides* were launched in 1836, and the first *Murray's Handbook for Switzerland, Savoy, and Piedmont* was published in 1838, when the concept of the 'science' of mountaineering was being developed.

The ascent of Mont Blanc in the latter part of the 18th century, by Jacques Balmat and Dr Paccard in 1786, by Balmat and de Saussure in 1787, by John Auldjo in 1827 and by many others, captured people's imaginations, and interest became more and more focused on this peak. The challenge to conquer Mont Blanc was taken up by increasingly large numbers of climbers, both men and women, among whom should be mentioned Emma Forman, an acquaintance of Ruskin. Albert Smith, who, with a large party of men including 16 guides and 18 porters, reached the summit of Mont Blanc on 12 August 1851, capitalised upon the growing fervour for scaling this peak and, upon his return to London, mounted a Mont Blanc publicity show in the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly on 15 March 1852. Among popular attractions were music, books, toys and a game of 'snakes and ladders' of the *Ascent of Mont Blanc*, commencing at the Egyptian Hall and terminating at the top of Mont Blanc.

This growing interest in the Alps is apparent in many paintings and drawings, such as in Jean Du Bois' *Ascent of Mont Blanc by de Saussure in 1787*; Sir William Gell's *Mt Brévant du Glacier des Bossons*, and J M W Turner's *Valley of Chamonix with Mont Blanc in the distance* of 1809. Other Englishmen, such as William Pars, William Bartlett and Edward Lear, were also prolific watercolourists and engravers of Alpine scenes. Jean-Antoine Linck and his younger brother Jean-Philippe painted many views such as the *Aiguilles de Charmoz* (Jean-Antoine Linck) and the *Valley of Chamonix* (Jean-Philippe Linck). The Alps were also the subject of the new science or art of photography, and the Bisson brothers, working from a studio in Chamonix, photographed in detail and on a panoramic scale *Le Massif du Mont Blanc*. The first photographic ascent of Mont Blanc by the Bisson brothers and a large contingent took place on 25 July 1861.

In 1868, Jules Michelet published a literary work in France entitled *La Montagne*. What was particularly original was his approach to mountains, regarded not as something hostile and threatening, but acquiring a personality and life of their own. For Michelet, Mont Blanc was a solitary and illustrious individual, a great hermit, a silent giant, 'a person made of granite' clothed by snow. Seen closer, Mont Blanc became 'a huge white monk, buried beneath his cope and ice cowl'.

John Ruskin

From a very early age, John Ruskin was interested in stone, in stones and in hills and mountains. In 1826, at the age of seven, he illustrated his first volume of poetry and texts, including a mention of 'the waters of the Alps', with a mountain drawing which he described as 'my first effort at mountain drawing'.⁶ But it was not until he was fourteen that he first saw the Alps on the occasion of his arrival with his parents at Schaffhausen, in 1833. He recalled the impact and vision of the mountains upon him in his autobiography *Praeterita*:

suddenly-behold-beyond! There was no thought in any of us for a moment of their being clouds. They were clear as crystal, sharp on the pure horizon sky, and already tinged with rose by the sinking sun.⁷

Ruskin's diary of 1833 recorded his first journey, by carriage, along the river Arve in the valley of Maglan, through Sallanches as far as Chamouni, as Ruskin often preferred to spell Chamonix. His feelings of joy, ecstasy, wonderment on seeing Mont Blanc for the very first time are vividly expressed:

I looked up, and lo! Seven thousand feet above me soared the needles of Mont Blanc, splintered and crashed and shivered, the marks of the tempest for three score centuries, yet they are here, shooting up red, bare [...] entirely inaccessible, snowless, the very snow cannot cling to the down-plunging sheerness of these terrific flanks that rise pre-eminently dizzying and beetling above the sea of wreathed snow that rolled its long surging waves over the summits of the lower and less precipitous mountains. Then came the stretching gloominess of the pine forests, jagging darkly upon the ridge of every crag, strangely contrasted with the cold blueness of the peaky glaciers that filled the huge ravines between the hills, descending like the bursting billows of a chafed ocean tide from the desolate dominion of the snow, and curling forward till they lay on the green fields of Chamouni, which stretched away, one unbroken line of luxuriance, till bounded by the lonely desertness of the Col de Balme. There is not another scene like Chamouni throughout Switzerland. [...]⁸

There, the fourteen-year-old John Ruskin undertook many parallel and mutually reinforcing activities: he sketched the Alps (see, for example, his *Needles of Mont Blanc from Geneva*),⁹ he wrote poems and prose passages about the Alps, and he maintained a diary. This was an epiphanic moment in Ruskin's life, in which he felt that his destiny was fixed.¹⁰ Henceforth he was going to write, draw, involve himself with architecture, and study the

Left

49. *Glacier des Bossons*, dated 1874, pencil and watercolour by John Ruskin.
(*Alpine Club Library Collection*) (p185)

Below Left

50. *Montagne de la Côte and Bossons Glacier*, ?1849, pencil, pen and ink and watercolour by John Ruskin. (*Alpine Club Library Collection*) (p185)

Below

51. *Mer de Glace Moonlight*, ?1863, pencil and watercolour by John Ruskin.
(*Alpine Club Library Collection*) (p185)



Alps with an emphasis on what he called the 'unabated, never to be abated, geological instinct'.¹¹ For this latter he requested, for his 15th birthday, de Saussure's book *Voyages dans les Alpes*, a seminal work which was to influence him throughout his life. He wrote in the appendix to Volume 4 of *Modern Painters*:

De Saussure [is] the only writer whose help I did not refuse during the course of these enquiries. His I received, for this reason – all other geological writers whose works I had examined were engaged in the maintenance of some theory or other, and always gathering materials to support it. But I found Saussure had gone to the Alps, as I desired to go myself, only to *look* at them, and describe them as they were, loving them heartily – loving them the positive Alps, more than himself, or than science, or than any theories of science; and I found his descriptions, therefore, clear and trustworthy; and that when I had not visited any place myself, Saussure's report upon it might always be received without question.¹²

This sojourn in the Alps, together with the study of de Saussure's work, resulted in Ruskin's first scientific article on the Alps, entitled 'Facts and Considerations on the Strata of Mont Blanc, and on some Instances of Twisted Strata observable in Switzerland', published in the *Magazine of Natural History* in December 1834. The opening sentence of this article demonstrates that the young John Ruskin saw the Alps through the eyes of a geologist as well as a painter: 'The granite ranges of Mont Blanc are as interesting to the geologist as they are to the painter.'¹³ This article was accompanied by three drawings by Ruskin of the *Aiguille du Servoz*, the *Aiguille du Dru* and the *Valley of Chamouni*. This set the tone for all of Ruskin's writings and lectures, based on the pedagogical principle of the importance of word and image in the learning and memory process.

Chamonix and Mont Blanc became central to Ruskin's life, and his father, John James, the prosperous sherry merchant, bemoaning his son's lack of interest in 'the City', remarked in a letter to W H Harrison of 30 January 1837 that John Ruskin knew 'the shape of every needle round Mont Blanc, and could not tell you now where Threadneedle Street is'. Ruskin visited Chamonix and the region some nineteen times between 1833 and 1888. The Chamonix Ruskin knew for more than half a century was a village, exceedingly isolated when he first went there, and with a population of only 2420 inhabitants in 1891, according to Murray's *Guide*. A comparison can be made with Conistown, whose current population is around 1200. Ruskin worked in Chamonix when many of his compatriots came in increasing numbers to this Mecca of Mountaineering with the sole purpose of climbing Mont Blanc in a spirit of competitiveness. He witnessed many events in the history of mountaineering and some changes to the character of the village, such as the construction of hotels necessitated by the influx

of tourists.¹⁴ 'The valley of Chamouni [...] is rapidly being turned into a kind of Cremorne Gardens', he bemoaned in *Modern Painters*.¹⁵ He saw the effects of natural disasters on the people and the environment, such as the great floods of 1852 when the Arve and Arveyron burst their banks, and the great fire on 20 July 1855. The opening of the railway as far as Chamonix in 1858, the construction of the English Protestant Church in 1860 and the annexing of Savoie to France in that same year placed Chamonix more firmly on the tourist circuit. Monuments were erected to Jacques Balmat and to Henri de Saussure in 1878 and 1887 respectively. Ruskin was also in Chamonix on the very day when Albert Smith gloriously proclaimed his conquest of Mont Blanc amid much razzmatazz and it is not surprising that Ruskin was critical of this display of vanity.¹⁶

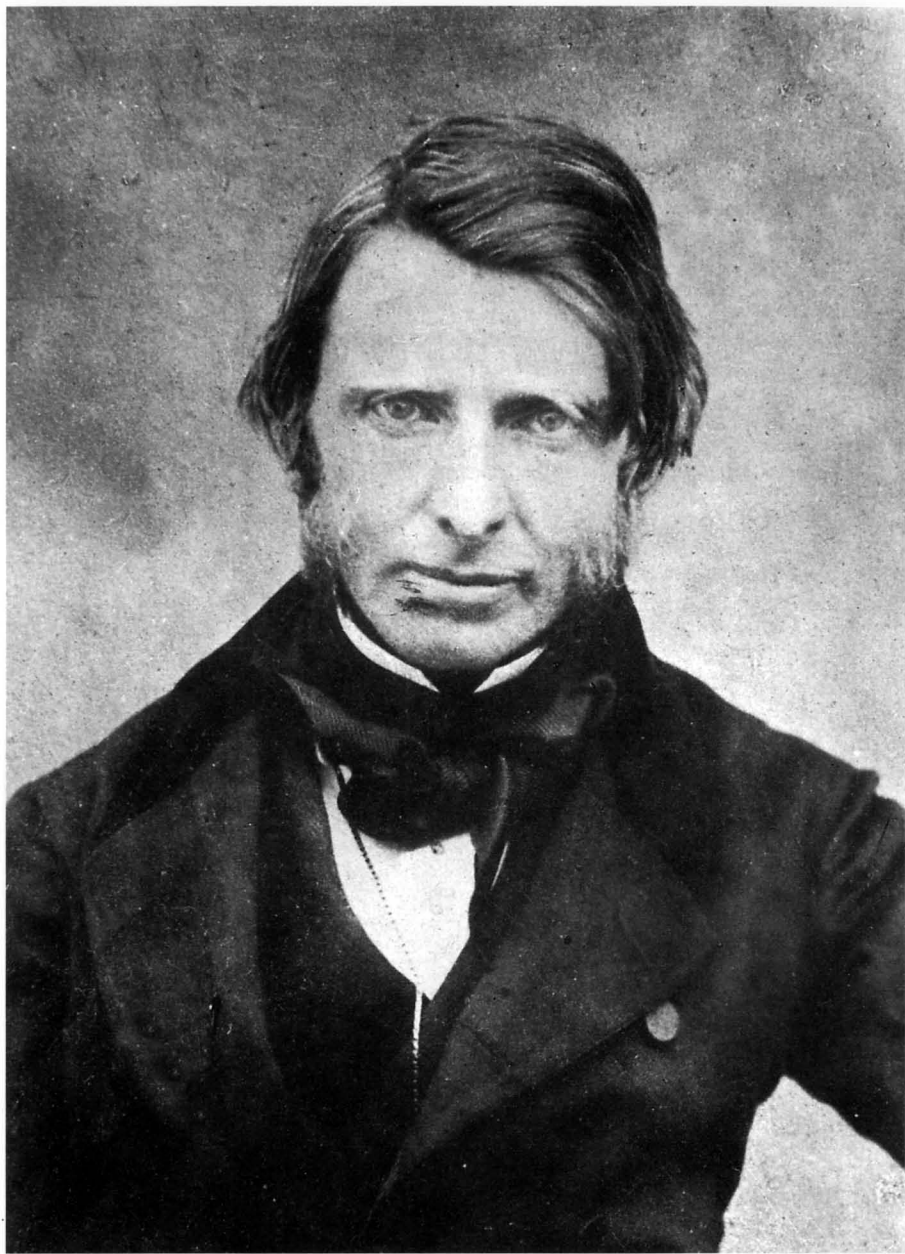
At the age of 69 and when he was ill, during his valedictory visit to Chamonix, Ruskin's great enthusiasm for, and sensitivity towards the Valley of Chamonix remained undiminished, as he recorded in his diary of 15 September 1888:

Stars all night after pure moonlight kept me awake. Then I saw rosy dawn, and now the "white mountain" above long-laid calm morning mist as clearly with my old eyes as when I was twenty-one.¹⁷

The next day, 'in the perfected light of Mont Blanc', Sunday 16 September, Ruskin completed his moving Epilogue to *Modern Painters* on its republication.¹⁸ This Epilogue was a farewell to Chamonix and an expression of his indebtedness to that village and the Massif of Mont Blanc, and a recognition of their healing and therapeutic powers. I quote Ruskin's concluding, and optimistic words:

in writing beneath the cloudless peace of the snows of Chamouni, what must be the really final words of the book which their beauty inspired and their strength guided, I am able, with yet happier and calmer heart than ever heretofore, to enforce its simplest assurance of Faith, that the knowledge of what is beautiful leads on, and is the first step, to the knowledge of the things which are lovely and of good report; and that the laws, the life, and the joy of beauty in the material world of God, are as eternal and sacred parts of His creation as, in the world of spirits, virtue; and in the world of angels, praise.¹⁹

The Alps were an important laboratory, training ground and school for Ruskin and Viollet-le-Duc: Ruskin learnt to see, draw and paint them; to appreciate the beauty of the mountains, the cloud formations, the landscapes. He learnt how to understand the deep structure and the life and movements of the mountains, with their glaciers and avalanches. He wrote extensively on subjects of geological theory, on denudation and crystallisation, and contributed to controversial discussions relating to



52. John Ruskin (1819-1900). Photograph c.1863
(© Ruskin Foundation) (p185)

glacier motion, much of which is assembled in *Deucalion*. A particular question which preoccupied Ruskin, in his writings and lectures, was the question 'Do glaciers excavate?' He found further confirmation of his views that glaciers had no capacity for scooping out lake basins during a visit to Chamonix in 1874, when he wrote: 'I was able to cross the dry bed of a glacier, which I had seen flowing, two hundred feet deep, over the same spot, forty years ago; and there I saw, what before I had suspected, that modern glaciers, like modern rivers, were not cutting their beds deeper, but filling them up.'²⁰ He climbed mountains, not in order to have his name recorded in annals as the first person to scale a peak, but in order to observe and know them for artistic and scientific purposes, and indeed spiritual purposes. As a botanist, he recorded in sketches and writing his observations about the trees, flowers and plants. He produced an album, little known today, called *Flora of Chamouni* 1844, each page containing detailed notes and observations on Alpine flora, such as, for example, the *Gentiana Alpina*, with the actual dried flower on the opposite page.²¹ Ruskin also amassed an important collection of minerals and geological specimens, many of which can be seen today in the Ruskin Museum, Coniston.

Eugène Viollet-le-Duc

Viollet-le-Duc acquired his early knowledge of mountains not in the Alps but in the Pyrenees where, like Ruskin, he spent his time observing, drawing, painting and walking. It was later, between 1868 and 1875, that he became intensely interested in the Alps, and which he studied and investigated in an organised way, almost like a military campaign. The result of this highly focused activity was his major scientific publication of 1876 entitled *Le Massif du Mont Blanc: Etude sur sa Constitution Géodésique et Géologique sur ses Transformations et sur l'Etat Ancien et Moderne de ses Glaciers*. Viollet-le-Duc illustrated this work himself with some 112 sketches, and with his famous map of the *Massif du Mont Blanc*. This work, an implosion of Viollet-le-Duc's acquired knowledge of Mont Blanc, owed its inception to Henri de Saussure whom he considered to be 'the first person perhaps who observed mountains in a scientific way' and who collected material and 'knew how to see and to see well, which is not so easy to do'.²² He recognised the extreme accuracy of de Saussure's observations, as did Ruskin. Viollet-le-Duc also wrote extensively on diet and hygiene for climbers, on the advantages of photography, and the use of the *téléiconographe*, a new instrument combining the functions of a telescope and a *camera lucida* by magnifying distant objects allowing both direct viewing (like a telescope) and the projection of an enlarged image onto a sheet of paper on which the outlines can be drawn. Like Ruskin, he was highly critical of a certain kind of Alpine tourist: he described the English in Chamonix in 1869 as 'a bunch of English who idle away their time and are dressed in a ridiculous way, with veils, knickerbockers and other embellishments'.²³ But even worse

than the English tourists were the French who, in that very same year, were not spared by their compatriot: 'French tourists are stupid beyond belief.'²⁴

Viollet-le-Duc's first mountain drawing dates from 1831 when he was 17 years old; it is of the Puy de Dôme, the volcanic peak in Auvergne, seen from the Puy Pariou, and is very different from Ruskin's early work. However, the first *important* mountain scenes of the Pyrenees by Viollet-le-Duc, such as *Glacier de la Brèche de Roland* and *La Vallée d'Azun* are as remarkable as those of the young John Ruskin and, curiously, date from that same epiphanic year of 1833.

Copying accurately and faithfully was an essential part of the learning process for Viollet-le-Duc and Ruskin: both believed in the supremacy of drawing and observation. Viollet-le-Duc already knew, in 1833, at the age of 19, why he had to paint: 'I feel very strongly that when I copy landscape conscientiously, I am taking an important step in my own special art, in architecture.'²⁵ Ruskin had written *The Elements of Drawing* in 1857: Viollet-le-Duc's last book, published in 1879, just before his death, was entitled *Histoire d'un Dessinateur: Comment on apprend à dessiner*. In it he states: 'Drawing taught as it should be taught is the best way of developing intelligence and forming one's judgement, for through drawing one learns how to see, and seeing is knowing.' One can almost hear the voice of Ruskin:²⁶ 'To see is to understand. [...] Hundreds of people can talk for one who can think, but thousands can think for one who can see.'²⁷ And in *Modern Painters* Ruskin wrote: 'To see clearly is poetry, prophecy, and religion, – all in one.'²⁸

For both Ruskin and Viollet-le-Duc, drawing was an essential subject in the school curriculum, a discipline which enabled students to learn how to observe objects with precision and exactitude and to discover the deep structure of things: a discipline in which anatomy and drawing overlap, in which science and art are in harmony.

Viollet-le-Duc's book on drawing is far removed from the French philosophical tradition and is more closely allied to Ruskin's. It relates the story of a little boy called Jean who learns, especially through drawing, many things about anatomy, plants, geometry, perspective. Jean's first drawing is of a cat which, at first glance, appears very simple: but Jean has skilfully captured the essential features and characteristics of the animal, in particular through the cat's eyes. This drawing can be compared with John Ruskin's apparently simple drawing of a mountain which depicted some of the key features.

Both Viollet-le-Duc and Ruskin possessed an aptitude, from an early age, for drawing and painting, encouraged by their families and their education. Up to the age of 18, Ruskin was educated mainly by his mother and by some private tutors, including a drawing master. Viollet-le-Duc was greatly influenced by his time as a boarder at a school in Fontenay-aux-Roses near Paris, with its teaching based on the principles of the Swiss educator Pestalozzi, stressing the importance of learning through doing and of manual work.



53. Eugène Viollet-le-Duc (1814-1879). Photograph by Charles Marville, 1860.
(© *Arch.Photo.Paris/CNMHS*) (p185)

The highly developed way of seeing and ability to draw of both Ruskin and Viollet-le-Duc are revealed particularly in their mountain drawings and paintings, often of the same scenes in Savoie and Haute-Savoie, such as *The Valley of Chamonix*, *The Montenvers*, *The Mer de Glace*, *The Glacier des Bossons*.

Epilogue

Viollet-le-Duc was very much appreciated by English travellers in France in the 19th century, as can be seen in Murray's *Guide* of 1877 which recognises the debt of gratitude to Viollet-le-Duc in the preface: 'An effort has been made to give a correct and scientific description of the Churches of France [...] and to distinguish the styles peculiar to the different Provinces of France, and to fix, as far as possible, the dates of various parts of the buildings, in doing which much aid has been derived from the admirable works of M. Viollet-le-Duc.'²⁹

Ruskin also admired Viollet-le-Duc's 10-volume, richly illustrated *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XIe au XVIe siècle* from which he often quoted. In 1884 Ruskin described it as 'the best-informed, most intelligent, and most thoughtful of guides',³⁰ and stressed *Viollet-le-Duc's* remarkable knowledge of architecture and his qualities: 'His knowledge of architecture [...] his artistic enthusiasm, balanced by the acutest sagacity, and his patriotism, by the frankest candour'.³¹ In a letter Ruskin wrote to a young man on 2 March 1887, he advised him to study Viollet-le-Duc: 'There is only one book on architecture of any value – and that contains everything. M. Viollet-le-Duc's *Dictionary*. Every architect must learn French, for all the best architecture is in France – and the French workmen are in the highest degree skillful.'³²

Ruskin's and Viollet-le-Duc's drawings and paintings of the Alps provide us with an historical, geological and anatomical record of mountain landscape of the 19th century, particularly important prior to the discovery of the daguerreotype and photography.

In Chamonix, there is a moving and discreet homage to Ruskin among the tall trees and away from tourists: the Pierre-à-Ruskin, sculpted by Michel de Tarnowsky³³ and erected in 1927 by his admirers in Chamonix.

In 1878 Viollet-le-Duc painted the inside walls of his house 'La Vedette' in Lausanne, with scenes of Alpine geography, giving the impression of living among the Alps, a décor he enjoyed for only a very short period, as his death occurred the following year. This architect-built house was demolished in 1975, the European heritage year, to make way for property developers. Viollet-le-Duc is buried in Lausanne, on the north side of Lake Geneva, facing his beloved Alps of Haute-Savoie.

Ruskin's Alpine paintings belonging to the Alpine Club

Thanks to the generosity of the late Dr Charles Warren, and thanks to his foresight and appreciation of the value of Ruskin, the Alpine Club is fortunate to own three fine watercolours by Ruskin, all of glaciers near Chamonix.

Glacier des Bossons, 1874 (AC ref HD008)

Ruskin's pencil and watercolour of the snout or lower end of the *Glacier des Bossons*, as it dies away in the valley after descending in unbroken continuity of ice from the summit of Mont Blanc, is dated by Ruskin 1874. It was painted on his return to Chamonix in early October 1874 after a lengthy Italian tour studying and often copying paintings and architecture, requiring intense observation of a different kind of material. He had, for example, spent two weeks in May in the Sistine Chapel, Rome, copying scenes of Botticelli's fresco *Le Prove di Mosè*. He copied two scenes of sheep and the portrait of Zipporah at the well.

The Bossons Glacier – *bossons* is the local dialect word for *buissons* (bushes) – seemed to have a particular fascination for Ruskin and he made a number of sketches of it over many decades: several date from 1849 when he spent 28 days in Chamonix between 13 June and 10 July, and again between 15 August and 30 August, including two days at Montanvert. At the age of 16, John Ruskin had described the Bossons Glacier as 'far superior in beauty to the Mer de Glace, broken into splendid pyramids of dazzling ice, quite free from Granite dust'.³⁴ In his diary of 16 October 1874 Ruskin wrote 'CHAMOUNI. Stormy, but with gleams of blue sky through cold cloud. Writing at little table – round – beside Mont Blanc. Sketched Bosson from window.' A photogravure, retouched by George Allen, of Ruskin's *Glacier des Bossons* of 1874 was used as an illustration in *The Works of John Ruskin* edited by Cook and Wedderburn, volume 2, *Poems*. It was previously reproduced in volume II of Ruskin's *Poems* published in 1891 by George Allen. As W G Collingwood has rightly pointed out, this photogravure has lost 'not only all the tone and rich colour, but a great part of the form'.³⁵ It accompanied Ruskin's sonnet, written at the age of 26, entitled *The Glacier*.

In Ruskin's watercolour, the green or blue tinge, and the opaque whiteness of the ice are dazzling, with the dark lower fringe almost hanging, displaced from the contours of the elegant tongue of the cascade of packed ice. It displays an opaline quality: the rocks and ice are sharpened. This striking and crisp watercolour was exhibited at the exhibition *Le Sentiment de la Montagne* at the Musée de Grenoble, 1st March–1st June 1998, and at the Palazzo Bricherasio, Turin, 1st July–15th October 1998. It is reproduced in colour in the splendid hardback book-catalogue of the exhibition on page 219, exhibit 134. Alas, it is erroneously entitled *Nuage sur une montagne, Martigny*, even though the subject and date are clearly indicated by John Ruskin himself in the bottom left-hand corner as *Glacier des Bossons 1874* and signed by him.

Montagne de la Côte and Bossons Glacier (AC ref HD007)

The Montagne de la Côte is the narrow, steep ridge of rock on the western side of the Glacier des Bossons, separating the latter from the Glacier de Tacconnaz. It was via the Montagne de la Côte that Henri de Saussure ascended Mont Blanc in 1787.

This small undated pencil, pen, ink and watercolour drawing conveys a close-up image of the Glacier des Bossons and background mountain detail of the Montagne de la Côte, in contrast to the more distant depiction of part of the same landscape in *Glacier des Bossons* of 1874 (ref HD008). The predominant hues are pale grey-green, purple and white. The swirling effect of the clouds and iceflow create both movement and merging of sky, mountains and ice; like white lava, the avalanche-glacier is frothing as it appears to be sweeping down the steep Alpine slope, unabated. There is the hint of another peak peering through a cloud in the background, but which will disappear quickly.

Ruskin frequently refers to the clouds and rain concealing the Montagne de la Côte, 'seen mistily through a dense veil of rain' (15 June 1849) and the 'level of clouds in this ponderous rain nearly half down Montagne de la Côte' (16 June 1849). On 13 June 1849, he recorded in his diary:

Morning wet; a very strange effect of cloud on Montagne de la Côte. The upper sky, down to top of G[lacier]des Boss[ons], was all of the common grey massy raincloud; but from the top of the ice there formed, as I looked, a filmy veil of vapour, through which the la Côte was plainly seen, which was thrown outward and across the mountain, falling from the glacier, or rather thrown out from it, like jets of seed from a sower's hand: very beautiful. A film of the same character formed among the pines below, in the usual place, at the same time; I thought both a sign of fair weather, but it has been raining softly nearly ever since – a fair interval without sun or lifting of cloud, only now and then. The filmy cirrus *under* the rain cloud, which entirely concealed the aiguilles, and all higher snows, is new to me. I have been drawing from my window very happily ...

Later the same month (28 June) he described its 'tiger striped crags, the pines above stretching their arms over one's head like nets and the ridge of the glacier, so warm, so strange, so rent and broken, so wild and fair and fantastic – cutting the blue sky into crystalline segments in a long wild line – like the level edge of a great sea wave, all foam, coming down upon one'. Aspects of these intense, geological and meteorological observations have been incorporated into this watercolour which may suggest that it was painted during – or at least owed its inception to – Ruskin's 1849 long stay in Chamonix.

Mer de Glace Moonlight (AC ref HD009)

The title was written by Ruskin in the bottom right-hand corner: the painting is undated. Only a tiny fraction of this seven kilometre long Mer de Glace is depicted by Ruskin as it bends on its way down from Mont Blanc. Dr Charles Warren has identified this view as from the Montanvert and considers that Ruskin's diary entry of 24 September 1863 refers to this particular watercolour: 'Yesterday up the Montanvert in fresh snow and across the glacier: loveliest serrated edge of Bouchard-Dru- just fresh sprinkled. Sketched moonlight.'³⁶

Ruskin has captured the watery effects of the pale light of the moon in this desolate and ice-cold landscape: the pale moon provides the only light to guide the climbers and a strong sense of danger lurks. The tones and hues are remarkably similar to those in *Montagne de la Côte and Glacier des Bossons*.

REFERENCES

- CW followed by the volume and page number(s), is used for the frequently cited source John Ruskin, *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, edited by E T Cook and Alexander Wedderburn. 39 volumes were published between 1903 and 1912 by George Allen, London.
- RF The Ruskin Foundation (The Ruskin Library, University of Lancaster).

- 1 CW, XXXV, 157 (*Praeterita*).
- 2 Viollet-le-Duc in a letter to his wife, written in Chamonix, 21 July 1871. '*Plus que jamais je me trouve heureux et possesseur de mes idées dans ces solitudes.*' Translations are by Cynthia Gamble unless otherwise indicated.
- 3 The aims of the Alpine Club, founded in 1857, were 'the promotion of good fellowship among mountaineers, of mountain climbing and mountain exploration throughout the world, and of better knowledge of the mountains through literature, science and art'.
- 4 Jean Gimpel, *The Cathedral Builders*, translated by Teresa Waugh, Pimlico, London, 2, 1993. This was originally published as *Les Bâisseurs de Cathédrales*, Seuil, Paris, 1958.
- 5 Yann le Pichon, *Le Musée retrouvé de Marcel Proust*, Stock, 1990 (from the Preface).
- 6 CW, XXXV, 54
- 7 CW, XXXV, 115
- 8 CW, II, 382 (Poems)
- 9 RF 1549
- 10 CW, XXXV, 116

- 11 CW, XXXV, 120
- 12 CW, VI, 476
- 13 CW, I, 194
- 14 Ruskin usually stayed at the Grand Hôtel de l'Union, built in 1816 but demolished in 1930.
- 15 CW, VI, 456.
- 16 For an account of life in the Valley of Chamonix, see Paul Payot, *Au Royaume du Mont Blanc*, Préface de Paul Guichonnet, La Fontaine de Siloé, Montmélian, 1996.
- 17 Diary entry of 15 September 1888. See *Diary*, volume 3, 1874-1889, ed. Evans and Whitehouse, page 1149.
- 18 See CW, VII, 461-464.
- 19 CW, VII, 464.
- 20 Quoted in E T Cook, *The Life of John Ruskin*, Volume II, George Allen, London, second edition 1912, page 417.
- 21 See J S Dearden, *The Growth of the Whitehouse Collection*, Keele University Press, 1994, page 139 (and page 140 for photograph).
- 22 E Viollet-le-Duc, *Le Massif du Mont Blanc*, Baudry, Paris, 1876, Slatkine Reprints, Geneva, 242, 1993.
- 23 'un tas d'Anglais désœuvrés et vêtus de façon ridicule, avec des voiles, des knickebokers et autres agréments ...'
- 24 'Le touriste français dépasse en bêtise tout ce que l'on peut supposer.' Viollet-le-Duc, in a letter to his wife, Chamonix, 5 September 1869. See Pierre Frey (ed), *E Viollet-le-Duc et le Massif du Mont-Blanc 1868-1879*, Payot, Lausanne, 119, 1988.
- 25 Pierre A Frey and Lise Grenier, *Viollet-le-Duc et la Montagne*, Grenoble, 44, 1993.
- 26 Ruskin was appointed First Professor of Fine Art at Oxford in 1869, where he established an important School of Drawing at the University of Oxford, a unique institution unheard of at the time.
- 27 1856. Quoted in Wolfgang Kemp, *The Desire of my Eyes: A Life of John Ruskin*, translated by Jan van Heurck, Harper Collins, 471, 1991.
- 28 CW, V, 333.
- 29 Murray's *Handbook France*, Part 1, vi, 1877.
- 30 CW, XXXIII, 465. *The Pleasures of England*.
- 31 CW, XXXIII, 465. *The Pleasures of England*. See also the following pages concerning Viollet-le-Duc in CW, XXXIII, 466-469.
- 32 Letter which I consulted in the RIBA library, London, and which is also quoted in Michael W Brooks, *John Ruskin and Victorian Architecture*, Thames and Hudson, 290, 1989.
- 33 Sculptor born 20 April 1870 in Nice, of Polish parents.
- 34 Diary entry, 10 July 1835 at Chamouni.
- 35 CW, II, xlv.
- 36 Dr Charles Warren wrote this quotation on the back of the frame, and commented: 'Possibly refers to this drawing'.